

## **“American Exceptionalism” — On What End of the Continuum?**

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### **Abstract**

This paper draws from global understandings about Human Rights, recasting them in terms of a sociological conception of the dimensions of a Decent Society. We pose our questions within the framework of American Exceptionalism, because the assumptions that underlie that term have never been empirically examined. Can we conclude on the basis of this analysis that America, when compared with other countries, advances human rights? *No*. Can we conclude on the basis of this analysis that America, when compared with other countries, is a Decent Society? *No*. Can we conclude on the basis of this empirical analysis that America, when compared with other countries, is Exceptional? Destined to promoting liberties and freedoms around the world? *No*.

### **Keywords**

Exceptionalism, Human Rights, Comparative Study of Societies

American Exceptionalism has a wide range of meanings, but the broad conception is that America is uniquely special can be traced to Alexis de Tocqueville (1840:36): "The position of the Americans is therefore quite exceptional, and it may be believed that no other democratic people will ever be placed in a similar one." This was further elaborated over time: America is the land of abundant opportunity, pluralistic, egalitarian, and celebrates the self-made man and woman. With a polemical flare, a program of the Public Broadcasting Service (2012) begins with this statement:

America's military is the strongest; its economy the richest, its political ideas the most imitated; its language near-universal; its music the most listened to; its movies and television the most watched; its publications the most read; its fast food the most eaten; its soft drinks the most guzzled. Now what?

In yet another analysis of American Exceptionalism, Blau and Moncada (2003) trace the roots of neoliberalism to American Exceptionalism - to greed, intense competition and fierce individualism. They quote English Beatrice Webb (1963: 149), trade unionist and cooperativist, who described in her 1898 diary two fallacies that delude Americans. The first was "the people's fallacy of believing their country America is egalitarian." The second she described as "the old fallacy of the classic economists that each will best serve the interests of the whole community by pursuing their own gain."

The term, "American Exceptionalism," continues to be evoked, by those on the left and those on the right. On April 2, 2012, President Obama stated in a speech at the Rose Garden, "my entire career has been a testimony to American Exceptionalism" (quoted by Dwyer, 2012) Earlier that week, in Pewaukee, Wisconsin, Romney (2012) questioned Obama's commitment to the view of America as a unique and unrivaled world power sustained by the values of free enterprise: "Our president doesn't have the same feelings about American Exceptionalism that we do." Thus like metaphors such as apple pie and motherhood, American Exceptionalism is an unequivocal good in today's popular culture and political candidates dare not even give a nuanced interpretation.

However, today's scholars are not so sanguine about American Exceptionalism. Some, including Noam Chomsky (2012), argue that America is in decline, largely focused on geopolitical and military factors. There is another line of argument, largely advanced by Michael Ignatieff (2005) and the other authors of his recent volume, *American Exceptionalism and Human Rights*: namely, that the U.S. has promoted human rights standards and practices standards *elsewhere*,

while ignoring them *at home*. In a more recent article Ignatieff (2012) writes:

From Nuremberg onward, no country has invested more in the development of international jurisprudence for atrocity crimes and no country has worked harder to make sure that the law it seeks for others does not apply to itself.

In the last section of this paper, we empirically examine the extent to which the U.S. exempts itself from international jurisprudence, specifically human rights laws. We are interested in fundamental human rights laws, not crimes of atrocity. It can be said quite simply that the U.S. is not a party to the International Criminal Court that has jurisdiction over the most atrocious crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. There are 121 state parties to the Rome Statute that implements the ICC (International Criminal Court, 2012) and while the U.S. has no trouble kibitzing loudly in the United Nations about Iran, North Korea, Sudan, Gaza, and Syria, the U.S. government insists its nationals (such George W. Bush and Henry Kissinger) cannot be brought to trial at the ICC or in any other state that has universal jurisdiction (such as Belgium and Spain).

