

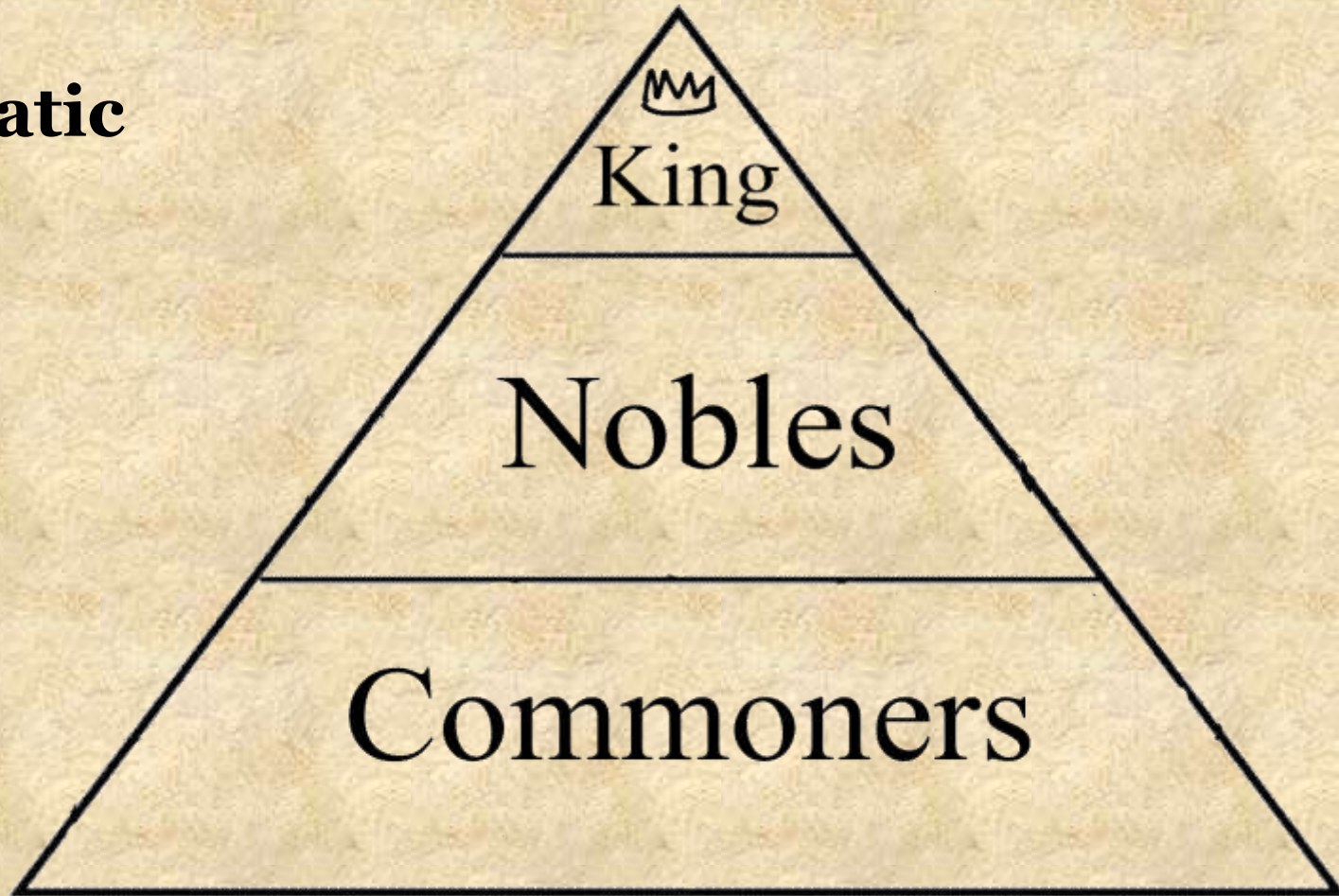
What is American exceptionalism?

