



THE NATIONALITY OF AMERICANS

The world of the 21st Century is carved up into nation-states. It is taken for granted. But the truth is that nation-states are a relatively new development. At the time of the French Revolution in 1789, only about half of that country's people spoke French. In the 19th Century, the proportion of people speaking Italian was even lower in the lands that would become modern-day Italy. There remains controversy about whether nations or states came first, and which led to which. But it is clear that industrialization and, especially, mass education and communication, led to the formation of peoples identifying as extended groups based on ethnicity, language, culture, religion and historical and geographic continuity.

Then there is "American Exceptionalism." Alexis de Tocqueville, the French historian and political philosopher who wrote about his extended visit to the United States in 1831, said that "America is quite exceptional." A century later Joseph Stalin was to complain about the excuse of "American exceptionalism," the idea that communism was not taking hold in America because it was exempt from the Marxist laws of historical inevitability "thanks to its natural resources, industrial capacity, and absence of rigid class distinctions."

More exceptional is that although most Americans speak English – almost a quarter of the world's people do! – the people of the United States do not share a common ethnicity, religion, culture or historical connection. It is said that we are "a nation of immigrants" because, except for native Americans, we or our recent ancestors all came from somewhere else. We say that we are a "melting pot." Perhaps no one put it better than Martin Luther King Jr – usually remembered for saying other things – when he said "We may have all come on different ships, but we're all in the same boat now." That is full of meaning considering that King spoke for people whose ancestors were brought to the Americas forcibly, in chains.

Americans are still digging their way out of the legacy of slavery. But before and after, most came to the United States by their own choice. Some fled terrible circumstances of persecution, oppression and calamity. Almost by definition, they all came seeking something better than they had. They willingly left behind the familiar ties they knew for new and uncertain opportunities. It

may seem trite (some would say, but why should this be?), but they came seeking freedom and willing to embrace a new identity, a new nationalism of a love of liberty. This has been the explicit promise of the United States, however imperfectly delivered.

The United States may be the only nation in the world that was forged not so much from an identifiable people as from an ideology, a "spirit of the age" and a political "worldview." This age was the Enlightenment, the Age of Reason that stands at the dawn of modernity. It is well-summarized by the famous assertion of the American Declaration of Independence, surely – and deservedly – one of the best known sentences in the English language:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Many have tried to parse and qualify these words. Many have cynically insisted that "men" means only males, or only white men, or only British subjects, and so forth. Others said that it was clearly wrong that people were equal in anything. Today some fasten on the words "created" and "Creator" as if the fact that most of the important founders of the United States were Deists is any more important or meaningful than that they wore powdered wigs and had no indoor plumbing. No, the really important words in that sentence are "equal" and "rights" and "liberty." For these all bear on the idea that one's life and energies belong to each one of us, that each of us is entitled to live as we think best, and that no legitimate system of government can be rooted in any other principle.

This is the creed that constitutes American nationalism, the glue of American solidarity and the real substance of American identity. It is the vessel and the heat of the "melting pot." One need not know the Declaration of Independence or who the founders were to think and to feel this conviction. But it is well that Americans continue to look to the words and ideas so well expressed by them. In a speech in Chicago on July 10th of 1858, Abraham Lincoln said of the millions of immigrants that had come streaming into the US

only by that day:

"We have ... perhaps half our people who are not descendants at all of [the founding generation], they are men who have come from Europe – German, Irish, French and Scandinavian— ... or whose ancestors have come hither and settled here, finding themselves our equals in all things. If they look back through this history to trace their connection with those days by blood, they find they have none, they cannot carry themselves back into that glorious epoch and make themselves feel that they are part of us, but when they look through that old Declaration of Independence they find that those old men say that 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,' and then they feel that that moral sentiment taught in that day evidences their relation to those men, that it is the father of all moral principle in them, and that they have a right to claim it as though they were blood of the blood, and flesh of the flesh of the men who wrote that Declaration and so they are. That is the electric cord in that Declaration that links the hearts of patriotic and liberty-loving men together, that will link those patriotic hearts as long as the love of freedom exists in the minds of men throughout the world."

But long before this, in his book Rights of Man, Thomas Paine wrote:

"If there is a country in the world where concord, according to common calculation, would be least expected, it is America. Made up as it is of people from different nations, accustomed to different forms and habits of government, speaking different languages, and more different in their modes of worship, it would appear that the union of such a people was impracticable; but by the simple operation of constructing government on the principles of society and the rights of man, every difficulty retires, and all the parts are brought into cordial unison."

National feeling based on ethnicity, religion, language or history and geography takes little effort to grasp. It is imposed by circumstances. But to grasp the principles of a just society and human liberty requires learning and thinking about them to gain a conviction and appreciation of their vital importance. If only once a year, on or about Independence Day, it is important that we Americans take note of our shared love for and commitment to "liberty and justice for all."

**YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS
TO THE NTCOF ARE NEEDED,
APPRECIATED,
AND TAX-DEDUCTIBLE!!**

**All NTCOF events can be found through our website calendar , or our meetup page, from which you can RSVP, at:
- www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought -
JOIN THE NTCOF MEETUP GROUP !!**

Social Luncheon: Today, immediately after our Service, join us for lunch and discussion at the Jason's Deli on MacArthur Blvd just south of 635, at 7707 N MacArthur Blvd, phone (972) 432-0555.

Freethought Salon: Discuss today's service topic or other conundrums of interest. It happens most non-1st Sundays, over breakfast, at the Hilton DFW Lakes Hotel restaurant "The Vineyard" - inside the hotel - in Grapevine beginning 10:30 AM.

Game Night: This is nearly every Friday night at the IHOP on 2310 Stemmons Trail (I-35), near Northwest Highway (Loop 12). Plan to arrive at about 7:30 PM, and stay late playing Risk, Rummikub, and other fun games!

Freethought Book Club August 20, 2016
THE BOOK: Undeniable by Bill Nye "The Science Guy."
Location (??): Farina's Winery, 420 S Main in Grapevine, TX. at 4:30 PM!

Communitas Dinner Group: To be Announced!
Have Another Idea? Email or call! Read past bulletins and service presentations and post on the FORUM at www.churchoffreethought.org LIKE US at www.facebook.com/northtexaschurchoffreethought/ and sign up for our Twitter feed at twitter.com/ntcof !

**PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH:
"EDUCATION"
Learning How To Learn
> Sunday, August 7, 2016 <
COMFORT INN DFW AIRPORT NORTH
(Take the Freeport Parkway exit, then the
frontage road east just past Best Western;
starts at 10:30 but come at 10 for fellowship!)**

The North Texas Church of Freethought
The Fellowship of Unbelievers

Pastor (It's a Job Description, NOT a title!)	Tim Gorski
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