

HST 203: ONLINE U.S.History Sp19 (Escobar)

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American Exceptionalism
by [Joe Escobar](#) - Saturday, April 13, 2019, 11:54 PM

This thread is for discussions on the American Exceptionalism topic.

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The similarities and differences of American Exceptionalism, and our leaders understanding of it today
by [Hannah Harp](#) - Tuesday, April 16, 2019, 6:23 PM

When first reading about American Exceptionalism I thought of it as you said on the Moodle page, “It’s our nations burden, or responsibility, to bring its democracy and civilization to ‘lesser’ peoples in need of help and guidance”. I believe that this is how the leaders of the 20th century defined the term, and this is why we pursued expansion. Although, this isn’t how the leaders of today would define it. I definitely believe our nations leaders still use exceptionalism, but it seems they have a different understanding of the term. A definition that really stuck out to me was, “When America is first, it owes little to everyone else. It’s a more Trumpian way of saying what other politicians often mean” (How Trump Is Making Us Rethink Exceptionalism, 3rd paragraph). I think in the 20th century American Exceptionalism was greatly based upon the belief that we were the best, and that we needed to act on that by pushing our ways on to others in order to “guide” them. Where as, today it seems to me that it’s still the belief that we are the best, but we aren’t so much trying to push that on to other countries and make them follow. That is the difference between American Exceptionalism in the 20th century vs today.

Of the differing views from the video clips, I found myself to most agree with Charles Murray. He explained that we used to be an exceptional country in the 19th century, but today it is less clear. He backed this up by saying the degree to which the government held a presence over America was much smaller back then, and at the time, no other country even came close to it. I liked this explanation because today the government has an overwhelming control over America, so it’s really a far different ball park than the 20th century was. Murray had a very nice way of explaining that we still have exceptional elements today, but the unique setting is gone, the unique ideology is gone, and the government is no longer limited in any way. Therefore, I think he really added to the conversation that American Exceptionalism just isn’t what it used to be. That being said, we can also see that it isn't defined in the same way, so I think that it's really important that someone addresses how they define the term before deciding if it's still seen today.

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American Exceptionalism has remained the same

by [Clifford Lyon](#) - Tuesday, April 16, 2019, 6:44 PM

American Exceptionalism is an idea which really started taking root during the era of Imperialism covered in chapter 22. Although McKinley, Roosevelt, and Wilson all believed in this idea in different ways, there are certainly still elements of their philosophies alive in America today. McKinley demonstrated in the Philippines that he wanted to help the Filipinos, but he did not believe that they were capable of helping themselves. Our textbook says that “McKinley and his supporters, however, believed that the ‘inferior’ Filipino people lacked the capacity for self-government,” (Murrin Textbook, page 726). Many people today might argue that the U.S. has made similar decisions in Iraq and Afghanistan by coming in and overthrowing existing governments in order to put one in place which better agrees with our goals for the region. The U.S. has made a decision to take over these countries by force, oust the existing government, and put one in place that better aligns with what we believe is right. In the video featuring Speakers on American Exceptionalism, Andrew Bacevich, who used much of his time to speak about the Iraq war, summed this up nicely when he said that many Americans believe that our definition of freedom has a universal application. This has been true since America’s first excursions in the name of the greater good.

Woodrow Wilson sculpted his views on American Exceptionalism from a similar school of thought. Wilson brought religious conviction with him to the White House, as many Presidents have, and he used that religious conviction as reasoning behind Imperialism. Following revolution in Mexico, Wilson “Deemed the Mexicans capable of making democracy work and, in general, showed a concern for morality and justice in foreign affairs—matters to which Roosevelt and Taft had paid scant attention. Wilson wanted U.S. foreign policy to advance democratic ideals and institutions in Mexico,” (Murrin Textbook, page 742). This passage came to mind when I was listening to Senator Ted Cruz on the video for this forum. Cruz reminds his audience of the “promise of America” and the things that people like to believe about this country. He ends on a high note, saying that “American Exceptionalism has made this nation a clarion voice for freedom in the world, a shining city on a hill,” (Speakers of American Exceptionalism, 10:36 Minute mark). I think that the idea of America being a “clarion voice for freedom in the world” is an idea which has led to a lot of foreign policy decisions since 1890. The idea that we have it figured out, our democracy is better than anyone else’s, our religions are better than anyone else’s, and our people are better than anyone else’s, and therefore we must go forth and show the poor people of these other countries how to live correctly. That is American Exceptionalism, right or wrong. It has not always had positive results, but I think it is an ideal that has remained largely the same in our foreign policy throughout American history.

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Re: American Exceptionalism has remained the same

by [Alexandra Selig](#) - Wednesday, April 17, 2019, 10:09 PM

This is very well put. The idea of American Exceptionalism and the need to extend our values for democracy to those of other nations is what makes us the great and power nation in which we are today. There is a reason why so many individuals flock to our borders or request our aid. Although on the flip side of the coin this also makes us look like the bully on the playground who wants it our way or no way at all. America has also been know to come in using force to establish our perception of what is right and what is wrong in places that do not share in our values and way of life. American Exceptionalism is like a double edge sword.

The only aspect that I would have to disagree with is that this has remined the same through out time. My impression is that foreign policy in regards to American Exceptionalism changes with the time and who is at the reins of our great nation. If you look at our current and previous presidents, Obama and Trump, their standing on American Exceptionalism are on opposite ends of the spectrum. One who preferred a softer touch and one who prefers and iron grip. Although the idea remains the way in which it is portrayed internationally and viewed through out the world changes.