Ronald Reagan (1983): “I’ve always believed that this blessed land was set apart in a special way, that there was some divine plan that placed the two great continents here between the oceans to be found by people from every corner of the Earth who had a deep love for freedom.”



European assumptions about how a society should be organized - hierarchy

static



Challenged by the Enlightenment – no hierarchy in the physical universe, only natural law – Galileo, Newton

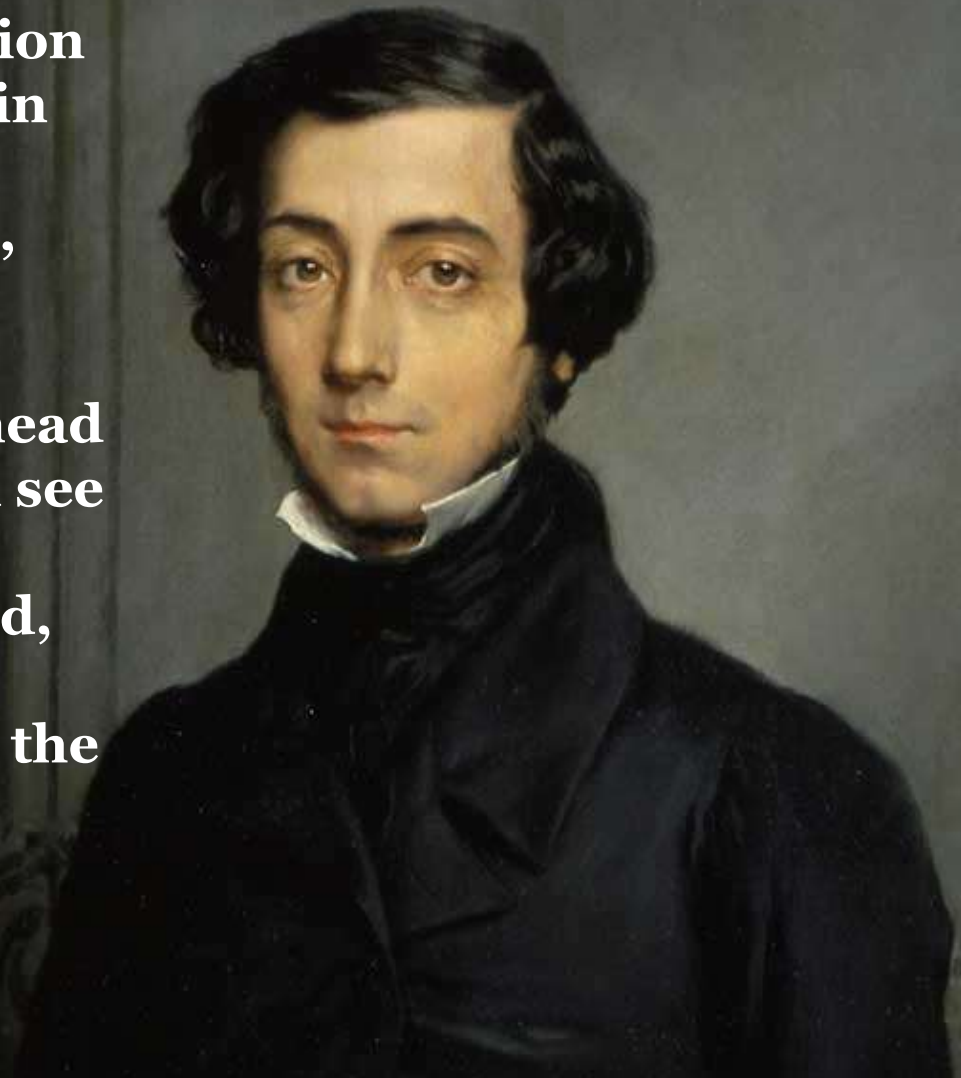
American Revolution challenges hierarchy in political universe

Tom Paine: “...The birthday of a new world is at hand, and a race of men, perhaps as numerous as all Europe contains, are to receive their portion of freedom from the events of a few months.”

