



## America: Still A Great Nation

**T**he past seven years of the Obama Administration have undermined Americans' confidence in government, our leaders and our future as a nation. Once in the White House, Obama declared that America was not an exceptional nation, and his policies, foreign and domestic, appear calculated to ensure that America does not remain an exceptional nation.

Last year, 2015, seemed especially dreadful. Obama's failure to exert leadership in Syria and Iraq has left complete chaos in the Mideast. His administration's strategy to abandon our traditional Middle Eastern allies—Israel, Saudi Arabia and Jordan—in favor of alliances with Iran and Arab Spring activists left the United States a follower in the region. His support of Arab Spring uprisings meant abandoning President Mubarak in Egypt and overthrowing dictator Gadhafi in Libya, leaving a vacuum that was filled by militant Islamists in the Muslim Brotherhood, al Qaeda in Iraq, and ISIS in Syria. The signing of a nuclear deal with the Iranian government on a promise that the regime would be good mullahs if we lifted billions of dollars in sanctions was like asking terrorists to promise not to blow any more buildings up if they were given more bombs. In fact, that is exactly what the Obama-Kerry deal was with Iran.

The domestic front has been almost equally disastrous. The economy remains stagnant, many workers are settling for part-time jobs, the national debt continues to soar, and the promise of Obamacare to reduce health care costs and to provide insurance for the uninsured remains unfulfilled and will remain so. There are still 40 million uninsured in America, even while state Medicaid enrollments have soared. The past year marked a time of racial riots, the continuation of a war on Christianity, and absurd political correctness impositions in schools from kindergarten through college.

2015 was not a good year by most measures. It has become harder to watch the news, read a magazine article about politics or the economy, or talk to a family member or neighbor and not feel that maybe the "end days" are nearing. It is tempting to retreat in these circumstances and say "to heck with the world, I am just going to take care of myself and my loved ones as best I can."

Before we reach this conclusion, however, let's remember what we are fighting for and understand that this is not the first time America has passed through difficult times. In the past, things got better after the people rallied and political, religious and civic leaders stepped forward to renew the nation. More importantly, we should remind ourselves that as bad as things might look at the moment, actually America is in a good place compared to other nations in the world. It is still the best place in the world to live, and Americans should thank God that they were born Americans and are living in this country today.

### The True Wealth of the USA

**T**he most important thing to remember about our country is that we are a nation founded on political liberty, economic freedom and individual opportunity. These ideals make the United States an exceptional nation in the world today and in history. This is the real wealth of the nation. These ideals have been threatened over the last century from foreign enemies and from within by some of our elected leaders and left-wing activists who do not understand or share these founding ideals. Nevertheless, the nation continues to uphold these founding principles and most Americans stand ready to defend these ideals against enemies and critics.

While there has been much talk about income inequality in our country in recent years, Americans rightly pride themselves on living in one of the richest nations in the world today. Any calculation of the nation's wealth should extend beyond measures of economic well-being to encompass political, legal, religious and cultural heritage. This heritage includes representative government based on a constitution; the rule of law; religious toleration; and an individualist ethos. We realize that in our history the promise of democracy, the rule of law, religious toleration and individual freedom often remained unfulfilled. Practice did not always fit aspiration. Yet these aspirations were real. The natural right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness remains fundamental to the national ethos. Faith in these "unalienable" rights enabled Americans over the course of two hundred-plus years to produce a constitutional republic unparalleled in human history. Perfect free markets might never have existed, yet the belief in a free-

market economy and the belief that every individual should have a chance for economic advancement unleashed the most materially and culturally prosperous nation in the world.

The fulfillment of these promises often came with violent struggle, profound social and cultural discord, and disturbing social injustice. In these conflicts, there was surprising agreement that democracy, the rule of law, religious toleration and individual rights were good things. We take such things for granted. At nearly every point of bitter social discord—debates over slavery, the Civil War, the rights of organized labor, the black civil rights movement, the treatment of Native Americans, women's rights, the role of the federal government, war—conflict was consistently framed within a belief in a constitutional order embodied in the Founders' vision with long historical roots in Western tradition.

The tangible and cultural wealth of the American nation remains our greatest strength. The framework created by our founding fathers allowed great political, business, religious and social leaders to emerge to shape the direction of the nation. Destiny is more than accident. It is also the product of will. Ideals of liberty fostered both American material prosperity and world prosperity. The world is better off because of America, and Americans are living longer and better lives.

### **The World is Wealthier**

**B**ecause American capitalism still remains the economic engine of the world, the people of the world are better off. This conclusion runs counter to left-wing critics who continue to blame America and capitalism for world poverty. The number of people around the world living in extreme poverty has fallen below 10 percent, according to a World Bank report issued last fall.<sup>1</sup> The World Bank estimated that poverty fell from 28 percent of the world's population in 2012 to 9.6 percent in 2015. This is a remarkable figure. Twenty-five years ago more than a third of the world was living in extreme poverty: one out of every three persons was living on less than \$1.90 (in today's dollars) per day. The reasons for the decline in poverty have included economic development, the ability and capacity of nations to compete in a global market, and trade with the United States, the world's largest economy.