#### IS AMERICA AN EXCEPTIONALLY 'DECENT' SOCIETY?

Our main focus is not on heinous crimes of atrocities, but instead indicators of quality of life and adherence to human rights. In an earlier issue of *Societies without Borders: Human Rights & the Social Sciences*, Judith Blau, along with two student co-authors, Jennifer Santos and Chelsea Sessoms (2009), presented a detailed list of human rights indicators, suggesting that from a sociological perspective these are prime indicators of a "decent society." In their paper they did not include any analysis, and an objective here is to carry such an analysis out, using many of the indicators they proposed. Their premise was that a Decent Society is one that upholds, promotes and secures human rights. In contrast to the contested term, "American Exceptionalism" it is possible to examine empirical indicators of whether America is a "Decent Society" or not.

Our data comprises original as well as modified indices and

scores on several indicators that are available for a large number of countries. We identified such indicators and collected data on all possible countries. In order to compare countries on each selected parameter, we modified scores such that for any indicator, a higher score means a 'better' situation. This allows us to compare mean and actual values across countries in a simple and uniform manner. In some cases the original data was already coded by the same logic. For example, electoral turnout in presidential elections was coded such that a higher turnout meant higher political participation. In other cases, the original data was recoded. For example, in the case of press freedom scores, prepared by Freedom House, countries with a more free press are given a lower score. We have divided this score by one to arrive at a 'press freedom index.' Thus for this indicator, now a lower indices value depicts a less free press. We have used the same logic to modify all our indicators. Our analysis is presented in three sections. First, we compare the U.S. score on selected indicators with the median scores of all countries considered together (Table 1). Second, we compare the U.S. score on selected indicators with the median of all other OECD countries considered together (Table 2). Finally, we compare the U.S. with all other countries on ratifications on all international human rights treaties under the umbrella of the Human Rights Council (Table 3). We were constrained in our selection of variables in the first analysis owing to missing cases, but this is not a problem for our second analysis and we chose a wide array of variables. In the final analysis we have no missing cases.

#### U.S. COMPARED WITH ALL OTHER COUNTRIES ON THE DECENT SOCIETY INDICATORS

There are a great number of indicators available for countries. We selected ones for which there are few missing cases. We rescaled and standardized all indicators so that a high value is good and a low value indicates that a country does poorly on this indicator. Then we obtained a distribution of scores on each indicator, from which we obtained the median scores and the score for the U.S. Therefore, relative to all other countries for which there is non-missing data, a high score reflects high adherence to a particular "decent society" indicator and a low score reflects low adherence. Please refer to Table 1.

Table 1. Values of Countries and U.S. on Selected 'Decent Society' Indicators  
(Rescaled on a normal, standardized curve, from high (good) to low (poor). N in parenthesis).

	Median	U.S.
Electoral Turnout (N=172) <sup>1</sup>	69%	42%
Death penalty score: executions in 2010 (N=196) <sup>2</sup>	0	-1
Tobacco Free Types of Places (N=194) <sup>3</sup>	1	0
Density of International Nongovernmental Organizations (N=180) <sup>4</sup>	128	18
Prison Population Incarceration Score (N=191) <sup>5</sup>	.0080	.0013
Number of Refugees Score (N=175) <sup>6</sup>	.0009	.00026
Peace Score (N=148) <sup>7</sup>	.67	.40
Gini Coefficient of Inequality (N=134) <sup>8</sup>	.026	.022
Happy Planet Index (N=142) <sup>9</sup>	43.75	30.7
CO2 Emission Score (N=216) <sup>10</sup>	.417	.05
Energy Consumption Per Capita Score (N=191) <sup>11</sup>	.0006	.00012
Number of International Labor Organization Conventions Ratified (N=184) <sup>12</sup>	28	2

<sup>1</sup> International Institute for Democracy & Electoral Assistance (2009) Electoral Turnout: <http://www.idea.int/vt>

<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International (2011) International Comparisons on the Death Penalty: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/death-penalty/numbers>

<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization (2011), Tobacco Free Types of Places, Country-level data: [http://www.who.int/tobacco/surveillance/policy/country\\_profile/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/tobacco/surveillance/policy/country_profile/en/index.html)

<sup>4</sup> Earth Trends (2003) Civil Society: Density of International Nongovernmental Organizations with Membership: [http://earthtrends.wri.org/searchable\\_db/index.php?theme=10&variable\\_ID=576&action=select\\_countries](http://earthtrends.wri.org/searchable_db/index.php?theme=10&variable_ID=576&action=select_countries).