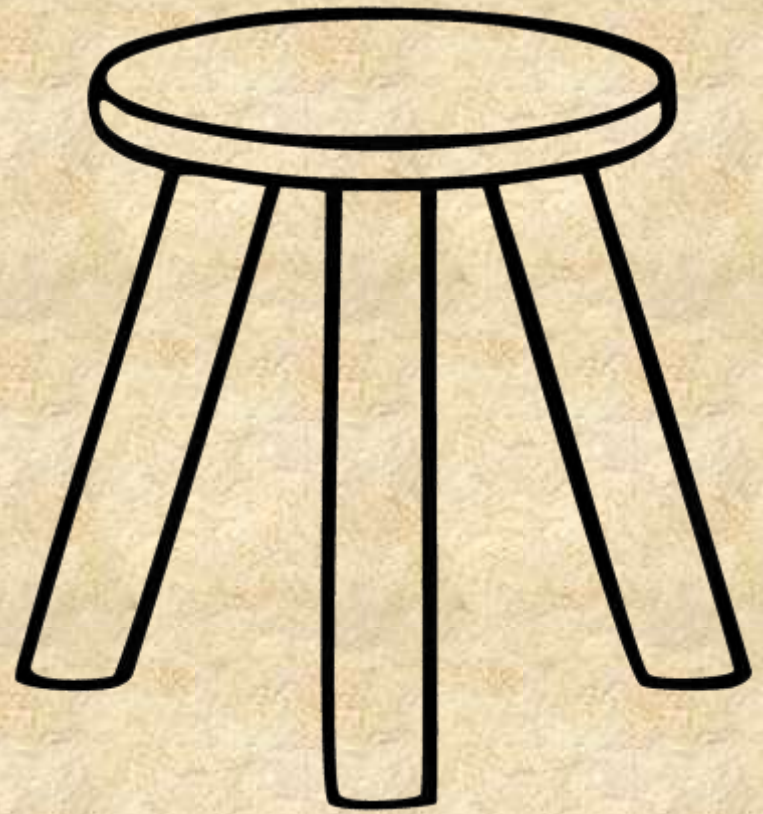


a political order with no ranks, no prelates, no hierarchy; a government that limited itself, and confined by a written Constitution; and an identity based, not on race or blood or soil or ancestry or even language, but on a single Enlightenment proposition as relentlessly logical as it was frighteningly brief, “that all men are created equal.”

Americans compensated for limiting government through the invention of private, voluntary associations. Alexis de Tocqueville: “The extraordinary fragmentation of administrative power” in America is offset by the proliferation of “religious, moral...commercial and industrial associations.” “Everywhere that, at the head of a new undertaking, you see the government in France and a great lord in England, count on it that you will perceive an association in the United States.”



A new politics created the first leg of what became a three-legged stool of American exceptionalism. The second leg was economic.