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Re: American Exceptionalism has remained the same

by [Seth Mayfield](#) - Saturday, April 20, 2019, 2:41 PM

I don't know if we have become weak. We are within the top 3 for the industrial economy, the largest agricultural economy. Arguments are more of what the world sees in the US. Projected through Trump. America first, being we will do what's best for us over the world. Demanding Mexico pay for a border wall. We had nothing to bargain with to make Mexico even think about help build the wall. Then there's the trade war with China. Even Wilson saw open trade as a mean to keep the piece. As a country we seem split on the matter Barack Obama ([speakers on American Exceptionalism](#), 22 sec) “I believe in American exceptionalism, just like I suspect the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism “.

([speakers on American Exceptionalism](#), Charles Murray, 2:45) "we were exceptional". ([speakers on American Exceptionalism](#), 10:37) Ted Cruz, "American exceptionalism that has made this county is a McCleary voice for freedom".

When you get down into the nitty gritty I feel American exceptionalism is just us saying we're better than you cause "place reason her"; and this is why we have so many different points of view.

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American Exceptionalism: Defined and Presidents' Take on It

by [Kaiser Slocum](#) - Wednesday, April 17, 2019, 2:25 PM

First of all, Obama did have a point about exceptionalism when he said, "I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism." Many countries, including but not limited to Britain and Greece, have a strong sense of exceptionalism mostly because of their patriotism. (Third Paragraph, In Defense of American Exceptionalism_TheAmericanSpectator). Also, all countries are unique is some aspect or another. However, a country's exceptionalism portrays that that country is better. (7:30 into Exceptionalism Speakers Video)

Obviously, not all countries are better than each other, and America appears to still be more economically, politically, and militarily stronger than other nations. This means that people may *think* or *believe* in their country's exceptionalism when compared to other countries it may not be exceptionally good at all; in fact, exceptionally worse. In other words, just because citizens of a country believe in their country's exceptionalism doesn't mean that is true, which is what Americans are starting to figure out. Charles Murray said that exceptionalism is not a matter of opinion but one that is a fact. According to him, Americans in the early years of America, whether they liked what was going on or not, all could agree that American has many exceptional characteristics that set it apart. Although many of the things that made America exceptional such as limited government, civic culture, and a belief in an almighty God have been sliding; it still remains an exceptional country. (2:45 into Exceptionalism Speakers Video)

I also agree with Ted Cruz when he said that America is founded upon our rights that come from God Almighty and that the Constitution's purpose is to serve as chains for the government. (10:00 into Exceptionalism Speakers Video) These beliefs then enabled some of the main causes that made America great like Charles Murray mentioned above. No other country has been founded on these two principles; the majority thinking that humans will naturally give all these rights to their fellow countrymen, something which has been proven wrong time and time again.

As we have read in Chapter 22 of [Liberty, Equality, Power](#) by John Murrin, both Wilson and Roosevelt firmly believed in American exceptionalism and this is evident in the way they spread America's military might and power across the globe; believing that American, as a "superior" or "exceptional" country, must assist and ensure democracy in "smaller" or "weaker" countries on the planet. In other words, Wilson and Roosevelt felt that America should be the world's policeman, speaking softly and carrying a *very* big stick (in the paraphrased words of Theodore Roosevelt). Their belief in exceptionalism and consequent actions on it are much different from the beliefs and actions expressed by the two latest Presidents of America, Barack Obama and Donald Trump. A very interesting article ([How Trump Is Making Us Rethink American Exceptionalism](#) from PoliticoMagazine) expressed how the term "exceptionalism" has been drastically changed by these two Presidents. Obama appeared to believe that American exceptionalism is no more than its patriotism, and Trump has changed the term to mean "America FIRST!" Both of which is a large drift from the original meaning of the term "exceptionalism." Wilson and Roosevelt believed exceptionalism to mean that America was better than other countries, and that America, as an exceptional country, should assist others that are not as exceptional and spread the ideals that made America so great. If Wilson and Roosevelt had put America first or believed that America was not all that exceptional, they would not have put in the time, money, and man power to help countries like Cuba and the Philippines to become self-sufficient.

I believe in America's exceptionalism, and I believe it is true that America has been exceptional and still is, despite the recent deterioration and Obama's belief. However, a truly exceptional country would not put themselves first as Trump apparently believes and like a dictator, anarchist, or communist government would do, but assist other countries to also become great and rise out of whatever is restraining them. A policeman does not go stomping around, swinging his stick and pushing to the front of the line, he corrects injustice; punishing the guilty and assisting the innocent in an effort to bring about peace.

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Re: American Exceptionalism: Defined and Presidents' Take on It

by [Clifford Lyon](#) - Wednesday, April 17, 2019, 6:42 PM

Kaiser,

I really like what you said in your last paragraph about the way in which an exceptional country should behave in relation to the rest of the world. I too still believe in American Exceptionalism by this definition, not that America should be sucking the life out of all other countries in order to get ahead, but rather we should be a role model and assist other countries when they need help. I think that this is what made the "greatest generation" stand out to everyone, sacrificing so much in order to help people across the globe who they would likely never meet. I like to think that a lot of proponents of American Exceptionalism think of it in this regard.