<sup>5</sup> International Centre for Prison Studies (2000) Prison Population Incarceration Score: [http://www.prisonstudies.org/info/worldbrief/wpb\\_stats.php?area=all&category=wb\\_poporate](http://www.prisonstudies.org/info/worldbrief/wpb_stats.php?area=all&category=wb_poporate)

<sup>6</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2007): [http://www.unhcr.org/45c06c662.html#DATA\\_SOURCES\\_AND\\_PROVIDERS](http://www.unhcr.org/45c06c662.html#DATA_SOURCES_AND_PROVIDERS)

<sup>7</sup> Uppsala Conflict Data, and published by Vision of Humanity (2011), Number of Internal and External Conflicts: <http://www.visionofhumanity.org/gpi-data/>

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Development Programme (2010), Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI): <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/ihdi/>

<sup>9</sup> New Economics Foundation, Happy Planet Index: A Measure of Resource Consumption (2011): <http://www.happyplanetindex.org/learn/download-report.html>

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Millennium Goals Indicators: CO2 Emissions (2008): <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/SeriesDetail.aspx?srid=749>

<sup>11</sup> World Bank Energy Consumption Trends: <http://data.worldbank.org/topic/energy-and-mining>: continuously updated

<sup>12</sup> International Labour Organization. Ratification of Core Conventions, continuously updated: <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/docs/declworld.htm>

The results reported in Table 1 are self-explanatory: namely, the U.S. is an exceptional negative outlier on all the indicators under consideration. It is true, of course, that we did not include some indicators on which the U.S. does well. For example, Americans, in the aggregate, according to international agencies, contribute disproportionately to charity. However, we did select indicators for which one would expect the wealthiest country in the world would have a positive score. The results are appalling. The US falls behind the median score on electoral turnout, incarceration, the Gini Index, the Happy Planet Index – and, in fact- all the other measures reported in Table 1. Clearly, on these global indicators, America is not Exceptional, if we mean by that a decent society that promotes human rights.

#### U.S. COMPARED WITH OECD COUNTRIES

The OECD states are the wealthiest in the world. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development includes primarily European countries, but also the U.S., Canada and Israel. Data collection is remarkably comprehensive, and the only missing case for some indicators is Israel. As before for Table 1, variables are standardized around the median for the 30 or 31 cases. The results are reported in Table 2, and when possible the value for the U.S. is based on international comparisons (from Table 1) to give it credit with respect to both poor and rich countries. That is, we have stacked the cards in favor of the U.S.

Table 2. Values for OECD Countries and U.S. on Selected 'Decent Society' Indicators (Rescaled on a normal, standardized curve, from high (good) to low (poor)). N in parenthesis.

	Median OECD Countries	U.S. All Country Comparisons
Electoral Turnout (N=31) <sup>1</sup>	69	42
Death penalty score: executions in 2010 (N=31) <sup>2</sup>	1	-1
Gender Development Index (N=30) <sup>3</sup>	.057	.055
Primary School Enrollment (N=31) <sup>4</sup>	99	93
Under 5 Mortality (N=31) <sup>5</sup>	.2	.12
Under 1 Mortality (N=31) <sup>6</sup>	.25	.14
Life Expectancy at Birth (N=31) <sup>7</sup>	80.3	79.6
Maternal Mortality (N=31) <sup>8</sup>	.143	.04
Years of Schooling (N=31) <sup>9</sup>	15.9	15.7
Tobacco Free Types of Places (N=31) <sup>10</sup>	1	0
Density of International Nongovernmental Organizations (N=31) <sup>11</sup>	372	18
Prison Population Incarceration Score (N=30) <sup>12</sup>	.010	.0013
Number of Refugees (N=31) <sup>13</sup>	.0106	.00026
Peace Score (N=30) <sup>14</sup>	.535	.40
Democracy Index (N = 31) <sup>15</sup>	9.58	9.17
Gini Coefficient of Inequality (N=31) <sup>16</sup>	.032	.022
Happy Planet Index (N=31) <sup>17</sup>	43.2	30.7
Corruption Score (N=31) <sup>18</sup>	7.6	7.1
CO2 Emission Score (N=31) <sup>19</sup>	.110	.05
Water Poverty Index (N=29) <sup>20</sup>	66	65
Energy Consumption Per Capita (N=31) <sup>21</sup>	.0002	.00012
Ratification of International Labor Organization Conventions (N=31) <sup>22</sup>	64	2

