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## Empire of Illusion? America's problem with contemporary public discourse

**Abstract:** This article argues that a strong sense of exceptionalism that has informed the national character of the United States over the last two centuries has also resulted with some negative, domestic and international, implications. It has diminished the quality of public discourse in America and undermined the US position in the international community. The recent Great Recession, military conflicts the US has been engaged in, a sharp economic and social disparity within the American society lead to questioning the validity of the American Dream. The US revival is possible only through making the American experience ethically and spiritually grounded and meaningful. It is argued that education should play an instrumental role in improving the quality of public discourse, and building civil society.

**Key words:** United States of America, Political culture, political myth, political discourse, civic education, exceptionalism

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**M**ore than two decades ago, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and, a few years later, the dismemberment of the Soviet Union, made some Americans believe that those events marked the victory of the United States of America and capitalism over the Soviet Union and the Communist bloc (Fukuyama, 1992). Although criticized, or even ridiculed by some scholars and essayists in many discussions and publications that followed, Fukuyama's belief in supremacy of the USA had been shared by many Americans, who were convinced that their country was the victor having outlived its main ideological opponent – the USSR. The American triumphalism quickly turned out to be premature, not to say unfounded and naïve. The legal, economic, political and moral repercussions of the so called “war on terror” launched by the George W. Bush Administration and continued by his successor in the White House have polarized the American public opinion.<sup>1</sup> Barack Obama's first term as US President has been also the time when the rapidly worsening economic situation, unemployment, and the stimulus package have stirred many discussions about the role of the government and its impact on the American society. It shows quite clearly that, as “The New York Times” commentator observed it recently: “We cannot win the future by ceding the present and romanticizing the past” (Blow, 2011). America needs a new public discourse that will not only help prevent America from further eroding but, in the long run, also help reinvigorate the ideals underpinning the American Dream and flourishing civil society. Such a public discourse can only take place in the public sphere that is a “discur-

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<sup>1</sup> The Pew Research Center (2012), *Trends in American Values: 1987–2012. Partisan Polarization Surges in Bush, Obama Years*, <http://www.people-press.org/2012/06/04/partisan-polarization-surges-in-bush-obama-years/>.

sive space in which strangers discuss issues they perceive to be of consequence for them and their group. Its rhetorical exchanges are the bases for shared awareness of common issues, shared interests, tendencies of extent and strength of difference and agreement, and self-constitution as a public whose opinions bear on the organization of society” (Hauser, 1998, p. 86).

The purpose of this article is to identify and examine the issues that might (or need to) become the core of a new American public discourse. It is critically important to be able to name the problems and to know how to talk about them. It is the first step in solving them (Lakoff, 2006). Each of them, given their complexity and importance, has been or deserves to be subject of further, much more in-depth, studies. The following issues will be examined in this article: American exceptionalism; the role of fear and poverty in creating the sense of exclusion, populism, xenophobia, and religious fundamentalism. The last part of this article will be dedicated to emphasizing the political role and implications of education for the prosperity of contemporary America.

During the last two centuries, many Americans have come to perceive their country as an “empire of liberty” (the term coined by Thomas Jefferson), a “shining city on a hill” (Ronald Reagan’s phrase), the “last best hope of Earth” (Abraham Lincoln’s words), the “leader of the free world,” and the “indispensable nation” (a quote from one of Madeleine Allbright’s addresses). Actually, it was Alexis de Tocqueville, who, as the first writer, could be credited for describing the United States as “exceptional” in his well-known book *Democracy in America* (de Tocqueville, 2000). The opinion that the United States is exceptional stems from the belief that America’s history, values, and political system on which it is founded (liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism and laissez-faire) are unique and qualitatively different from other nations. The term “American exceptionalism” which was introduced by the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin in order to denounce the leaders of the American Communist Party in the early 1930s, who claimed that due to America’s distinctively different industrial capacity, the absence of sharp class struggle, and the lack of interest among the American workers, it wouldn’t be possible to carry out in their country a Bolshevik-style revolution. Therefore, the US distinguished itself by not following the utopian political and revolutionary scenarios that, formulated earlier by Marx, Lenin, and Stalin, were eventually supposed to lead to the fall of every capitalist society (McCoy 2012). Despite the fact that Stalin used the term “American exceptionalism” derogatively, there has been also a long tradition of using it in the sense that implied US superiority over or even arrogance towards the international community. It started to be more apparent especially during the George W. Bush administration. “American exceptionalism” became somewhat abstracted, eventually, from its historical context and started to be used, both by its backers and critics, to describe a phenomenon where certain United States political interests are viewed, especially after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, as being “above” or an “exception” to the law, also the international law.<sup>1</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, Wilson R. J. (2003), *United States Detainees at Guantánamo Bay: The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Responds to a “Legal Black Hole”*, “The Human Rights Brief, 10:3, Spring, <http://www.wcl.american.edu/hrbrief/10/3wilson.pdf>; Borelli S. (2005), *Casting light on the legal black hole: International law and detentions abroad in the “war on terror”*, “International Review of the Red Cross”, vol. 87:857, March, [http://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/irrc\\_857\\_bo](http://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/irrc_857_bo)