For all the previous talk about China becoming the wealthiest nation in the world, the Gross National Product of the United States remains by far the largest in the world. The GNP of the United States in 2015 stood at approximately \$17,768,050 (in millions) of dollars. China's GNP was around \$9,181,204 (in millions). Far behind stood Japan, Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Brazil.<sup>2</sup>

Gross national numbers mean one thing, but what about per-capita wealth? Once again Americans' share of the wealth is impressive. On a per-capita basis, America stands only fifth in world ranking, but these figures are misleading.

The countries ahead of America, and others in the top ten, are countries with small national populations. The wealthiest nation on a per capital basis is Norway, followed by Luxembourg, Singapore, Switzerland and then the United States. The United States is followed by Hong Kong, Denmark, Sweden, Austria and the Netherlands. Our nation with a population of more than 300 million people, composed of a remarkably ethnically diverse demography, offers what no other large country does in way of wealth.

### **Americans Are Getting Richer**

**L**eft-wing critics and Democrats running for their party's nomination like to harp on America's shrinking middle class and income inequality. The two are often equated to make it appear that America's middle class has become poverty-stricken. Leftists use this argument to justify their perennial advocacy for the redistribution of wealth. While they do not state this explicitly, their agenda is to make sure that everyone (except themselves) is equally poor. What is not discussed is that income disparities do not present a good measure for general economic prosperity for the nation. There is income disparity and middle class average wages have stagnated, but income disparity reflects age disparities. Older employees tend to have higher incomes because they have been in the work force longer and have developed talents that come with experience. Similarly, measuring wealth—as opposed to just income—reflects demography. An older population tends to accumulate more wealth by owning their homes and by saving and investing over a lifetime. An older population, as seen in America, will have accumulated more wealth than a younger population.

Of greater importance, however, is that the middle class has shrunk in part because many in the middle class have become wealthier. The number of households that fit within the category of the middle class has shrunk by 11 percentage points since 1971.<sup>3</sup> The number of people who are classified as the lower class has increased in this same period from 25 percent to 29 percent. Yet at the same time, the proportion of households that are classified as upper class increased from 14 percent to 21 percent. This suggests that the crisis of inequality is political hype contrary to empirical evidence. Not only do the media and left-wing politicians fail to mention that the proportion of upper middle class households increased; they also do not mention that there has been an increase in incomes in all income categories. The proportion of people in lower and lower middle class household categories has not changed dramatically in the last forty-three years. In 1971 the proportion of lowest household income stood at 16 percent. Today it is 20 percent. The lower middle class household income category stood at 9 percent in 1971, and it still stands today at 9 percent.

Comparing those who were poor or lower middle class in 1971 with today ignores mobility completely. Those who

were poor or middle class in 1971 are not necessarily poor or middle class today. The beneficiaries of shifting income over the last forty years have been elderly people, married couples and, yes—African Americans. Blacks saw a net 11.2 percent increase in their participation in the upper middle class income group. So have whites, Asians, women and men seen positive economic mobility. Those who have “lost” in not making it into the middle and upper middle class have tended to be Hispanics, many of them recent immigrants, young workers (millennials) just entering the workforce, and people with only high school diplomas. The point is that America is still a pretty good place to live a middle class life and experience economic and social mobility.

### Living Longer

**N**ot only are many of us living better, we are living longer.<sup>4</sup> A recent report by the Centers for Disease Control showed that people born in 2009 can expect to live on average to 78.5 years. That’s nearly a full year longer than for those born in 2008! Life expectancy overall has increased for the last fifty years or more. Why? We are eating better, taking better care of ourselves, and medical care has been revolutionized. Treatments for heart disease and stroke have undergone radical technological advances. Many cancers are now being treated as “chronic conditions,” not fatal diseases. There are disparities in life expectancies between men and women, whites and blacks, rich and poor, but these disparities have been decreasing.

While life expectancy has increased, many Americans still suffer from poor health. Diabetes, heart disease and pulmonary diseases affect the well-being of people who do not eat well, drink too much and smoke. Nonetheless, many Americans have become health-conscious. They are staying away from fatty foods, eating more vegetables, and have given up smoking.

Think a moment about “lifestyle” in the 1950s. The American diet was heavy in fried foods, and most adult Americans smoked and drank heavily. Supermarkets offered few fresh fruits and vegetables. Fresh fish was a luxury for most Americans. Today American supermarkets from the West Coast to New England are stocked with fruits from all over the world, many unknown to most Americans in the 1950s. Instead of being limited to iceberg lettuce, a shopper can buy a range of salad greens that would amaze a 1950s shopper. Think about the wide variety of breads available to the American consumer today. Many supermarkets have their own bakeries making nine-grain loaves and much, much more. Low-fat, sugar-free and healthier products are readily available at grocery stores.

