

AMERICAN IDENTITY

Winning whose future?

Founders made clear our goals must be individual, not collective

By Edward H. Crane

The theme of President Obama's State of the Union address was "Winning the Future." It is a theme he continues to tout and one that may well make its way to Election Day 2012. Presumably it was vetted thoroughly by White House wordsmiths and strategists (although apparently overlooked was the fact that its initials are commonly used to express profane incredulity). Regardless, it is a revealing theme that should represent a philosophical flash point between partisan philosophies. Would that it did.

It is a theme that is shorthand for the Democrats' notion that America is some kind of team — that we are all in this together, sharing some goal toward which we must strive (together) in order to win. Alas, too many in the GOP see nothing wrong with this construction. Indeed, Mr. Obama stole the phrase from none other than Newt Gingrich, noted ethanol champion and soon-to-be presidential candidate. His 2005 book is titled "Winning the Future." And the neoconservatives are forever clamoring for "national greatness," the concept according to which all Americans should sacrifice for some shared national goal.

The neoconservative intellectual David Brooks once explained that national greatness requires that "individual ambition and willpower are channeled into the cause of national greatness and by making the nation great, individuals are able to join their narrow concerns to a larger national project. ... Ultimately, national purpose can find its voice only in Washington."

Perhaps the most earnest explication of the team concept of political philosophy came

from presidential candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton back in 2007 when she told MSNBC, "You know, when I ask people, 'What do you think the goals of America are today?' people don't have any idea. We don't know what we're trying to achieve. And I think that in a life or in a country you've got to have some goals." After all, how can we determine if we've won or not without goals?

All of this team spirit may help explain why President Obama seems somewhat per-

plexed whenever the subject of American exceptionalism is raised. Sure, he says, I believe in American exceptionalism, "just as I suspect the Brits believe in British exceptionalism, and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism." In other words, there is nothing

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exceptional about American exceptionalism.

But, of course, there is. It is clearly stated in our founding document, the Declaration of Independence, which contains the radical concept that legitimate government exists to protect our individual right to "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." Happiness here refers to our personal goals, dreams and ambitions. Indeed, the concept of group rights or group goals is missing from the Declaration, the Constitution, the Federalist Papers and anything related to the American founding that made for American exceptionalism.

Yet Mr. Obama and those colleagues who share his collectivist, we-are-family, what-is-America's-purpose mentality aim to "win" the future. The question is, whose future? In a society based on individual liberty, each of us should decide what our goals are and what constitutes a life well lived. The groupthink approach from both the left and the right has led to \$100 trillion in unfunded liabilities in Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. We are regulated, controlled and micromanaged at every stage of life and in every endeavor, from education to health care to our workplace.

We don't need politicians winning the future for us — whatever that may mean. As Americans become ever more dependent on a bankrupt, intrusive and inept government, what we need is to liberate the future.

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