phenomenon, as some authors argue, is less concerned, then, with justifying American uniqueness than with asserting its immunity to international law. This new use of the term has served to confuse the topic since its unilateralist emphasis and a historical orientation diverge somewhat from older uses of the term. It has to be noted here that a certain number of those who subscribe to traditional notion of “American exceptionalism”, the idea that America, as it was mentioned above, is a more nearly exceptional nation than are others, that it differs qualitatively from the rest of the world and has a special role to play in world history, also agree that the United States is and ought to be fully subject to and bound by the public international law (Ignatieff, ed., 2005). Indeed, recent research shows that there still some strong indication for American exceptionalism among the American public, but very little evidence of unilateral attitudes (Page, 2010). Since the 1960s there have been scholars rejecting American exceptionalism. They have been arguing that the United States has not broken from European background, and has retained class inequities, imperialism and war. Those opponents of American exceptionalism have seen every nation as being exceptional in various ways. They have been saying tirelessly that for every one feature of America, some other country shares it. Proponents reply that the historical uniqueness of the United States is the result of a combination of many factors and not captured by particular aspects of the national character. Opponents, however, argue that the national character – resulting from all of its components – of each and every nation is unique. Although the notion of America’s exceptionalism asserts that the United States is both destined and entitled to play a leading and positive role in the world politics, it is considered pretty much a myth. Although the United States possesses certain distinctive qualities, as every country does, yet by focusing on their supposedly exceptional qualities, Americans are totally wrong when claiming that they are not lot like everyone else.<sup>2</sup> Steven M. Walt identifies five myths that can be viewed as constitutive elements of the American exceptionalism: 1) There is something exceptional about American exceptionalism; 2) The United States behaves better than other nations do; 3) America’s success is due to its special genius; 4) The United States is responsible for most of the good in the world; and 5) God is on America’s side (Walt, 2011). The undisputed faith in American exceptionalism makes it harder for Americans to understand why others question U.S. dominance on the world stage, are often startled by U.S. policies, and frequently irritated by what they see as U.S. hypocrisy. The United States is repeatedly accused of double standards with regard to such matters like possession of nuclear weapons, conformity with international law, or America’s tendency to condemn the conduct of others while ignoring its own flaws.<sup>3</sup> It is suggested sometimes that U.S. foreign policy would

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relli.pdf; Ulbrick T. J. (2005), *Tortured logic: The (Il)legality of United States interrogation practices in the war on terror*, “Northwestern Journal of International Human Rights”, 5:1, <http://www.law.northwestern.edu/journals/jihr/v4/n1/15/Ulbrick.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> N. Gingrich’s book ‘A Nation Like No Other: Why American Exceptionalism Matters’ can serve as a good example of this belief. Gingrich Newt (2011) *A Nation Like No Other: Why American Exceptionalism Matters*, Regnery Publishing, Washington DC.

