



What's So Great About America?

What I'd like to talk about is the special role of America in the world today, and the enormous controversy which surrounds the position of America as the world's only super power. We are one year into the war against terrorism, and we have made some military progress, it seems, in this war. And yet, I want to suggest that we have not made very much intellectual progress in understanding the nature of this conflict, the nature of the enemy—what this fight is all about. You remember that right after the terrorist attack President Bush announced, "This is not a war against Islam." Islam, he assured us, is a religion of peace. The Islamic concept of Jihad, we were told, does not record the holy war, but is a kind of moral campaign to cleanse one's inner soul. Tony Blair, Prime Minister of Britain, said, "I don't like the term Islamic terrorist, because the vast majority of Muslims are not terrorists." Now, I would suggest to you that all of these statements that set out the intellectual background of our understanding of this war are either dubious or manifestly untrue.

For example, it is certainly true that the vast majority of Muslims are not terrorists, but isn't it also true that the vast majority of terrorists are Muslims. The Islamic concept of Jihad is a fairly elastic concept. If you read the Qur'an and the Islamic commentaries, you can read about many different types of Jihad—the Jihad of the pen, the Jihad of the tongue—but right in the middle, right up there, you'll read about the Jihad of the sword. And historically the Islamic empire, like most other empires, established itself by force. I think we need to step back for a moment and reconsider the true sources of this controversy, and one way to look at that is to ask this question, "What is it about America's role in the world that is simultaneously the source of great magnetic attraction to many people and yet at the same time is a source of intense hatred and repulsion on the part of others." I mean, think about it, America has this dual status in the world. Immigrants are drawn to America and come here from many different countries. You can go into a hotel in Barbados or Bombay and you'll find the bell hop is whistling the theme song from *Titanic*.

There's this fascination with the idea of America that has to be explained. But on the other hand, you have a certain intense criticism of America. Some of it comes from European intellectuals, some of it comes from Islamic radicals. Interestingly, some of it comes from people in America. How often do you turn on the television and see some professor of romance languages at Oberland College denouncing the United States' foreign policy: our foreign policy is the cause of all these problems; we have been a wreck in these countries for centuries; no wonder they are lashing out at us.

*How did **Western civilization** become the **dominant** civilization in the world?*

No Events