As for the exceptionalism of the nineteenth century, it is clear to me that there were motivations in play that were less honorable. While there was certainly a feeling of America being the "Clarion voice for freedom in the world," as Senator Cruz stated (Speakers of American Exceptionalism, 10:36 mark), there was also an underlying feeling of America searching for something to gain from these countries they were "helping." Chapter 22 of our text tells us that "Eager to assist in the drive for overseas expansion was a group of politicians, intellectuals, and military strategists who viewed such expansion as essential to the pursuit of world power," (Murrin Textbook, page 719). While this is an understandable position for a young country which is just experiencing prosperity to take, it is hard to argue that you are simply trying to do the right thing for your neighbor when you approaching the problem with ulterior motives.

I think this is where much of the debate on foreign policy still remains today. Often there is one group of people saying that they simply want to help another, less fortunate country, while another group of people cry foul and find hidden motives that must be the real reason for our wanting to help. I think the truth is often somewhere in the middle, but this is the basis of the debate. I think that a lot of the belief in American Exceptionalism as America was just spreading its wings into the realm of foreign policy was based on the idea of superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race. This is an idea that is still attributed to America today, although it isn't narrowed down to one race anymore. I think that author Evan Sayet exemplified this in the video when he said that "If America isn't exceptional, then how is somebody like Barack Obama to explain America's success? Our success is unjust if we're nothing special. And given that we are the most successful nation in all of human history, Barack Obama and the modern liberal has no choice...but to believe that we are the greatest injustice in human history," (Speakers of American Exceptionalism, 1:52 minute mark).

A comment like this might not exactly be nativism but I think it is pretty close. It's rooted in the belief that we are better than the rest of the world and our record has proven that. Like a bumper sticker that reads "Back to back world war champions," this mindset leads us to believe that we have been victorious, and therefore we have always been correct in our motivations. I believe that America has seen a great deal of success, and I am proud of that, but I also realize that we have sometimes seen that success at the expense of others who were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time; or worse, they were the wrong race at the wrong time. I admit that my own views on this issue have changed over time. I used to believe that America always did the right thing by other countries because that is who we are, but the more history I study the more I find that simply isn't always true. Does that mean that America is not exceptional? No. It simply means that we are an exceptional country who sometimes behaves selfishly. When we get back to a policy of helping weaker nations because it is the right thing to do, we will find American Exceptionalism as it should be once again.

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American Exceptionalism in Foreign Policy

by [Kaiser Slocum](#) - Thursday, April 18, 2019, 11:25 AM

Clifford

Thanks for your input. I enjoyed reading what you said.

Unfortunately, as imperfect human beings, most of what we do from day to day is the result of a selfish or prideful motivation. In general terms, most people are not willing to help others if there is not anything in it for themselves. This being said, although America tries to give the allusion that they are trying to be charitable, the majority of the time(or at least the term of the 19th century) they were only willing to "help" so that they could get a military base, protect their industries, expand the U.S. borders, etc. The result, although the motivation and some of the process was very bad, was freedom and a higher standard of living for those countries. This selfish theory can be readily seen throughout life. Who would want to pay extra taxes for parks they never use, or support a President that is not doing anything they want?

One of America’s characteristics over its lifetime is that it is very slow to make a big change. For instance, it took a lot of bothering by other countries to bring America into World War One and Two. America did not just go out and take the Philippines which is what some of the European powers would do. Instead, they waited for an opportunity before they decided on a course of action. This proves that unless the people and government leaders have a really good reason to declare war (such as Pearl Harbor or the sinking of an important ship) or pursue imperialism in the Pacific, they often times will do nothing because there is not anything to gain from changing.

On the positive side, according to our Student Survey, I thought it was interesting how the majority of people thought that the idea that all human beings have a God-given right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is what makes America great. This also proves the point that Americans, although we have thought of many other people groups as “inferior” and “uncivilized” (Page 726 of Liberty, Equality, Power by John Murrin) still believe that humans no matter where they are have a right to life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and that that will make a country great.

Also from the articles, it would appear Trump is against exceptionalism. He said, “American exceptionalism. I don’t think it’s a very nice term. I think you’re insulting the world.” (Page 2 from How Trump Is Making Us Rethink American Exceptionalism from Politico Magazine) In all honesty exceptionalism does seem to be really prideful and puts down other countries’ accomplishments. So is exceptionalism good? After all no country is perfect. I feel like Americans should not focus on our exceptionalism or “how much better are we than other countries?” but how can we improve our own country and those around us. We should strive to become as exceptional as possible under the basic, Christian principles we are founded on and let others countries make their own judgements as to if we are exceptional.

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Re: American Exceptionalism in Foreign Policy
by [Seth Mayfield](#) - Thursday, April 18, 2019, 5:11 PM

I feel that we are all missing a little part of what American exceptionalism is and that is us the people. Anyone can make an argument for or against American exceptionalism. A 100 years ago the U.S. showed its mite to the world with its (textbook, pg 740) ‘Great White Fleet’ (America begins a new century, 4:26) ‘Along with the largest industrial economy, largest agricultural economy, highest per capita income, and the highest level of education’ in the world. All of this made the American exceptionalism. leading to other nations copying us; example Japan copied out large navy approach to straight, WW2.

([List of Countries by GDP](#) Sector Compositions, web-based states)

The US is no longer the largest industrial economy or the largest agricultural economy, that goes to China. We are number 2 for industrial and 3 for agriculture. ([business insider](#), web article) shows the per capita income of today. ‘U.S is ranked 13th with a per capita of \$57,293’. While ‘Qatar is number 1 with a per capita of \$129,726’. On the education front ([cnbc most-educated-countries in the world](#), web article) Canada is ranked number one when it comes to the number of people who have completed college. While the U.S. is in the sixth position behind The United Kingdom.