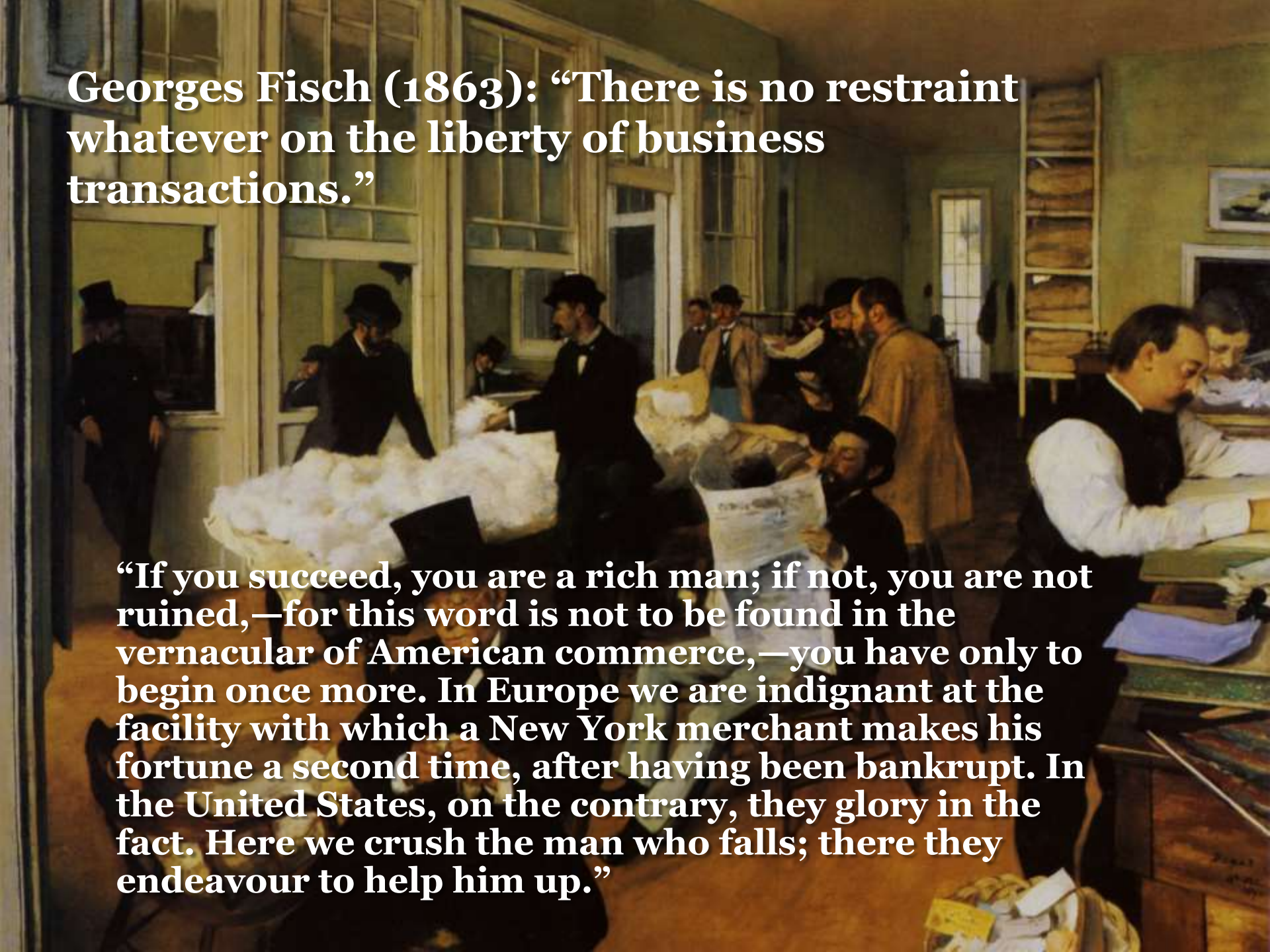


Hector St. John de Crevecoeur:

“What, then, is the American, this new man?”

“He is an American,” Crevecoeur replied, who has stopped doing what others tell him he must do. He has escaped “from involuntary idleness, servile dependence, penury, and useless labour,” and has “passed to toils of a very different nature, rewarded by ample subsistence.”