- <sup>1</sup> International Institute for Democracy & Electoral Assistance (2009) Electoral Turnout: <http://www.idea.int/vt>
- <sup>2</sup> Amnesty International (2011) International Comparisons on the Death Penalty: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/death-penalty/numbers>
- <sup>3</sup> United Nations Development Programme, Gender Inequality (2010): [http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR\\_2011\\_EN\\_Table4.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2011_EN_Table4.pdf)
- <sup>4</sup> OECD Access to Education, Participation, and Progression (2011) Years of Schooling: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/61/34/48631055.pdf>
- <sup>5</sup> World Health Organization (2007) Under 1 and under 5 Mortality: <http://www.who.int/whosis/indicators/2007LEX0/en/index.html>
- <sup>6</sup> World Health Organization (2007) Under 1 and under 5 Mortality: <http://www.who.int/whosis/indicators/2007LEX0/en/index.html>
- <sup>7</sup> OECD Statistics: Life Expectancy (2012). Maternal Mortality: <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx>
- <sup>8</sup> World Health Organization (2008), Maternal Mortality Ratio: <http://apps.who.int/ghodata/?vid=250>
- <sup>9</sup> OECD. Family statistics (2011): <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/56/9/37863998.pdf>
- <sup>10</sup> World Health Organization (2011), Tobacco Free Types of Places, Country-level data: [http://www.who.int/tobacco/surveillance/policy/country\\_profile/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/tobacco/surveillance/policy/country_profile/en/index.html)
- <sup>11</sup> Earth Trends (2003) Civil Society: Density of International Nongovernmental Organizations with Membership, [http://earthtrends.wri.org/searchable\\_db/index.php?theme=10&variable\\_ID=576&action=select\\_countries](http://earthtrends.wri.org/searchable_db/index.php?theme=10&variable_ID=576&action=select_countries)
- <sup>12</sup> International Centre for Prison Studies (2000) Prison Population Incarceration Score: [http://www.prisonstudies.org/info/worldbrief/wpb\\_stats.php?area=all&category=wb\\_poprate](http://www.prisonstudies.org/info/worldbrief/wpb_stats.php?area=all&category=wb_poprate)
- <sup>13</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2007): [http://www.unhcr.org/45c06c62.html#DATA\\_SOURCES\\_AND\\_PROVIDERS](http://www.unhcr.org/45c06c62.html#DATA_SOURCES_AND_PROVIDERS)
- <sup>14</sup> Uppsala Conflict Data, and published by Vision of Humanity (2011), Number of Internal and External Conflicts: <http://www.visionofhumanity.org/gpi-data/>
- <sup>15</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit (2011) Democracy Scale: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracy\\_Index#2011\\_rankings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracy_Index#2011_rankings)
- <sup>16</sup> United Nations Development Programme (2010), Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI): <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/ihdi/>
- <sup>17</sup> New Economics Foundation, Happy Planet Index: A Measure of Resource Consumption (2011): <http://www.happyplanetindex.org/learn/download-report.html>
- <sup>18</sup> Transparency International, Corruption Perception Index (2010): [http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2010](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2010)
- <sup>19</sup> United Nations Millennium Goals Indicators, CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions (2008): <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/SeriesDetail.aspx?srid=749>
- <sup>20</sup> World Resources Institute. (2012) Water Poverty Index: [http://earthtrends.wri.org/searchable\\_db/index.php?theme=2&variable\\_ID=1299&action=select\\_countries](http://earthtrends.wri.org/searchable_db/index.php?theme=2&variable_ID=1299&action=select_countries)
- <sup>21</sup> World Bank Energy Consumption Trends: <http://data.worldbank.org/topic/energy-and-mining>: continuously updated
- <sup>22</sup> International Labour Organization. Ratification of Core Conventions, continuously updated: <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/docs/declworld.htm>