We can't say we’re an exception when we don't lead the world in anything besides the number of integrated people. We need to fix a few or all of these to have American exceptionalism once again. To be a nation that others look to better their own nations.

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Does American Exceptionalism still exist?
by [Kaiser Slocum](#) - Friday, April 19, 2019, 11:24 AM

Seth Thank you for your input, I had not considered all of that.

I agree that one can make an argument for and against American exceptionalism, but it still remains that America was and is exceptional. First, America may not be number 1 or 2 in the world standings for agriculture or industry, but it consistently ranks a high average in pretty much any category you can think of. It ranks #3 in Industrial output (www.worldatlas.com/articles/10-countries-with-the-highest-industrial-outputs-in-the-world) and #2 in agricultural output (<http://www.mediamaxnetwork.co.ke/261583/261583/>). China is the only country who ranks about the U.S. in these two categories. However, China's per capita GDP is #108 in the world compared to the U.S. #19. (www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2004rank) On average, U.S. has been able to maintain a high ranking in all of the rankings including #1 in military! (www.military.com/undertheradar/2017/08/top-10-militaries-world-2017). This would be impressive for any country to do but the fact that the U.S. was able to rise to this kind of power this quickly is unmatched. England is four times as old as the U.S. (www.quora.com/How-old-is-England) and China is twelve times as old as the U.S. (www.chinahighlights.com/travelguide/culture/china-history) The fact that the U.S. was able to comparatively match these countries, having so much less time to expand its power and build itself is impressive. America has to be exceptional, there is no other explanation.

As our current leaders change or discard the concept of exceptionalism, our ability to be an assistant to weaker countries is disabled. Although we may not be as exceptional in the way we were a hundred years ago, we now live in a country that is arguably a better place to live, I.e. there is no or little segregation and no one is getting killed or treated incorrectly for their race. I believe that the fact that Americans were largely able to put away their prejudices and inequalities is truly an exceptional accomplishment. Hopefully, Americans will realize the only way to truly be exceptional is to put others first, not ourselves.

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Re: American Exceptionalism: Defined and Presidents' Take on It
by [Daniela Rosales Name](#) - Sunday, April 21, 2019, 9:47 PM

Interesting take on American exceptionalism. I'm bringing up some questions for the sake of adding nuance to this argument. I don't personally believe it is all black and white; America can be a great country *and* have many flaws that need to be fixed.

In regards to your statement about President Obama's comments where you say that while other countries may "*think or believe* in their country's exceptionalism when compared to other countries it may not be exceptionally good at all; in fact, exceptionally worse." I wonder what standards are we using to measure what is exceptional. I think the issue, a lot of the times — is that we use an Americanized view of other countries. What does America consider great, and are other countries meeting this? I don't think we stop to think what does that each country think makes them exceptional. It may be the same, it may be different but once we start to adjust our way of thinking a lot more possibilities open up when asking who is exceptional. Also, how does religion play into this? Is something wrong with another country because it is related with another religion? For example, the hijab; most muslim women choose to wear it but "western" countries continue to say it is forced on women.

If we start thinking about this, then when does it become okay to impose on another country that we view to be weaker? Is it ever okay? I'm not sure, but I think it is important to look at it from a non-American perspective.

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Re: American Exceptionalism
by [Shaylee Welsh](#) - Wednesday, April 17, 2019, 2:49 PM

I believe that every president has the idea of American Exceptionalism or they would not even run for presidency in the first place. There are similarities with today's leaders from past centuries just as there are difference as the troubles and needs of America changes. Our nation's leaders use American Exceptionalism today but overall greed sometimes takes over in the process. The idea of American Exceptionalism has changed overtime just as Ted Cruz said. I have to agree with Ted Cruz the most out of all the speakers because of his perception. His perception is that our rights come from God and the reason for the constitution is to control the chains of government. He is right that we fear exceptionalism is slipping from Americans. However, as times change so does exceptionalism

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Sourced from the text back. Mainly concerning American Exceptionalism 100 years ago to what it is today



by [Seth Mayfield](#) - Wednesday, April 17, 2019, 2:59 PM

Part 1 / Forum 1

HST 203: ONLINE U.S. History Sp19

Seth Mayfield

American exceptionalism then and now

American exceptionalism is still a common factor to this day but has changed along with the American ideas and interests as a society. Some parts have been removed while some are as prevalent as ever.

(Mahan called for the construction of a U.S. Navy with enough ships and firepower to make its presence felt across the world.)

Roosevelt believed in a strong navy to project U.S. strength and willingness to protect its interests. He even went so far as to have a world tour of our naval fleet, as to not come off as a weak nation. The U.S. Navy is the largest in the world with eight aircraft carriers. 100 years on and we still believe in a strong navy that can project the American exceptionalism. Even if we're not meaning to do so.

The Panama canal was built to allow U.S. goods a safer and faster means of travel. Before the canal, your options were either train or down and around South Africa. Both options took time and were dangerous. The canal showcased the U.S. ability to negotiate for what had already been built, from a French company that had gone bust. The U.S. paid 40 million instead of 109 million asking prices. Then turn around and use the technology and knowledge of the U.S. to complete the canal in 10 years. The Panama canal then helped to cement our large navy. Allowing us to move between oceans with ease.