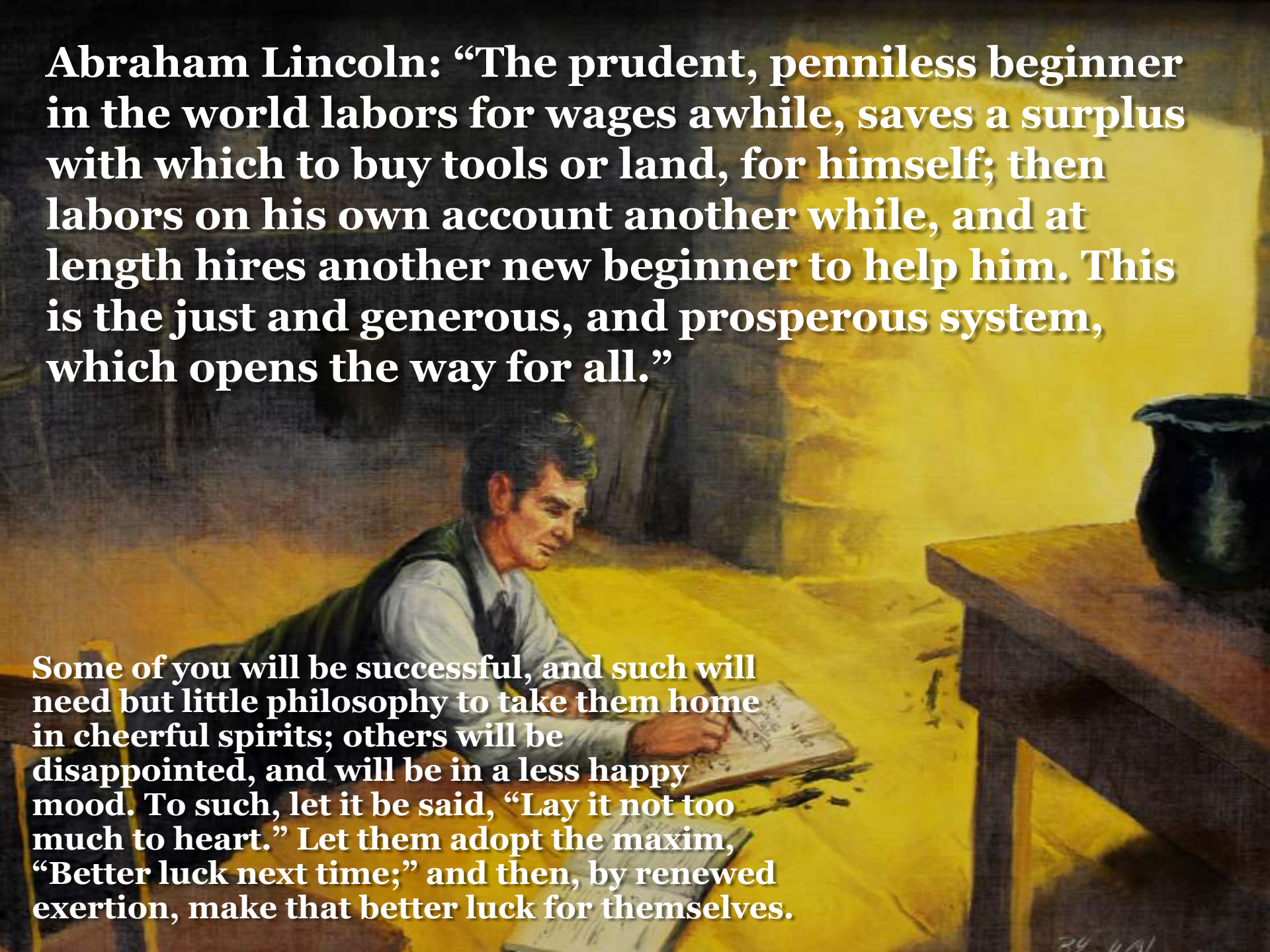
Georges Fisch (1863): “There is no restraint whatever on the liberty of business transactions.”



“If you succeed, you are a rich man; if not, you are not ruined,—for this word is not to be found in the vernacular of American commerce,—you have only to begin once more. In Europe we are indignant at the facility with which a New York merchant makes his fortune a second time, after having been bankrupt. In the United States, on the contrary, they glory in the fact. Here we crush the man who falls; there they endeavour to help him up.”

Abraham Lincoln: “The prudent, penniless beginner in the world labors for wages awhile, saves a surplus with which to buy tools or land, for himself; then labors on his own account another while, and at length hires another new beginner to help him. This is the just and generous, and prosperous system, which opens the way for all.”