<sup>3</sup> BBC World Service [http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/mar07/BBC\\_VIEWSCountries\\_Mar07\\_pr.pdf](http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/mar07/BBC_VIEWSCountries_Mar07_pr.pdf). See also, Tyllér I. (2007), *American Exceptionalism and Anti-Americanism*, in: *Anti-Americanism: History, Causes, and Themes*, vol. 2: *Historical Perspectives*, ed. B. O’Connor, Greenwood World Publishing, Oxford, p. 99–117.

probably be more effective if Americans were more humble, less convinced of their own uniqueness and free of an arrogant pretense of supremacy. What US citizens need, argue some scholars of American exceptionalism, is a more realistic and critical assessment of America's true character and contributions. For example, a renowned American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr argued that the automatic assumption that America acts for the good will bring about moral corruption. After the Second World War, Niebuhr repeated his claim by focusing on the immoral nature of the atomic bomb and the irony that such a lethal weapon was used by a nation claiming the moral high ground over communism (Niebuhr, 2008). There have been such, to recall just a few, American public intellectuals, like Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn, or civic journalists, like Amy Goodman and Chris Hedges, whose books, articles, speeches, broadcasting, and other public involvements over the last few decades have been aimed to keep reminding fellow Americans the fact that American history is so morally imperfect and as such the United States cannot be an exemplar of virtue. For instance, in his *opus magnum*, published in 1980, *A People's History of the United States*, the late Howard Zinn, a famed historian and social activist, argued that American exceptionalism cannot be of divine origin because it was not kind, especially when dealing with Native Americans, the people of color, the poor, and the women. Today, Zinn's ideas and work are being continued and disseminated by Zinn Education Project. Their goal is "to introduce students to a more accurate, complex, and engaging understanding of United States history than is found in traditional textbooks and curricula. [...] [And] emphasize the role of working people, women, people of color, and organized social movements in shaping history. Students learn that history is made not by a few heroic individuals, but instead by people's choices and actions, thereby also learning that their own choices and actions matter. We believe that through taking a more engaging and more honest look at the past, we can help equip students with the analytical tools to make sense of – and improve – the world today." (Howard Zinn Project, 2012).

The reconstruction of a public sphere and civil society cannot be accomplished in a society where people do not trust each other, are afraid of or hostile to each other. In the society in which he or she can get stigmatized (and victimized) because of his or her race, gender, sexual preferences, religious or political views, ethnic background, social, or economic status. These days, often characterized as an age of insecurity – economic, physical, and political (Standing, 2011), one can point to the negative impact of a considerable deficit of trust in today's America. There is a lot of evidence, which proves that trust and collaboration are *conditio sine qua non* for building and maintaining a prosperous, secure, and growing society.<sup>4</sup> "Insecurity breeds fear. And fear- fear of change, fear of decline, fear of strangers and an unfamiliar world – is corroding the trust and interdependence on which civil society rests" (Judt, 2010, p. 8–9). In other words, in order to make democracy work, people cannot be left 'bowling alone'.

While Milton Friedman, his "Chicago Boys" and many ideological followers around the world have trumpeted the role of free market and called for having a small govern-

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<sup>4</sup> R. Putnam (1994) *Making Democracy Work*, Princeton University Press, Princeton; R. Putnam (2000), *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Simon & Schuster, New York; F. Fukuyama (1995), *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*, Simon & Schuster, New York.

ment abridged in its prerogatives, there is enough empirical evidence to claim, as did the late British-born American historian Tony Judt, that “Markets do not automatically generate trust, cooperation or collective action for the common good.” (Judt, 2010, p. 38). At the same time, argued Judt, “people trust other people more if they have a lot in common with them not just religion or language but also income.” (Judt, 2010, p. 66). Once trust is gone, it paves way for fear, suspicion, and new measures of, often illusory, protection. Tony Judt, who was one of the most acute observers of trends and changes taking place in the contemporary American society, depicted a very depressing, yet it seems, very accurate, picture of the society that for decades has prided itself for its exceptionalism: “We have entered an age of fear. Insecurity is once again an active ingredient of political life in Western democracies. Insecurity born of terrorism, of course; but also, and more insidiously, fear of the uncontrollable speed of change, fear of the loss of employment, fear of losing ground to others in an increasingly unequal distribution of resources, fear of losing control of the circumstances and routines of our daily life. And, perhaps above all, fear that it is not just we who can no longer shape our lives but that those in authority have also lost control, to forces beyond their reach” (Judt, 2010, p. 217). Judt’s lengthy remarks provide the key to further understanding and analysis of such important, and dangerous, social phenomena like nationalism, xenophobia and religious fundamentalism.