(The Colombian legislature, however, rejected the proposed payment as insufficient and sent a new ambassador to the United States with instructions to ask for better terms.) textbook pg 736

A six-mile strip was to be put in place to finish the Panama Canal. To compensate for this the U.S. was going to pay Colombia 10 million up front and \$250,000 a year in rent. Colombia turned down the deal, so the U.S. helped instigate a revolution. Before the new government can think over the deal. The U.S. and a self-appointed representative of Colombia agree to the original terms. This showcased the U.S. unwillingness to barter with what Roosevelt perceived to be lesser countries and races. Along with a willingness to topple governments that went against U.S. interests.

(Woodrow Wilson's was troubled by a foreign policy that ignored a less powerful nation's right to determine its own future.) textbook 742

Was a bit different from Roosevelt he didn't want to instigate a revolution? Instead, he wanted to wait for an outcome. Believing that all nations deserve a say Just like we did with our revolution. Keep in mind though he wanted it to be a democracy and not to interfere with the U.S. and its interests.

(When political turmoil threatened investments that American companies had made in the region, the United States simply sent in its troops.) textbook 741

Nicaraguan dictator José Santos Zelaya was talking to European Nations about building a second Panama canal. This second canal would cause a loss of revenue for the .U.S companies. Santos was removed from power and Adolfo Diaz was in.

What I am trying to say is that 100 years ago the U.S. was unwilling to cooperate with nations that went against their interests. Being that you were not Anglo-Saxon. Back then the U.S forced this American exceptionalism upon the world to see. Mainly over power, greed, and race. Today American exceptionalism has nothing to do with race. Instead of forcing it onto people, we mainly project it. Via movies, Tv, industry, military NATO or UN, and Technology.

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American Exceptionalism today vs turn of the 20th century

by [Kathy Holmes](#) - Wednesday, April 17, 2019, 6:25 PM

In the hundred-year difference, I think the view of American Exceptionalism has changed drastically not only the American citizens' view but the leaders view as well. In this week's video (speakers on American Exceptionalism) Charles Murray states "everybody in the world who came here were unanimous in saying they might like it, they might not like it but there were a variety of exceptional characteristics that they all agreed that were exceptional" (3:02) Whereas earlier in the video Evan Sayet talks about how Obama believes in American exceptionalism because he lives here not because he truly believes we are exceptional. (1:28) What Charles Murray states is backed by the text (pg 734 paragraph 2) "...He believed that Americans were racially superior people destined for supremacy in economic and political affairs. He did not assume however that international supremacy would automatically accrue to the united states. A nation, like an individual, had to strive for greatness..." talking about Vice President Roosevelt's views during the McKinley administration. A majority of the similarities between the leaders in the late 1800s- early 1900s and today's leaders lie in the passion of the topic. Just as Roosevelt, McKinley, and Wilson were supporters of the American Exceptionalism ideology, recent presidents have had a similar passion and directness in making it clear their beliefs about our exceptional qualities as a nation. Although the passion between the two centuries is similar the backing is not. Many Americans believe that America is exceptional because that's what we have been told our whole lives. Growing up in a very conservative household I was told "we are the greatest nation on this planet" more times than I can count but there wasn't any solid evidence to back it up. Evan Sayet made a great point and I agree that most Americans believe America is exceptional because we live here and we have been told every step of the way that we are exceptional. I think our leaders do use exceptionalism but in a different way than leaders did back at the turn of the 20th century. Trump has stated that he doesn't believe in American Exceptionalism the way we talk about it. In

The Trump Files: Donald doesn't believ...

Trump goes into more detail about his views and states how he would like to make us exceptional but that as of now we are not. All in all, I do believe that our views on exceptionalism have changed greatly.

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Re: American Exceptionalism today vs turn of the 20th century

by [Clifford Lyon](#) - Wednesday, April 17, 2019, 7:30 PM

I think there certainly is an element of America believing in its own exceptionalism because that is what we have always been told. I also believe, however, that this has been the same since the founding of this country. In order to become an independent nation, the Colonists had to defeat the greatest military power on earth. If an achievement like that does not lead you to believe in your own exceptionalism, what will? In 1898, America had very little experience in foreign policy or imperialism beyond the War for Independence. Since that time we had been focused on building and expanding our nation on this continent, and holding together the ground which was already "ours." I think that the fact that Americans had defeated the British and built a successful nation led many to believe that we were, in fact, exceptional. At the time a lot of this belief was based in racism. The belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority ran so deep that when the American forces arrived in Cuba and discovered that Cubans were not "fully nine-tenths white" as the textbook points out, it "came as a shock to U.S. forces," (Murrin textbook, page 723-724). Many of these men had joined the fight on the premise of helping these "almost white" people defeat an enemy who was "depicted as dark-complexioned-'dark, cruel eyes, dark swaggering men'...-and as possessing characteristics of their 'dark race': barbarism, cruelty, and indolence," (Murrin textbook, page 724). The Civil War had been fought, African Americans had been set free, and yet the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race had prevailed.