Some of you will be successful, and such will need but little philosophy to take them home in cheerful spirits; others will be disappointed, and will be in a less happy mood. To such, let it be said, “Lay it not too much to heart.” Let them adopt the maxim, “Better luck next time;” and then, by renewed exertion, make that better luck for themselves.

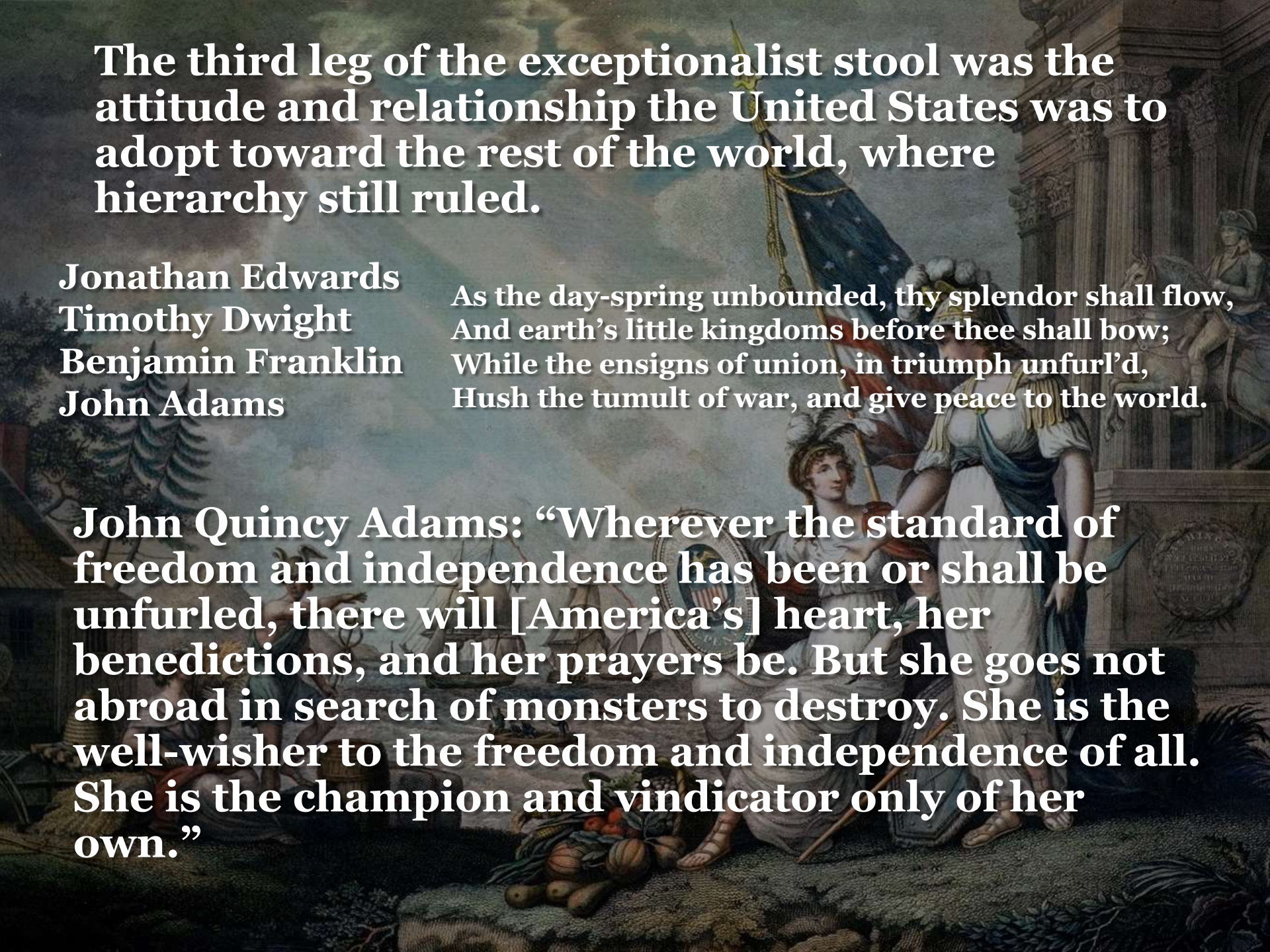


The third leg of the exceptionalist stool was the attitude and relationship the United States was to adopt toward the rest of the world, where hierarchy still ruled.