While continuing the examination of the issues that are of critical importance for vitality of American democracy and its political discourse, one cannot avoid confrontation between the sacrosanct value of American individualism, issues of national security, and, often conflicting, views on the role the government should play in the United States. In many respects the terrorist attacks of 9/11 have changed the USA in a way that leaves many Americans feel troubled, to say the least. Whenever there is any military conflict somewhere in the world the children always pay the highest price. It is not much different in the case of American boys and girls. Although the US has waged many wars in its history, for kids who were born after 2001, and who are already elementary school students, the reality of war or heightened security measures is something they have known and experienced through their entire life so far. Those young people know nothing but wars; whose mothers or fathers have been deployed in Iraq or Afghanistan; who have lost a parent, family member, family’s friend in combat.<sup>5</sup> It makes very timely Dwight Macdonald’s warning of the ideology of *permanent war* he wrote about in his, published in 1946, essay titled *The Root is Man* (MacDonald, 1995). According to Macdonald permanent wars lead to the rise of a culture where exploitation and violence, even against fellow Americans, are justified to protect the nation. In a long run permanent wars reduce freedom of expression; the language of nationalism is the only one that is accepted in the public sphere. It strips citizens of their civic rights and reduces all communication to some pseudo-patriotic newspeak. It empowers those who profit from the state in the name of war. And it weakens and limits democratic debate and institutions. That’s how populist

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<sup>5</sup> *A Parent’s Military Deployments Take a Major Toll on Children’s Mental Health, Study Finds* (2011), “National Journal”, 4 July, <http://www.nationaljournal.com/healthcare/a-parent-s-military-deployments-take-a-major-toll-on-children-s-mental-health-study-finds-20110704>; *Army War College Study Provides Insight on Children with Deployed Parents* (2010), “U.S. Medicine”, April, <http://www.usmedicine.com/articles/army-war-college-study-provides-insight-on-children-with-deployed-parents.html>.

agendas become popular (see the case of Weimar Republic in the late 1920s and early 1930s in Germany, or former East Germany nowadays; in many post-Communist countries, and even the recent success of Tea Party in the US falls into this category). It seems that a catchy phrase that, as is wrongly believed, Sinclair Lewis wrote in 1935 in "It Can't Happen Here: 'When fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying the cross'" (Lewis Sinclair, 1935) *surprisingly gets a new meaning in 2012*. Also, in the context of today's America, President Eisenhower's remarks, made in his presidential farewell address in 1961, of the danger of the "military-industrial-academic complex" do not seem to be exaggerated at all (Eisenhower, 1961). Many Americans found to be shocking the results of the journalistic investigation published by The Washington Post in 2010. According to that report, there are today 1,271 government organizations and 1,931 private companies working on programs related to counterterrorism, homeland security and intelligence in about ten thousand locations across the US.<sup>6</sup>

The protests across the US that accompanied the creation of the Occupy Wall Street movement revealed painfully that so called American Dream is for a growing number of Americans just an empty, meaningless, phrase. The slogan "we are the 99%" shows clearly that many US citizens do not feel as though they are part of any conversation of significance in their country, that they feel excluded. This degrading feeling has been, in many cases, amplified by, especially in the wake of Great Recession, poverty, economic deprivation, and a huge, and still growing, gap between the rich and the poor. The symptoms of collective impoverishment are equally disheartening – "Broken highways, bankrupt cities, collapsing bridges, failed schools, the unemployed, the underpaid and the uninsured: all suggest a collective failure of will" (Judt, 2010, p. 12).