Today it is less about race and more about the fact that we are Americans, and therefore we are right. Many Americans still believe that we are exceptional- I believe that we are- and maybe part of that is because we have grown up being told this. My point is that Americans have always been told that we are exceptional. We have found different reasons to justify that exceptionalism, but there has always been an element of exceptionalism in our national pride. This is why I disagree with President Obama's comments from the video. While there are certainly elements of every nation that the citizens appreciate or take pride in, I think that American Exceptionalism goes beyond that. I think that Americans, regardless of which end of the political spectrum they favor, believe that we are still the greatest country on earth. No one is saying that we are perfect, but I have not heard anyone point out a country which they would rather live in either. No country is perfect, but the idea that all countries are equal is ludicrous. When we look at the political system in place in this country, the efforts which we have (eventually) made for human rights, and our efforts to be a world leader in so many categories, I don't see an argument against American Exceptionalism. Again, I admit that we have not always been right, and we have not always made the moral decision, but I think that America stands above many other nations of the world in our efforts to do the right thing. It has just taken us longer than we like to admit to realize what the right thing is in some instances. I don't mean to downplay the plight of those groups who have been oppressed by Americans, I mean to highlight the fact that we have been moving as a nation in an upward trend morally. We no longer see race or sex as the defining factor in one's decision-making capabilities, and we are interested in spreading freedom (and therefore, democracy) throughout the globe. Whether or not democracy is the right option throughout the globe is another issue, but I think we are doing what we believe is right. Only time will tell if American Exceptionalism will remain a real factor in world politics or a thing of the past.

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Re: American Exceptionalism today vs turn of the 20th century

by [Kathy Holmes](#) - Thursday, April 18, 2019, 10:57 PM

Although I absolutely agree that there has always been an element of exceptionalism in our pride, I don't think that this country is as exceptional as it once was.

America simply is not as advanced or as exceptional in some areas as other countries. We are 125th in literacy (<https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/the-highest-literacy-rates-in-the-world.html>) 12th in obesity (<https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/29-most-obese-countries-in-the-world.html>) and we aren't even number one in economic freedom... (<https://www.heritage.org/index/country/unitedstates>) I have a truly hard time believing that America is as exceptional as we would all like to believe.

I had never thought about one of the first points you made in the way that you phrased it "In order to become an independent nation, the Colonists had to defeat the greatest military power on earth. If an achievement like that does not lead you to believe in your own exceptionalism, what will?" Although I think this is beautifully put, there comes a time where we have to find new things to be exceptionally proud of and it sure isn't our gender equality or LGBT+ rights just to scrape the surface. Breaking away from another nation is no small task I absolutely understand that, but when do we start changing our country in such a way that makes us proud, and shows other countries that we are the best?

I know that there was a time when America was exceptional and I believe that America can, and hopefully will become exceptional again, but we have a long way to go before that happens.

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Re: American Exceptionalism today vs turn of the 20th century

by [Clifford Lyon](#) - Friday, April 19, 2019, 5:35 AM

I would agree with you that America needs to find new things to be exceptionally proud of. I think this is demonstrative of the way in which the idea of American Exceptionalism has continued to evolve throughout time. President Trump’s comments in the Politico article in this week’s forum materials is a good example of this. The President of the United States is saying that he does not care for the term “American Exceptionalism” because he doesn’t “think that it’s a very nice term,” (Politico article, third paragraph). I would argue that many Americans like the term for this very reason, because it puts America in a higher social class on the world stage than other “less-exceptional” or “unexceptional” countries. The President has decided that “America First” is a better term, although in many ways the two could be interchangeable.

The question remains then, as you mentioned, what is it about America that makes us so exceptional, if only in our own view? I am glad that you brought some statistics into the conversation to show some areas in which America has some work to do. I think this is an important part of the conversation. If America has fallen behind in all these categories, then why do people still believe that we are exceptional? The Politico article had an interesting take on the history of American Exceptionalism as an idea. It stated that “[American Exceptionalism] conveyed the idea that the United

States was immune from social, political and economic forces that governed other countries—specifically, that it was invulnerable to communism and fascism, and to violent political convulsions of the sort that jolted Europe throughout the long 19th and 20th centuries. It also implied that Americans bore a providential obligation to be exemplars of virtue in a sinful world,” (Politico article, fourth paragraph).

We have seen from the statistics which you provided, that America has fallen behind other countries in these three main categories. The idea that America is invulnerable to communism or fascism would be hotly argued by many people who would say that we are dangerously close to either one of these depending on their political views. So, what do we still have in America that makes us exceptional? We still have a strong military, a standing in the world which leads other countries to seek our help, and, most importantly, we still have our democracy which supports the peaceful transition of power no matter how heated the political debates get. Are these things grounds to say that America is truly exceptional? I think they are important building blocks if nothing else. Our strong military ensures that we are not bullied by other countries, and that we can reach out and help other countries in need when the time comes (which is a simplification of a much more complex issue). This standing in the world has allowed us to cultivate relationships with allies that further protect our interests in the world. And our political system of checks and balances has ensured that even when we don’t like what is happening in our country, we know that we will have an opportunity to change the players at the next election.

I have no doubt that America has areas in which we are less-exceptional and we need to work on those. The thing that gives me comfort is knowing that we have a system which allows us to continue making changes, a standing in the world that ensures that we are not alone in the world, and a military that will protect our nation and its interests as we continue finding our way.

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Re: American Exceptionalism

by [Quinn Hodges](#) - Wednesday, April 17, 2019, 7:45 PM

I believe that American Exceptionalism is at a all time low since the turn of the century. At the turn of the century, Presidents like McKinley, Roosevelt and Wilson believed in American Exceptionalism (Chapter 22) In week 1-2 videos there was a video that depicted America as careful and full of life during the turn of the century, which made it look like the American people also believes in American Exceptionalism.