Jonathan Edwards
Timothy Dwight
Benjamin Franklin
John Adams

As the day-spring unbounded, thy splendor shall flow,
And earth's little kingdoms before thee shall bow;
While the ensigns of union, in triumph unfurl'd,
Hush the tumult of war, and give peace to the world.

John Quincy Adams: “Wherever the standard of freedom and independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will [America’s] heart, her benedictions, and her prayers be. But she goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.”



PRESIDENT PROCLAIMS WAR

EVERY TEUTON SHIP IN PORTS OF U. S. SEIZED

VOLUNTEER CALL ISSUED; ALIENS WARNED

U. S. Customs Officials And Armed
Forbade Landing Of
Three Vessels Seized Here;

Stars And Stripes Raised To
Mastheads; Powder On Board

Germany's vast submarine fleet, interred in United States ports, was seized today by United States armed forces. America's first act of war. Sixty-two vessels, representing the German navy, are being held in the Baltimore harbor by United States officials. Eighty-one officers and men were detained. The Stars and Stripes are now flying over the ships.

The Government code word that the House had passed the "war resolution," flashed from coast to coast before daybreak, set thousands of Government men in action.

In New York alone the ships seized are worth \$51,600,000. The three vessels in the Baltimore waters are worth approximately \$2,000,000.

Coincident with the seizures, it was announced from Washington, that crews taken off the merchantmen will be treated as "enemy aliens," not as prisoners of war.

Extraordinary precautions are being taken all over the country to avoid possible trouble from crews of the ships. Warships have been guarding the vessels since it became certain a declaration of war would be forthcoming. Two destroyers have been constantly on duty in the Hudson river in New York. They moved

President's Proclamation And Call

Washington, April 6.—President Wilson this afternoon issued a proclamation to the American people, declaring that the United States is at war with Germany. The proclamation was read in the White House and the President's call for volunteers to bring the army and navy to the front was heard. The President also issued a call for volunteers to bring the army and navy to the front.

The "volunteer men," said the President, in a statement, "will be accepted for the regular army and the National Guard by volunteering, as at present, until, in the judgment of the President, a resort to selective

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President Signs Resolution And Issues
Proclamation To The People; Orders
Flashed To Fleet And All
Naval Stations.

