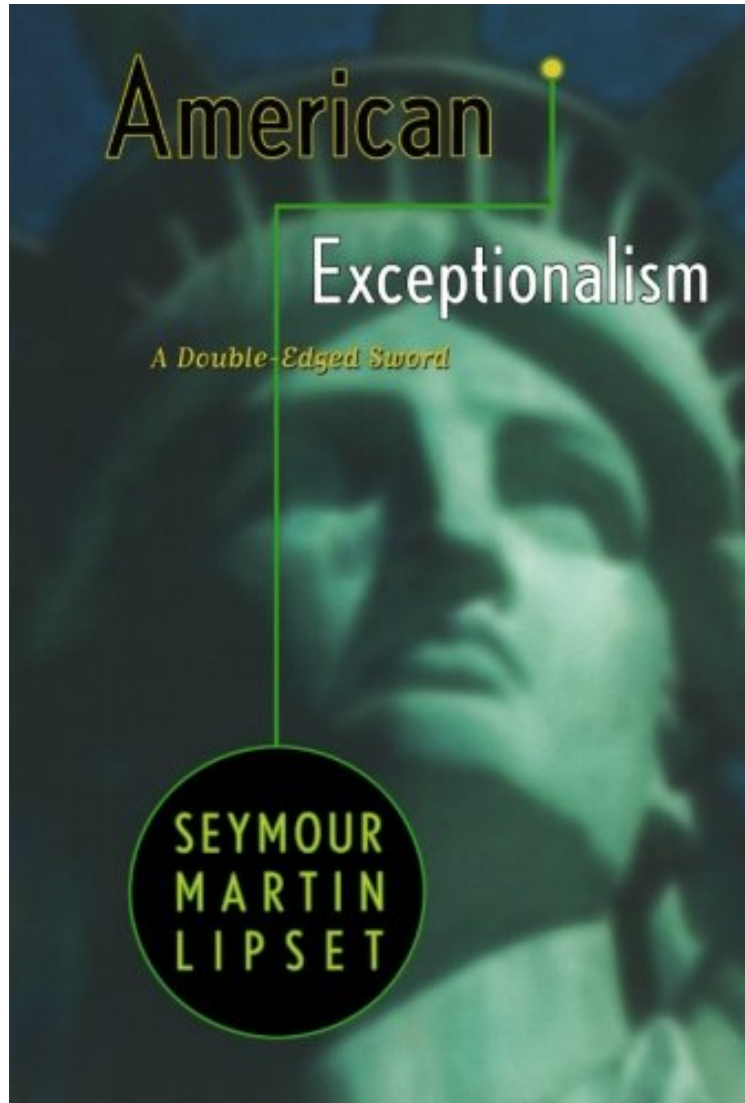


(Download) American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword

American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword

Seymour Martin Lipset Ph.D.
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#443953 in Books Seymour Martin Lipset 1997-04-17 1997-04-17 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.30 x .90 x 5.60l, .60 #File Name: 0393316149352 pages American Exceptionalism A Double Edged Sword | File size: 38.Mb

Seymour Martin Lipset Ph.D. : American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Diane C Smith Great book with perfect condition! 23 of 29 people found the following review helpful. Some good stuff here, but basically a collection of articles By Moten Swing First chapter is quite good on the basics of American Exceptionalism as Lipset sees it. But the rest of the book doesn't hang together very well. As previous reviewer noted, the chapter on intellectuals is quite interesting, and so is

the chapter on Jews, but they don't fit in to any overall argument. These chapters were all published in many places over a considerable period of time, and it shows. Not a coherent work, but an interesting first chapter. 12 of 13 people found the following review helpful. A brilliant American social scientist's gift for generalization can lead us astray if we don't test his ideas.

