

Donald Trump's phrase "Make America Great Again" is a brilliant political slogan. During the election season, it implied that the democrat President messed things up and that Trump, a republican, was needed to fix the mess. Unfortunately, the slogan has people looking for what is wrong with America. People take for granted much of what makes the U.S. a truly exceptional country. There is a lot that is great about America that remains great regardless of who sits in the Oval Office. These U.S. advantages become apparent when talking to people who were born and raised in other countries.

I have a colleague who grew up in China. He talks about how all of the children in China take a college entrance exam. The results of this exam mostly determine whether a student can get an education and whether the student can have an opportunity to develop his or her talents. In China, there is one main path to success and the path runs through the entrance exam. The exam mostly measures IQ, so people with other talents, such as creativity, are shut out from a path that can lead them to be successful.

India has even more daunting obstacles that prevent youngsters from building skills that can lead to economic success. In India, the caste system plays a huge part in determining the occupation that a person must enter. The smartest person in the world could be born into the wrong caste and this person will never have a chance to develop his or her abilities.

The United States is much different. Access to college is open to a large percentage of the population. If a high school student does not do well on a college entrance exam, he will not get into an elite school, but he will find some university or some community college that will give him a chance.

Because the U.S. does not give up on its youth early, we offer our children a chance for success that a similar youth in China would not have. I know plenty of people who were late bloomers. They did not do particularly well in grammar school or in high school, but sometime during their college or graduate school careers, a fire was lit under them. Because the U.S. does not set up roadblocks, these people found a way to succeed. I also know several people who are extraordinarily creative. These people would not have done well on an IQ based college entrance exam and if the U.S. had a system like China, these people never would have had a chance to get educated and to develop their talents. Further, I know people with exceptional people skills. These people also would not have done well on a Chinese styled college entrance exam. However, they were able to get an education in the U.S. and this education coupled with their talents allowed them to thrive. Finally, I know people who have come from the poorest of backgrounds. These people had a relative starting position similar to those in the lowest castes in India. However, through hard work and grit, they were able to find a path to material success in the U.S.

I find America's great strength is that it does not give up on huge blocks of people to the extent that other countries do. In the U.S., our kids have the opportunity to develop their talents and there is not just one talent, like IQ in China, which provides the only path to economic success. Given the relative success the U.S. has enjoyed in providing opportunities for our youngsters, I believe that more of our political discourse should be centered on how we can open up opportunities for even more of our youngsters. However, in the course of this discussion, we should realize that we are starting from a position of strength relative to the rest of the world, not from a position of weakness.

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