CALL FOR NAVAL MILITIA IS
MADE BY NIGHT

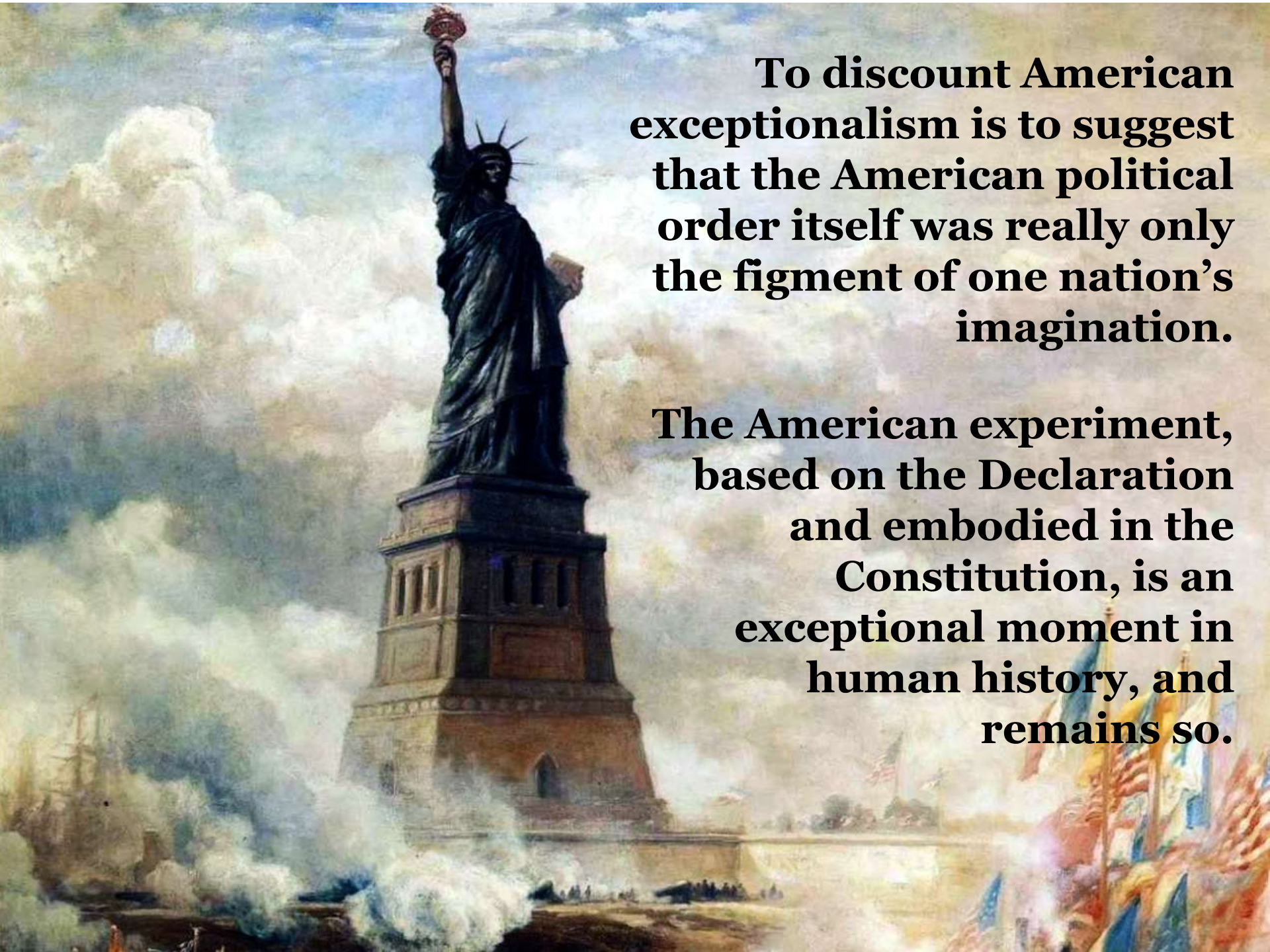
Washington, April 6.—After being in session just two hours and fifteen minutes the Senate adjourned until noon Monday.

Washington, April 6.—The United States is at war with Germany. Formal entrance into the conflict came at 1.13 o'clock today.

At that hour President Wilson attached his signature to the Flood-Martin resolution, declaring that a state of war exists between this nation and the Imperial German Government, and pledging all the vast man and material resources of the country to bringing that war to a successful close. The resolution had been signed at the Capitol by Vice-President Marshall just one hour before.

Five minutes after the President had signed the resolution he addressed a proclamation to the

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- A wide-angle photograph of a large, modern lecture hall. The room features tiered seating with rows of orange and black chairs. In the foreground, there is a dark wooden podium with a laptop and a microphone. The ceiling is high with numerous long, recessed fluorescent light fixtures. Large windows are visible on the left side, and a blackboard is at the far end of the room.
- ◆ We are becoming less reliant on voluntary associations
 - ◆ We are witnessing the rise of identity politics
 - ◆ We are enduring the erosion of economic mobility and opportunity



To discount American exceptionalism is to suggest that the American political order itself was really only the figment of one nation's imagination.

The American experiment, based on the Declaration and embodied in the Constitution, is an exceptional moment in human history, and remains so.