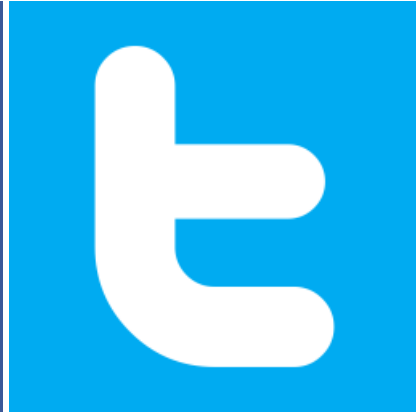


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# Which legacy will we choose to bequeath to our children? Editorial by Hector E. Garcia

Posted on Wednesday, June 7, 2017 at 10:33 am



Most Americans would agree that the great achievements, which validated the claim to the American Century, must continue.

Most might agree that, if the United States had a formula to produce such achievements, we would not need to invent a new formula unless the original could no longer work.

Here is where agreement begins to break down: There are millions of Americans who have learned from history that the Founders of the nation structured a political, legal and social system derived from Enlightenment and religious ideas, which was unprecedented in several respects. Some of these were the valuing of freedoms of thought, religion, justice and the press. Their system enshrined the God-assigned dignity of each human being and its accompanying rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Those freedoms were balanced by the expectations that citizens must be engaged in self-government, especially through knowledge and morality, as well as through abiding by the law. Conscious of human frailties that led astray other civilizations, the Founders paid special attention to a set of checks and balances, which would prevent abuse and appropriation of excessive power by any of the three branches of government they established.

At the same time, there are millions of Americans who are more familiar with a much more recent history. They know more about the values that have been in practice over the last 5 decades, after the nation experienced unprecedented affluence and became the sole

Super Power, seemingly indispensable to the world.

These are two broad classifications with many nuances in-between but the distinction should be made because of the large proportion of citizens and leaders who now fall into the second category. What the latter often convey is that the formula for the success of Americans was based on principles such as: winning-is-the-only thing, looking-out-for-number-one, elitism, and entitled consumption of cheap products and simplified information. It is a proverbial trait for those who inherit wealth and power to see less and less of the abstract and difficult principles, which generated that wealth and power and more of their outward appearances... less of character and more of showmanship, less of wisdom and more of expediency... "Resting on their laurels" has been a temptation to which all great civilizations have eventually succumbed.

The formula designed by the Founders and reinforced by subsequent leaders as well as citizens, such as those among the Greatest Generation, was uniquely successful because it was painfully and perseveringly perfected over centuries. It eventually led to the progress and affluence Americans enjoyed in the last century.

The post-affluence formula is not unique. Worse, it has repeatedly failed in other times and places. It may lead to pyrrhic victories but not to lasting success and, especially, not to greatness. On 3/30/17, former Treasury Secretary Larry Summers was interviewed by Charlie Rose. He stated, "If we move further towards a Latin American style economy... where everybody wakes up every morning thinking about what the head of state is thinking, that will be devastating to our economy..."

Is it possible for us to aspire to be great again by claiming that Americans are victims of exploitation by other countries, by blaming long-standing allies for our problems, by scapegoating minorities, praising dictators and violence... spreading visions of fear, mistrust and hatred on the basis of religion, ethnicity and party?

Diversity of opinion, both informed and uninformed, wise and superficial, is not an impediment to effective democracy. It has been a part of American history with excellent complementary results for most of that period. Nevertheless, the prevalence of uninformed opinion in both the executive and a large proportion of citizens regarding the formula for national greatness rather than lead us towards attaining common goals will lead us to destroy one of the main sources of greatness: national teamwork. One of the architects of our exceptional Union, Abraham Lincoln, paraphrased the Biblical principle "A house divided against itself cannot stand."

Let us continue to be "proud of our ancient heritage," as President Kennedy stated in his inaugural address. John Quincy Adams, at a moment of doubt over principles to follow—the trial of the African slaves who took over command of ship "Amistad"—appealed to the Founders for guidance: "We understand now... that who we are is who we were. We desperately need your strength and wisdom, to triumph over our fears, our prejudices, ourselves..." Adams was reminding the jury of the American core identity the Founders had bequeathed to future generations.

What does that American identity challenge us to do today and what legacy will we pass on to our children?

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Garcia is the published author of the higher-ed textbook *Clash or Complement of Cultures?: Peace & Productivity in the New Global Reality*.

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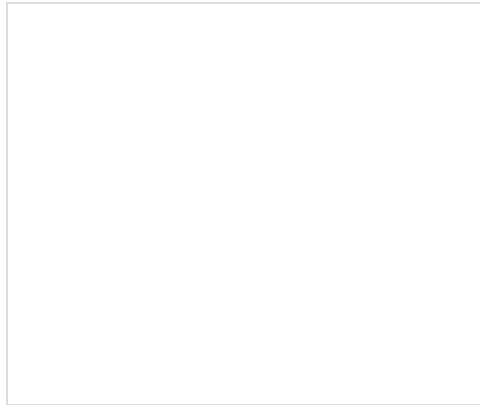
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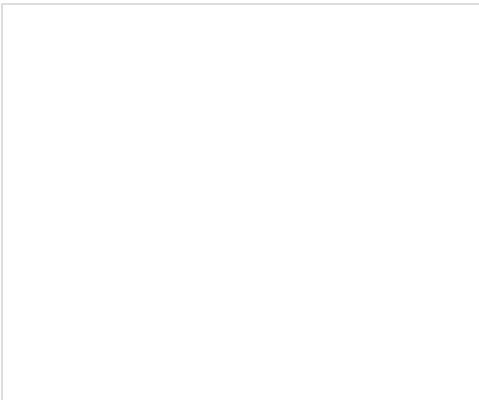
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