Owing to virtually complete reporting, we are able to report on more indicators for OECD countries compared to countries in Table 1. The list of variables in Table 2 includes a broad range of factors that relate to gender equality, incarceration and the death penalty, schooling, the peace score, number of International Labour Organization treaties ratified, among others. The U.S. ranks poorly on all indicators compared with all other OECD countries. This is even when we have stacked the cards! We see little merit in the term, “American Exceptionalism,” and from a human rights perspective, cannot say that the U.S. is a “Decent Society” that privileges the rights of its citizens over its imperial ambitions.

IS AMERICA LIVING UP TO HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS?  
At an accelerating pace, the world’s countries are adopting and advocating human rights standards, namely the 17 Human Rights Treaties, which are listed in Table 3.



Table 3. United Nations Human Rights Treaty System (Treaties and Optional Protocols), Year of General Assembly Approval, Number of States Parties, Whether the US is a Party or Not, US Limitations, Number of Signatories, Whether US is a Signatory or Not (February 1, 2012).<sup>1 2</sup>

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International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), 1965 175 parties, U.S. is a party. 3 reservations, 1 understanding, and 1 declaration 86 signatories, US is a signatory
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 1966 160 parties; US is not a party. 70 signatories; US is a signatory
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966 167 parties; US is a party. 5 reservations, 5 understandings, 3 declarations 74 signatories; US is a signatory
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 1979 187 parties; US is not a party 99 signatories; US is a signatory
Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), 1984 150 parties; US is a party. 2 reservations, 9 understandings, 1 declaration 78 signatories; US is a signatory
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989 193 parties; US is not a party 140 signatories; US is a signatory
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICRMW), 1990 45 parties; US is not a party 33 signatories; US is not a signatory
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), 2006 110 parties; US is not a party 153 signatories; US is a signatory
Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR-OP1) (implements Treaty), 1966 114 parties; US is not a party 35 signatories; US is not a signatory
Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty, (ICCPR-OP2) 1989 73 parties; US is not a party 35 signatories; US is not a signatory
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (OP-CEDAW) (implements Treaty), 1999 104 parties; US is not a party 79 signatories; US is not a signatory

Table 3 (cont.). United Nations Human Rights Treaty System (Treaties and Optional Protocols), Year of General Assembly Approval, Number of States Parties, Whether the US is a Party or Not, US Limitations, Number of Signatories, Whether US is a Signatory or Not (February 1, 2012).<sup>3 4</sup>

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Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OP-CRC-AC), 2000  
143 parties; US is a party. 8 understandings, 4 declarations  
129 signatories; US is a signatory

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (OP-CRC-SC), 2000  
152 parties; US is a party. 1 reservation, 9 understandings  
119 signatories; US is a signatory

Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (implements Treaty), (OP-CAT), 2002  
62 parties; US is not a party  
71 signatories; US is not a signatory

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (implements Treaty), (OP-CRPD) 2006  
66 parties; US is not a party  
90 signatories; US is not a signatory

International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance. (CED) 2006  
30 parties; US is not a party  
91 signatories; US is not a signatory

Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2008  
Not yet in force; 7 parties and 39 signatories  
The US is neither a party nor a signatory

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<sup>1</sup> The United States has attached reservations, understandings and/or declarations to each of the three treaties and two protocols that it has ratified, thus limiting for itself the applicability of any treaty or protocol. That is, the United States has declared each of the three treaties it has ratified to be “not self-executing” and, thus, without merit.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Slater Newman and Judith Blau (May 1, 2012), ACLU-North Carolina web page. Updated quarterly. The original source is: United Nations: <http://treaties.un.org/Pages/Treaties.aspx?id=4&subid=A&lang=en>

<sup>3</sup> The United States has attached reservations, understandings and/or declarations to each of the three treaties and two protocols that it has ratified, thus limiting for itself the applicability of any treaty or protocol. That is, the United States has declared each of the three treaties it has ratified to be “not self-executing” and, thus, without merit.

