

What I learned from the royal wedding (and why I want a queen)

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[I'm not ashamed to say](#)

that I woke up at 5:15 am on Friday to watch the royal wedding. For anyone interested in plumbing the socio-political imagination of the British this was a must see event.

I was not disappointed. And I came away with a surprising insight. It came to me about the time when the entire Commonwealth burst into "God Save the Queen" during the ceremony. People wept. Flags were waved. The country was one because of a little old woman in a sweet hat.

The British love the queen. They may not love their government. They may loathe David Cameron. But what holds together an impressive diversity of religious, cultural, political and economic persuasions is a hearty, unabashed sentimentalism for the royal family. If you'd like evidence of this see the BBC special on the Queen. It is mind-boggling to see who comes together under the banner of HRH.

Which led me ponder: If America had a royal family maybe we wouldn't need Tocquevillian nonsense. We wouldn't have to be a "city on a hill." Instead, we'd have a queen. In Britain the queen bears the brunt of exceptionalism. There's *something different* about the royals.

They know what they have to live up to and they spend their lives being groomed to promote an image that unites. They hold no political opinions and they make no decisions. But the royal family plays a powerful role in deflecting the pressure from the real decision-makers of the country.

Let me give you an example. When the British discovered that John Prescott, the Deputy Foreign Minister and Robin Cook, Foreign Secretary were both having extra-marital affairs it was a media fuss but, to my

memory, there were no calls for the resignation of either. In fact, then Prime Minister Tony Blair explains in his memoir that the real problem was the way the government manipulated the media unnecessarily; the public was tolerant of sexual misdemeanors. Compare this with Bill Clinton who was actually *impeached* for his affair with Monica Lewinsky because Americans somehow reasoned that being morally upstanding has something to do with being an effective political leader.

I wonder if part of the reason for these very different reactions is that every country needs a royal. And if you don't have one you roll your royalist expectations into the national leader, the form of government or the nation-state itself. Maybe we would be just a little better off if we had a few figureheads upon whom we could cast our unrealistic expectations, fears and loyalties.

For my part, God save the Queen.

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