Harriet Fraad distinguishes five intertwined forces that have devastated the American moral, economic, psychological, and social landscape: 1) the crisis in morality and social ethics; 2) the dying of the economic dream; 3) what produced the crisis in personal and family life; 4) Americans' increasing isolation from one another; 5) the drugging of America (Fraad, 2010). In a nutshell, an intergenerational mobility has collapsed: in contrast to their parents and grandparents, children today in the US have very little expectation of improving upon the condition into which they were born. The American dream in which each generation surpassed the previous generation in real wages has disappeared, along with dreams of an intact family, a steady job, a home, and an honest supportive community.<sup>7</sup> What does it mean in practice? The reproduction of poverty – the poor stay poor. Economic disadvantage and inequality correlate with such pathological social and medical problems as: unemployment, economic insecurity, high infant mortality rate, short life expectancy, high rates of criminality and incarceration, poor health, unequal educational opportunities, obesity, malnutrition, teenage pregnancy, or addictions. Stress, illness and early death frequently follow as well. Many indicators seem to suggest that what matters is not how affluent a given country is but how unequal it is (Geoghagen,

<sup>6</sup> D. Priest, W. M. Arkin, *A hidden world, growing beyond control*, "The New York Times", <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/top-secret-america/articles/a-hidden-world-growing-beyond-control/>.

<sup>7</sup> A portrait of the most pauperized, hopeless segments of the American society can be found in Barbara Ehrenreich's book, *Nickel and Dime*. B. Ehrenreich (2001), *Nickel and Dime. On (not) getting by in America*, Metropolitan Press, New York.

2010). It is worth noting that trust, the faith we have in our fellow citizens, corresponds negatively with differences in income. The data collected and analyzed by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett reveal an extremely huge gap between the most affluent and those most underprivileged in America. In 2005 21.2 percent of US national income was accumulated by only 1 percent of earners. For example, in 1968 the CEO of General Motors earned, in wages and benefits, about 60 times the amount paid to an average GM worker. Today the CEO of Wal-Mart earns nine hundred times the salary of his standard employee. In 2005 the wealth of the Wal-Mart founders' family was estimated at about the same (\$ 90 billion) as that of the bottom 40 percent of the US population: 120 million people (Wilkinson, Pickett, 2010). In the situation when, as Chris Hedges puts it, the United States is "rapidly becoming a third-world country, cannibalized by corporations, with two-thirds of the population facing severe financial difficulty and poverty" (Hedges, 2010, p. 181), the government has a special role to play in the American society. It has to, despite so typically American distrust of federal authorities, step in and exercise power and initiatives in those cases where individuals would not be able to rely just on themselves. Nowadays, when government benefits, like Social Security and Medicare, make up nearly a fifth of Americans' income, and almost half of the US society lives in households that receive benefits, it is the government that is able to provide access to collective goods that individuals could never afford in isolation. Controversies surrounding Health Care reforms proposed by the Obama administration illustrate the tensions, misunderstanding, and often the lack of good will among those who oppose state-run social policies.<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that in Europe and majority of other contemporary developed countries, the idea that anyone could be completely self-reliant is viewed as a relic of the 19<sup>th</sup> century individualism. As Tony Judt remarks, "The only thing worse that too much government is too little: in failed states, people suffer at least as much violence and injustice as under authoritarian rule [...]. Capitalism is not a political system, it is a form of economic life, compatible in practice with right-wing dictatorships (Chile under Pinochet), left-wing dictatorships (contemporary China), social democratic monarchies (Sweden) and plutocratic republics (the United States)" (Judt, 2010, p. 145). In her controversial and thought-provoking book, *"The Shock Doctrine"*, Naomi Klein critically scrutinizes the consequences of the radical implementation of Milton Friedman's economic "shock doctrine". In her view, the human cost of "shock doctrine" is very high, causes a lot of suffering (Naomi, 2007).

So, someone might ask, if there are there any ideas, solutions, or policies that are worth pursuing in order to strengthen the very foundations of participatory democracy in the United States. What should be reconsidered then? What has to be done? Rabbi Michael Lerner argues in his book *The Politics of Meaning. Restoring Hope and Possibility in an Age of Cynicism* that what is needed in America these days is the "politics of meaning" that involves seeking to build lives that are ethically and spiritually grounded and meaningful (Lerner, 1997). Michael Lerner stresses the fact that the American society has created human beings who think that their sole purpose in life is to be consumers, to take

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<sup>8</sup> *Reliance on the Safety Net Rises* (2011), "The New York Times", 11 February, <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/02/12/us/relying-on-government-benefits.html>.

in and consume whatever they wish. As Lerner notes sadly, "In contemporary public life we are taught that human beings are fundamentally motivated by material self-interest [...]. People, we are told, are fundamentally selfish. They look out for themselves and they do not really care about anyone else, except as a way to advance themselves. People want to accumulate material goods and bodily pleasures without end, and all human actions are aimed at achieving those ends" (Lerner, 1997, p. 31). Many people live with the expectation that they are entitled to receive, but they are not taught to expect that they are also ought to give back. As a result, Americans have retreated into collective narcissism. They are disconnected from themselves and others. They lack community, they lack information. It brings to mind Neil Postman's book, published in 1985, "Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business" (Postman, 1986). It is dangerous, for the future of the American society, argued Postman, that public that can no longer distinguish between truth and fiction is left to interpret reality through illusion, talk shows, tabloids, and soap operas.