<sup>4</sup> Source: Slater Newman and Judith Blau (May 1, 2012), ACLU-North Carolina web page. Updated quarterly. The original source is: United Nations: <http://treaties.un.org/Pages/Treaties.aspx?id=4&subid=A&lang=en>

While the U.S. holds other countries accountable for upholding these treaties, the U.S. itself has not unconditionally ratified a *single one*. It has not even ratified the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, while boasting that it alone was the pioneer in advancing these rights for its citizens. The term, “not self-executing” is the critical term. Technically, it means that until the Senate has voted to ratify a treaty, it does not apply to the U.S. The Senate has never voted to ratify any human rights treaty. This is in contrast to free trade treaties. The Office of the United States Trade Agreements (2012) summarizes the 18 free-trade treaties to which the U.S. is a party.

Legal scholars have argued that a problem with the American legal system is that it exaggerates the importance of procedure at the expense of substance. We believe that this is essentially correct in that the U.S. fails to join the rest of the world in setting its sights on substantive human rights objectives and pursuing their realization. Instead, it overprotects procedures and under-protects substance and thereby under-protects the well-being of residents (that is, their health, housing, jobs, education). However, we go beyond this interpretation to argue that, indeed, U.S. law does indeed have a substantive bias: that is, privileging capitalism, trade, and corporations over human rights. Lately, the Supreme Court has repeatedly reinforced this bias.

#### CONCLUSION: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

We have shown that America is an extreme negative outlier on a broad range of indicators, including expressions of civil & political rights, as well as social and economic rights, and adherence to global human rights standards. It lags behind on indicators of environmental security. While it huffs and puffs, depicting other countries as ornery, derelict, and delinquent, the U.S. itself has no reason to be smug, or as it is often said, “Exceptional.” It does not do at all well on our indicators of a Decent Society.

We suggest a grounded conclusion, shared by many intellectuals and commentators, and, second a speculative conclusion. First, instead of hurling epithets against China, Cuba, Iran, etc. the U.S. should rely on the international community to evaluate human rights abuses. This includes UN agencies as well as highly experienced

INGOs. The U.S.'s condescension only worsens inter-state relations and polarizes the international community. Besides, many people around the world believe that the U.S. is a hypocrite: that is, the U.S. condemns human rights abuses elsewhere, and yet has prisoners kept without trial in Guantánamo, kills civilians in drone strikes in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and has the largest stockpile of nuclear weapons in the world. Its corporations are often not taxed, while people live in tent cities all across America.

Second, speculatively, yet grounded in a sociological understanding of political culture, we propose that human rights will be embraced by Americans, our schools and institutions of learning, and our communities if only the U.S. ratifies human rights treaties, and revises the Constitution to incorporate these rights. Wishful thinking? No. We only need to abandon the idea that we are inherently and historically exceptional.

What is our speculative conclusion? America's strength has always been its extraordinary diversity. After all, America has not been a nation of individual immigrants, but instead a nation of immigrant groups, cultures, cognitive varieties, and varied life styles. "International" learning has constantly taken place and continues to do so. Between and among Poles, Burmese, Mexicans, Salvadorans, Haitians, Scots, Catholics, atheists, and on and on and on. We might say that this international learning that accompanies diversity is the soul and spirit of America, and also nourishes and invigorates social life. Let's hope that this diversity pulls us away from going over the brink. It could --so long as it accompanies a robust notion that each and every person is entitled to enjoy all their human rights.

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