### More Educated

**W**hile there is much rightful complaint about schools and the quality of education many of our young are receiving, our nation presents young people with

more educational opportunities than ever before. In the 18th century, literacy was fairly high in New England and in some Middle Atlantic colonies. In the Southern colonies, Virginia, the Chesapeake and Carolinas, it was a capital crime to teach a black slave to read or sign his name, and black slaves were severely punished if they were discovered to be literate. But it was not just blacks who were kept uneducated. The Southern planter class in these colonies deliberately discouraged poor whites from learning to read or write, and the rate of illiteracy was extremely high, as historians have discovered.<sup>5</sup> Many of those who enlisted in the American revolutionary army could not read or write their own names. Most of the heroes of Washington’s army never read Locke, Paine or the Declaration of Independence. They joined the war for independence because they believed their rights as Englishmen had been denied and because they believed in their independence.

Today more American youth are completing high school and college and there is an increased premium on being educated.<sup>6</sup> By 2012 about a third of the nation’s 25- to 29-year-olds had earned a bachelor’s degree. This share has been slowly edging up for decades from about one-fifth in the early 1970s to today. At the same time, 90 percent of this same age cohort were high school graduates, up from 78 percent in 1971.

### An America Worth Fighting For

**A**ll of this is not to suggest that all’s well with the world or the nation. We face serious problems on every front. The *Mindszenty Report* will continue to discuss these problems: the persecution of Christians at home and abroad, the terrorist threat, the deterioration of the traditional family, and left-wing lunacy. At the same time, we should take an occasional break to remind ourselves what we are defending. Progress is often slow and never an even path. Battles are won by the committed, the resourceful and the inspired. America is inspiring from its birth to what we have achieved thus far. The American dream is still worth dreaming.

1 Adam Taylor, “For the First Time, Less than 10 Percent of the World is Living in Extreme Poverty, World Bank Says,” *Washington Post*, October 2, 2015.

2 The Economist, *Pocket World in Figures* (London, 2015).

3 “The Middle Class is Shrinking Because They’re Getting Rich,” <https://reason.com/blog/2015/12/10/the-middle-class-is-shrinking-because-th>.

4 <http://consumer.healthday.com/senior-citizen-information-31/age-health-news-7/americans-living-longer-than-ever-cdc-683595.html>.

5 David Hackett Fischer, *Albion’s Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York, 1989).

6 [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/06/education/record-numbers-of-young-americans-earn-bachelors-degree.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/06/education/record-numbers-of-young-americans-earn-bachelors-degree.html?_r=0).



SAVE THE DATE

## 2016 Chicago Conference

The Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation urges you, your family and friends to attend this important  
Conference on **FAITH, FAMILY, FREEDOM**

**Chicago, IL – Saturday, March 19, 2016**

Drury Lane Oakbrook Terrace, IL

**7:30 a.m. – 3:15 p.m.**

### Speakers:

#### Monica Miller

Professor of Religious Studies  
at Madonna University outside  
Detroit, founded Citizens for Pro-Life Society

#### Juliana Taimoorazy

Founder and past president  
of the Iraqi Christian Relief Council and  
currently a radio host for Ninevah Radio

#### Clarke Forsythe

Senior Counsel, Americans United for Life  
and author of *Abuse of Discretion*  
on the history of abortion decisions

### Chicago Conference Leaders:

#### Kevin Haney

Chairman (630) 730-7112

#### Deacon James M. Sinacore

Mass/Rosary Chairman (708) 343-2263

#### Gina Gallo

Registrar (630) 424-1447

#### Caroline Corley

Program Administrator (314) 727-6279

Mark your calendar now! Hope to see you in the Windy City!

More to follow!

The Mindszenty Report is published monthly by

Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation

7800 Bonhomme Ave.

St. Louis, MO 63105

Phone 314-727-6279 Fax 314-727-5897

Subscription rate: \$25 per year

Outside the U.S.A. \$35

The Mindszenty Report is not copyrighted, and

subscribers are invited to have it printed in

their local newspapers.

Contributions to the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation

are tax deductible as allowed by law.

Eleanor Schlafly, *Publisher*

*e-mail: info@mindszenty.org*

*web site: www.mindszenty.org*

*orders.inquiries@mindszenty.org*

## Mindszenty Report Reprints

**LESSONS ISIS IS TEACHING US THE HARD WAY.** Recent Islamic State-affiliated terrorist attacks in Paris and California underscore the critical need for stricter immigration rules and education about the emergence of the terror network. Ask for 1/16

**DO RELIGIOUS VOTERS STILL MATTER?** Emphatically yes, especially in Republican primaries, but they are declining as a share of the U.S. electorate. To win, Republican candidates need to appeal to voters based on economic and national security issues and not only social issues. Ask for 12/15

**POPE FRANCIS, CAPITALISM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE.** Our Argentine pope's focus on helping the poor is admirable, but his sharp criticism of capitalism indicates a limited understanding of the power of free markets to lift people out of poverty. Ask for 11/15

**A NEW CRACKDOWN ON CHINESE CHRISTIANS.** Chinese Communist government leaders, long deeply suspicious of Christianity and other religions, have ordered the destruction of more than 400 church crosses and the demolition of more than 60 Christian churches in 2014 and 2015. Catholic and Protestant clergy and worshippers in China have strongly protested. Despite the history of persecution, there appear to be more Christians than Communist Party members in China. Ask for 10/15