Recently, it seems that people are non-committal about stating whether they do or don't believe in exceptionalism of America. When President Obama was asked if he believes in american exceptionalism. He states that he does believe in american exceptionalism, just like the brits, believe in British Exceptionalism, or the Greek believe in Greek

Exceptionalism (00:20 Exceptionalism speaks)

Even more recent article in the Washington Post about the decline in American Exceptionalism in the democratic party since President trump was elected. "The percentage of Democrats saying they are proud is the lowest Gallup has measured to date, falling below the previous low of 74 percent recorded in January 2007," (2nd paragraph Washington post article).

I think the 5 speakers are saying that once there was an ideal of american exceptionalism. But today depending on the person there are things that people don't like and things that people do like about American.

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Re: American Exceptionalism
by [Shaylee Welsh](#) - Saturday, April 20, 2019, 7:48 PM

I agree with you that American Exceptionalism is at an all time low. I would also have to say it depends on which part of the country you live in also has an affect on exceptionalism. I have lived in places where cost of living was lower and it was easier to live on what you made and that seemed to give people a sense of pride and revived the american dream a bit.

I have to also agree with you that every country will have their own exceptionalism. Perhaps the opposing party will always feel less exceptionalism when their different political party is in office. It really depends on the person, and their political views what one says about it.

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Re: American Exceptionalism
by [Breanna Lindsey](#) - Sunday, April 21, 2019, 10:00 PM

I am unfortunately going to have to agree with you that out nations exceptionalism is at an all time. I really do believe that we are so great and America truly is one of the greatest and most fortunate nations in the world. But many others would not say the same. I am currently reading the same article as well; where the Gallup states that only 47% of Americans are extremely proud. This is an all time low for our nation. In 2003 America had its highest peak at 70%, and since 2003 the numbers have been on a steady decline. Although 41% of Americans do say they are ver proud or moderately proud. I think when our leaders are not expressing a since or pride or American exceptionalim than the citizens are also not going to be proud of their country. If Americans experience a moment where their nation is united the numbers will increase. "After the 9/11 terror attacks caused the public to [rally around the nation and its leaders](#), the percentage expressing extreme pride in the country increased to 65%, and went up further to 70% less than two years later." Presidents Roosevelt and Wilson were extremely proud of our country and they would do anything to protect this nation. What's it going to take for our leaders to be proud of our nation again? That is what our nation needs for our leaders to take action and be proud.

Gallup, Inc. "In U.S., Record-Low 47% Extremely Proud to Be Americans." *Gallup.com*, 2 July 2018, news.gallup.com/poll/236420/record-low-extremely-proud-americans.aspx.

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Re: American Exceptionalism-Then and Now
by [Alexandra Selig](#) - Wednesday, April 17, 2019, 7:46 PM

In reading chapter 22 of Liberty of Equality and Power, A History of the American People by Murrin, Johnson, McPherson, Fahs, Gestle, E. Rosenberg and N. Rosenberg we are given a deep look into the establishment of exceptionalism, or as it was then referred to, imperialism. "Under President William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt, the United States pursued these initiatives and established a small but strategically important empire." (pg. 742) It was their effort in expanding the American interests and dream abroad that led to a change in the international standing of the United States that continues to this day. When comparing yesterday's leaders to the leaders of today you can see similarities and differences. Depending on the leader in question there is a significant difference in the values and standings regarding where the United States should and should not stand in regard to

Exceptionalism. In the American Spector article, written by Emmett Tyrell, President Barack Obama is quoted saying " I believe in American exceptionalism just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism" I agree with the interpretation that this is essentially saying there is nothing exceptional in American Exceptionalism as the name should imply. This one statement shows this significant difference in the beliefs of President McKinley/President Roosevelt and President Obama. A leader who is trying to solidify their foot hold as a strong imperial power does not compare apples to oranges. The United States deserves the prestige that we have earned over the 100's of years since our founding fathers wrote the Declaration of Independence. We have grown ourselves to be and international power that deserves respect and acknowledgment for our accomplishment. In looking at our current commander and chief President Trump, he not only rejects American Exceptionalism but looks to change the thinking around Exceptionalism all together. In the Politico Article, How Trump is Making us Rethink American Exceptionalism, Daniel Downey, Jr. writes in paragraph three " Trump has replaced it, at least temporarily, with an angrier tag line that conveys the same sense of national power and entitlement-America First, itself a term ripped from history". Every new president brings with them their own ideals and goals that they wish to achieve in the hopes of improving either foreign or domestic relations. Some of these align with the original intent of Exceptionalism while some fall more into a socialism or libertarianism political stance.

In looking between the polls taken by the class and the 2017 What makes America Great poll it is interesting to see how the majority of the class chose the idea that all human beings have a God-given right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness while the poll takers from 2017 seemed to share in this view as the majority of respondents chose the opportunity to become who you want to be and the constitution. It is my opinion that the majority of Americans have the same basic goals it is our way of fulfilling those goals that creates such a vast difference and draws such a deep line in the sand.

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Comparing Survery's: A Common Ground
by [Hannah Harp](#) - Wednesday, April 17, 2019, 8:21 PM

After viewing the barna.com survey, I looked at the top two most popular choices and decided to do some further analyzation. The results showed that among the 1,000 people from the poll, the opportunity to become who you want to be, and the constitution were the top two choices for what makes America great. Where as, after looking at the survey from our class I found that the idea that all human beings have a god given right to life liberty and the pursuit of happiness was overwhelmingly favorable. The ethic of self government and personal responsibility came in second place. When comparing the two the top choices among both results, it seems to me that the common ground is the idea of humans having the freedom to do as they wish, and independently achieve whatever goals they may have- to a certain extent. This didn't surprise me, because my votes fell in the same categories. I think that the idea that we can work towards our own goals and, for the most part, have the freedom to be whoever we want to be is appealing to anyone. Often times, isn't that why people from around the world want to move here? America has been called time and time again, "the land of the free", and that's why it is so appealing. Therefore, I can definitely agree with the results, those characteristics are certainly contributing factors in the favor that America is a great country, which was also where the majority of votes fell.