That is why education has to be part of any public discourse. Theodor Adorno in his 1967 essay titled *Education After Auschwitz* reminded that the moral corruption that made the Holocaust possible remained largely unchanged. He argued that schools should teach more than skills. They had to teach values. If they didn't another Auschwitz was always possible (Adorno, 2003). It is of a political importance that a discourse about real educational reforms be developed, as Diane Ravitch wrote in her bestseller *The Death and Life of The Great American School System*. A widespread example of *functional illiteracy* illustrates what is really at stake here. Functional illiteracy in North America, as many educators argue, is epidemic. According to the US Department of Education's National Assessment of Adult Literacy, there are 42 million illiterate Americans and this figure is growing by more than 2 million a year. Another 50 million are unable to read above a 5<sup>th</sup> grade level. Put it differently, 20 percent of American high school seniors can be classified as functionally illiterate at the time of their graduation. 70 percent of prisoners are illiterate, while 85 percent of juvenile offenders are either marginally or functionally illiterate. 43 percent of those with the lowest literacy skills live in poverty. A third of high school graduates never read another book for the rest of their lives, and neither do 42 percent of college graduates. In 2007, 80 percent of the families in the United States did not buy or read a book.<sup>9</sup>

It is very dangerous that universities no longer train students to think critically, to examine and critique systems of power and cultural and political assumptions, to ask the broad questions of meaning and morality once sustained by the humanities. These institutions have transformed themselves into vocational schools. They have become high-priced occupational training centers where students seek tangible vocational credentials (Ravitch, 2010). Frank Donoghue notices in his book *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities* that liberal arts education has been systematically dismantled for decades. Any form of learning not strictly vocational has at best been marginalized and in many schools abolished (Donoghue, 2008). Most of the stu-

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<sup>9</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, *National Assessment of Adult Literacy*, <http://nces.ed.gov/naal/>.



dents are so conditioned to success that they become afraid to take risks. They are socialized to obey, while, as writes William Deresiewicz, “the true purpose of education is to make minds, not careers” (Dorosiewicz, 2008).

Almost two centuries ago, in *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville penned the following words: “I cannot help fearing that men may reach a point where they look on every new theory as a danger, every innovation as a toilsome trouble, every social advance as a first step toward revolution, and that they may absolutely refuse to move at all” (Tocqueville, 2000). Although one may only speculate about how this French author might view today’s America, Tocqueville’s concerns seem to be worth keeping in mind when trying to understand contemporary Americans and their political culture.

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## **Imperium złudzeń. Problemy Ameryki ze współczesnym dyskursem publicznym**

### **Streszczenie**

Artykuł stawia tezę, że silne poczucie amerykańskiej wyjątkowości, będące częścią charakteru narodowego USA rodzi również pewne negatywne implikacje na poziomie krajowym, jak i międzynarodowym. Obniżyło ono jakość dyskursu publicznego, a także wpłynęło na pozycję USA w stosunkach międzynarodowych. Recesja ekonomiczna, zaangażowanie w konflikty zbrojne oraz silne ekonomiczne i społeczne nierówności podważyły wiarygodność amerykańskiego mitu. Etyczne i duchowe zakorzenienie amerykańskiego doświadczenia może być ważnym czynnikiem odrodzenia USA. Istotną rolę dla poprawy jakości amerykańskiego dyskursu publicznego oraz wzmocnienia społeczeństwa obywatelskiego ma do odegrania edukacja.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Stany Zjednoczone Ameryki, kultura polityczna, mit polityczny, dyskurs polityczny, edukacja obywatelska, wyjątkowość

