

Americans: Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness? Pith or Myth? Who are we Anyway?

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

*Do you really believe that people are endowed by their creator with certain **unalienable** rights among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? If so, you are totally irrational. No! You are deranged.*

Since human beings evolved, they have been taking each other's lives and enslaving others. And as for pursuing happiness? Whether you chase it until the end of your life, no one will ever care. Having a right to pursue it is irrelevant. Attaining it is what matters, and no one has even ever suggested that people have that right. When Jefferson put those sentiments into the Declaration of Independence, he knew they were pure propaganda.

Today it is myth. I'm sure there were some at the Court of George III who howled with laughter when the Declaration was first read there. The idea that people had unalienable rights was ludicrous. Is that idea ludicrous today? Some believe not, but believing something does not make it true. Even today, people, even Americans, are still taking the lives of others and enslaving them. If life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were ever rights, someone somewhere abolished them.

Then there's the Gettysburg Address. Does anybody really believe that Lincoln believed that his description of America as "of the people, by the people, for the people" was accurate?

He knew that the nation had been founded by people who owned slaves that had no role in its creation, who could not vote or hold elective office, and for whom no benefits were pursued. He surely knew his pithy oration was pure propaganda. He might have hoped, but he didn't know, it would become pure myth. But it has, because this nation never has had the "new birth of freedom" he envisioned. Just as Christians are still waiting for the Second Coming, Americans are still waiting for the "new birth of freedom" of the people, by the people, and for the people.

In reality, nations have never existed "for the people." The people have always existed for the nation. J. F. Kennedy made this clear when he said, "ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." People have always been expected to do what was necessary to preserve the state. That's what those who make the ultimate sacrifice consider their duty. One does not live for oneself or others, one lives and dies for God and country.

And then there's the belief that this nation is uniquely a nation of immigrants as though Brazil or Canada or Australia or others aren't. Mankind evolved as migratory. Human beings have always moved to what they thought were greener pastures. They still do, and they don't all want to come to America. Furthermore Americans have not always wanted them to

in spite of the inscription on the Statue of Liberty.

“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

In fact, Americans have never really wanted these poor, huddled masses. The dispute between Clinton and Trump supporters is based on ignorance. The Congress has always favored some peoples and rejected others. In fact, Americans did not consider America to be “a nation of immigrants” until the latter part of the 19th century.

Massive migrations of people to the United States did not even begin until after 1880. The nation was then a century old. The few who came to America before then came from Northern European countries, especially Ireland, Germany, and the United Kingdom. But between 1880 and 1924, more than a million Eastern Europeans came to this country. Most of these were Jews and Roman Catholics. They were followed by Italians. The numbers peaked by 1910 at over two million. By 1924, the conservative Congress had had enough. In 1924, the National Origins Act (Johnson-Reed Act) was enacted, and it did not welcomed foreigners with open arms.

The National Origins Act was an exercise in discrimination on a world-wide scale. It attempted to control the number of “unfit” individuals allowed to enter the United States by imposing quotas on applicants from various parts of the world. But the quotas were fudged. The mass migrations to the United States began in the 1880s. By 1924, more than 30 years of migration had taken place. Since the quotas were to be based on the number of people from various places already in America, getting those base numbers was essential. But instead of basing those numbers on the latest census, that of 1920, Congress decided instead to base them on the census of 1890. But that census contained higher numbers of Northern than Eastern and Southern Europeans.

Since each quota was to be a percentage of the people from each nation already in America, the quotas for Northern Europeans were proportionally greater than those for people from Eastern and Southern Europe. The act’s purpose was to maintain the ethnic distribution of America at the time. It also limited immigration from East and South Asian and Africa. Even if Ellis Island was a doorway to liberty for some, it was never a doorway for all. The arguments proffered for the act held that the earlier admitted immigrants were skilled, thrifty, and hardworking while those from Southern and Eastern Europe were unskilled, ignorant, not Protestant, and not easily assimilated.

Also the Naturalization Act of 1906 provided that only white persons and persons of African descent or African nativity could become naturalized citizens, and Associate Justice of the Supreme Court George Sutherland ruled that only Caucasians were white. In fact, it was not until 1965 that national origin considerations were abolished. America’s open door has not always been open. America became a nation of immigrants by necessity, not by choice. The New Colossus envisioned by Emma Lazarus in 1883 is also merely a myth. Would she have

written, “Send the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door” if she had known what America really thought of immigrants? We shall never know.

The salient thing about the Declaration of Independence, the Gettysburg Address, and the poem inscribed on the Statue of Liberty is that none of these documents has any legal status. The sentiments they contain have never been enacted into any law. Consequently no one, not an official, person, agency or institution has any responsibility to instantiate these lofty ideals. Everyone can say that they believe them without having to do anything to bring them to realization. It is no one’s fault that these lofty sentiments have never been realized. Simply stated, myths are unreal. Perhaps they aren’t meant to be real. They might merely express ideals that are idols of the mind. Objects to be worshiped but not to be acted upon. The realization is that people are not defined by what they claim to believe; they are defined by what they do.

“[From](#) 1964 to 1973, the U.S. dropped more than two million tons of bombs on the country of Laos to interdict traffic along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The bombings destroyed many villages and displaced hundreds of thousands of Lao civilians. . . . Up to a third of the bombs dropped did not explode, leaving Laos contaminated with vast quantities of unexploded ordnance. . . . Over 20,000 people have been killed or injured . . . since the bombing ceased.

. . .

Nearly 40 years on, less than 1% of these munitions have been destroyed. . . .

In just ten days of bombing Laos, the U.S. spent \$130M (in 2013 dollars), or more than it has spent in clean up over the past 24 years.”

When the United States withdrew its army from Viet Nam, it said almost nothing about what it had done in Laos. It didn’t even provide the Laotians with paper signs warning of the danger. Laotians are still being killed and maimed by those bombs and no American political or religious leader, to my knowledge, has ever uttered a single word of regret or sorrow.

The Laotians were not an enemy. The United States was not at war with Laos. It was no danger to the United States. It was not even an economic competitor. Why would the Americans do such a thing to innocent people? What kind of people would do such a thing to anyone?

Well, a kind, considerate, compassionate, and benevolent one, of course. Isn’t that what kind, considerate, compassionate, and benevolent people do? No? Isn’t that what Americans are? Kind, considerate, compassionate, and benevolent? No? What are they then? What kind of people are Americans? Isn’t it time that Americans and the rest of the world found out?

That any nation can kill so cavalierly without expressing regret or sorrow is shameful. That it evokes no howls of horror from the international community is astounding. Thousands and thousands of absolutely innocent Laotians have been maimed and killed and nobody cares—not the President nor the Pope, not the Secretary General of the United Nations nor the justices of the World Court, not any representative of a permanent member of the Security Council nor any country’s representative to the General Assembly, not the Archbishop of Canterbury nor the Dalai Lama. NOBODY!

What kind of people are we? Have human beings lost all vestiges of human decency? Have centuries of war, genocide, even the holocaust taught us nothing? Are we no better than the

citizens of Ur were?

Apparently not!

Just as they did in the city of Ur, people today cherish their myths. But unless people can distinguish the mythical from the real, myths are monstrous.

John Kozy is a retired professor of philosophy and logic who writes on social, political, and economic issues. After serving in the U.S. Army during the Korean War, he spent 20 years as a university professor and another 20 years working as a writer. He has published a textbook in formal logic commercially, in academic journals and a small number of commercial magazines, and has written a number of guest editorials for newspapers. His on-line pieces can be found on <http://www.jkozy.com/> and he can be emailed from that site's homepage.

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