

Be wary of extreme patriotism and its racial pride

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Patriots are citizens who love their country. They are proud of their nationality, ethnicity, traditions and achievements. A moderate amount of patriotism is healthy. It can help bring about one's best personal accomplishments. A measured amount of patriotism also helps bring order and structure and direction and self-discipline to our lives. This type of patriotism can inspire us to work hard and achieve results that will be respected by those who are part of our country and those who are not. Yet, sometimes patriotism can go too far.

Extreme patriotism develops gradually and often follows a pattern of progressive steps leading to unfortunate results. It can begin with the recognition that a country has been able to realize notable achievements made by its predecessors. So far, so good! The next step in excessive patriotism may be a feeling of *exceptionalism*. Because of previous successes patriotism can easily turn into feelings that a nation is very special above all others. The nation feels favoured by God and by human kind and a concept of *manifest destiny* may emerge. In Hitler's version of exceptionalism his soldiers' uniforms bore the military epaulet and belt buckle, "Gott mit uns" (God with us). With Nazi exceptionalism there came a feeling of invincibility and grandiose racial pride.

Extreme patriotism next turns its attention to finding a strong leader who best represents most of the qualities of exceptionalism. The new leader doesn't have to be perfect but he has to believe that he is an exceptional leader suitable for a nation that stands above all others. Usually, the chosen leader is male, Caucasian, verbose and not too aware nor caring about those outside his own country. Al-Assad, Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin and other dictators were not inclined to respect democracy or value truth-telling as part of their leadership styles. Political power is usurped by a strong authoritarian leader who is entrusted to know the best policies for his nation. Wherever it's convenient, the leader may change previous laws so as to weaken opinions about free speech and other hard earned

protections acquired earlier by ordinary citizens. Free speech, public media such as radio, television and newspapers become the enemy and laws can be changed to either regulate or shut down public media. Political correctness is mocked as political weakness. Free speech and factual news become fake news with alternative facts and political expediency. This makes it possible for a strong leader to lead his political party in whatever directions he wishes. If the leader is supported by politicians who already hold a majority of votes against opposing politicians there is not much opposition parties can do to influence the strong majority leader.

For determined leaders who love power, it is not a big step to change democracies into extreme governments where decisions are made from the top down. Dictatorial leaders promise citizens that their lives will become better under their leadership. Promises of jobs for all, and health care and good practical education for all, lower taxes, military superiority, and security from foreign threats, will be exactly what citizens want to hear. Such promises are precisely what ordinary people are anxious to believe in and they hope good things will occur under their newly chosen strong leader.

Winston Churchill once said democracy is the best system of government, yet he realized democracy can be weakened and changed fairly easily. It is not unusual throughout history that democracies have been shown to be fragile. They can be contaminated by extreme patriotism. Like good marriages and good friendships, and good humanistic principles, democracies need to be nourished and valued and protected. Where democracies fail, often they do so gradually and before citizens realize they have given up rights and freedoms developed earlier through the hard work of their predecessors.

Canadians are now celebrating our one hundred fifty year anniversary. Let us hope that our chosen leaders will stand up for democratic principles and for the rights and freedoms we currently enjoy. Too much contentment with our past achievements may make us too easily satisfied with ourselves.

A good way to evaluate American exceptionalism would be to solicit the opinions of those who live in countries outside United States and to be moderate in patriotic aggrandizement.