By Frank T. Manheim

If everything else about him is forgotten, Lipset, who died in 2006, will surely be remembered for coining the term, "American Exceptionalism". Before I took up social science as a "second language" at Lipset's last academic residence (School of Public Policy, George Mason University) I was an earth scientist - avocationally interested in public policy. The only political and other social scientists whose names appeared at regular intervals in *Science Magazine* were Lipset, Robert Merton, and Amitai Etzioni. Lipset had omnivorous curiosity and interests. Among his many memberships and honors, he was the only person to serve as President of both the American Sociological Association and the American Political Science Association. In almost every publication Lipset effortlessly tosses out bold and often accurate generalizations that other academics did not mention - either because the relationship didn't occur to them, or because they were afraid to venture conclusions not quantitatively established by "empirical" studies. [Empirical studies are social scientists' term for research that tests hypotheses using statistical proofs.] For example, in his Introduction, Lipset states that the U.S. is the most religious country in Christendom, and the only one where churchgoers adhere to sects. Protestantism has not only influenced opposition to wars, but determined the American style of foreign policy. The U.S. disdain of authority has led to the highest crime rate and the lowest level of voting participation in the developed world, etc. I found that Lipset's penchant for generalization had to be respected but taken advisedly. This is illustrated by the abovementioned claim that the U.S. had the lowest level of voting participation in the developed world. In fact, this statement only applies to recent years. The Wikipedia article "American election campaigns in the 19th century" points out that elections in the Midwestern states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, and Ohio, reached 95% voter turnout in 1896. Generally high voter turnouts continued after the turn of the Century. Lipset's intent in using the term American Exceptionalism is to confirm that America IS qualitatively different from all other nations. He indicates that this quality was first established by the 19th Century French observer, Alexis De Toqueville. Besides the earlier-mentioned points, Lipset identifies a large number of other differences. These include less obedience to authority and deference to superiors, identification with a creed (moralism), rather than ethnic or other commonalities; firm belief that the U.S. is best and unique among nations; distrust of a strong state, aversion to state-provided welfare, weak working-class radicalism, and lack of a significant socialist movement. Elections are more pervasive than in any other nation, etc. Lipset recognized that the strong American proclivity for moral absolutism could lead to excesses. This is abundantly demonstrated by today's partisan political polarization and Congressional gridlock - unique among advanced nations. Each contending faction declares in ringing pronouncements the rightness of its principles and the hopeless error of the opposition. Andrew Bacevic's recent book "The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism", targets a long list of evils and disastrous policies the author attributes to American moral utopianism and hubris over the past 40 years. He cites chicanery, dirty tricks, "suppression of open discussion and insulation of error against public criticism", blatant corruption, making common cause with dictatorial regimes, and squandering of billions of dollars, all of which were justified in the name of higher moral goals. Lipset avoids such "good/bad" characterizations, like most social scientists. From my own studies of the history of U.S.'s political polarization I see a problem with Lipset's exuberant embrace of theories and generalizations. He often fails to test them, look for exceptions, and differences with location and time in assessing social problems. Wherever I look I find problems with stereotypes. Take U.S. "high crime", for example. The U.S. has not been a "high crime" nation always and everywhere. In 1905 police in Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York did not wear guns. Although I have not tried to put together comparative statistics, there are reasons to conclude that criminality was no higher in many East Coast regions of the nation than in the European nations from which most immigrants came. Women are even said to have been able to walk safely late at night in Harlem, NY in the 1930s and 40s. Crime and violence rose steeply toward the troubling levels seen in the past 30 years beginning mainly from the 1960s. Bacevic documents evidence that American Exceptionalism took on more extreme character after 1960. My observations offer support for this idea in ways not mentioned by Bacevic. Parochialism was paradoxically spearheaded by elite educational institutions and political leaders. For example, before the 1960s virtually all colleges and universities required at least one foreign language for admission, and leading universities required two. U.S. industry and academia had close ties with foreign organizations and developments. But in the 1960s language requirements were eliminated altogether by Princeton, MIT and other elite institutions. From the 1970s on Congress virtually ignored foreign experience in lawmaking. At its best, America had earlier been pragmatic in developing rational systems of operation. It sought to correct abuses. The effect of the huge growth of the U.S. academic establishment after the 1950s, accompanied by disciplinary fragmentation and increasing disengagement from the nation's practical affairs, is almost completely overlooked by Lipset, presumably obscured by his absorption with special associations and relationships.

Is America unique? One of our major political analysts explores the deeply held but often inarticulated beliefs that shape the American creed. "American values are quite complex," writes Seymour Martin Lipset, "particularly because

of paradoxes within our culture that permit pernicious and beneficial social phenomena to arise simultaneously from the same basic beliefs." Born out of revolution, the United States has always considered itself an exceptional country of citizens unified by an allegiance to a common set of ideals, individualism, anti-statism, populism, and egalitarianism. This ideology, Professor Lipset observes, defines the limits of political debate in the United States and shapes our society. American Exceptionalism explains why socialism has never taken hold in the United States, why Americans are resistant to absolute quotas as a way to integrate blacks and other minorities, and why American religion and foreign policy have a moralistic, crusading streak.

[A] magisterial attempt to distill a lifetime of learning about America into a persuasive brief . . . [by] the dean of American political sociologists. - Carlin Romano, Boston Globe
Invariably perceptive and revealing. - The Economist
An illuminating new book. - David Gergen, U.S. News World Report
About the Author
Seymour Martin Lipset is the Hazel Professor of Public Policy at George Mason University and a fellow of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.