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Trumps take on American Exceptionalism vs the articles
by [Hannah Harp](#) - Thursday, April 18, 2019, 8:30 PM

American Exceptionalism is quite the topic of controversy, but I find President Trump's "rejection" of the term to be even more so. As history follows, we are shown that all presidents agree in American Exceptionalism, or at least say that they do. I view the term to be something that conservatives, or the right wing, would stand behind without a doubt. "Conservatives see America as exceptional because of our shared belief in the dignity and creativity of the individual" (Spectator.org article, fifth paragraph). Not only is Trump the president, but he's also a strong member of the right wing, and I think that is why his view on the concept was such a shock to everyone. It was even a shock to me. I think there is this stereotype about Trump that he is extremely selfish, believes that we are 100% the greatest country in the world, and has no problem insulting the rest of the world. Then in his interview he proceeded to say that he doesn't like the term, because it IS so insulting to the rest of the world. He went on to also say that we aren't any more outstanding than any other one nation. This all seemed pretty odd to me, being that it totally went against the claims in the articles, and the views of presidents before him. Although, Trump doesn't totally seem to be opposed to the idea. He continued on to say he would like to make America exceptional again. I think this brings us right back to the root of the topic, and how every person seems to have a slightly different view on what

American Exceptionalism is. I'd be interested in hearing each president's exact definition on the term, and I think it could shed some light on the different views. For example, does Trump not agree with the definition from the spectator.org article that it is the, "shared belief in the dignity and creativity of the individual"?

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Re: Trumps take on American Exceptionalism vs the articles
by [Alexandra Selig](#) - Thursday, April 18, 2019, 9:47 PM

This is a very interesting take on this article. I can agree that it would be very interesting to see how each of the presidents interpret the term "Exceptionalism". In another article from this weeks resources Trump is quoted saying that he does not agree with the term Exceptionalism and would rather use America First. My take on this again is that President Trump may not view the current state of our nation as the Exceptional place it once was but is looking to put America First. We as a nation have become weak in they eyes of the rest of the world over the past decade and the current POTUS has put a significant amount of effort into rebuilding that tarnished image, putting our great nation first. Although his tact in his interpersonal communication skills can be seen as lacking, his tenure as President has commanded a sense of respect from other nations that has been lacking in the past.

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American Exceptionalism vs. Imperialism
by [Jamie Atkins](#) - Friday, April 19, 2019, 2:16 AM

It seems to me, the farther people are to the left of the spectrum, the more they question the consequences of exceptionalist thinking. Those on the left shy away from language that can be inflammatory, sometimes excessively. I have to disagree with Evan Sayet's opinion on President Obama's statement. I don't think he meant he didn't believe in American exceptionalism, I think he meant that he didn't believe in imperialism or nationalism. The belief and pride in the ideals of our government don't equate to superiority. Charles Murray is with whom I most agree with. The Founding Fathers of our country had the best ideas in history regarding government. Is it our right to impose it upon others? I don't think so. The ideals of freedom: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are contradictory to imperialism. Too many times in history American exceptionalism has been a mask over the face of imperialism and has been the justification for un-American behavior. The treatment of the people of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, Cuba, Guam, and Columbia are all examples of this (Murrin textbook, Chap 22).

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Re: American Exceptionalism and US actions
by [Seth Mayfield](#) - Friday, April 19, 2019, 11:18 AM

I have a different train of thought on what Barack Obama meant with ([speakers on American Exceptionalism](#), 22 sec) "I believe in American exceptionalism, just like I suspect the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism ". All countries at some point have been exceptional. Great Britain ([quora.com](#), article) at one point control 24% of the world's population and it's land mass. They influenced the world with English and still influence countries today. Canada, new Zealand, and Australia to name a few. This can be seen as exceptional. Greece had states that worked independently from one another with different laws and idea but came together during the war. The United States use states in a similar manner. Along with use coming together during wartime, unless you come from the country were fighting. Nevertheless, this can be seen as exceptional. ([speakers on American Exceptionalism](#), Charles Murray, 3:16) "It's not etched in stone that we always have to be that way". At one point or another, all countries have been exceptional; leaving an influence of the world. I feel that thought American exceptionalism is used to gloss over our country's wrongdoings. Slavery, lynch mobs, mass genocide of Natives Americans, theft of land, wrongful imprisonment, Segregation, and blockade of countries, leading to economic turmoil. Is this American exceptionalism?

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Why America is not Exceptional
by [Maddy Singer](#) - Friday, April 19, 2019, 5:40 PM

American exceptionalism is the idea that the United States is not only different but better. It is believed that the US is unique in its origins and has more liberty and freedom than any other nation in the history of the world. These claims are false. Economic freedom versus other countries is ranked 12th. Since 1979 only 2% of women have been a part of Congress. Freedom of the press is ranked 49th. As well as the Pearson role of education is ranked 14th. The United States is known for being a wealthy first world country, when in fact the wealth inequality in the US is the fourth most unequal. The original settlers were all in agreement that they wanted to create a system that made personal freedom their top priority. Yes, they did pursue individual freedom but they pursued money more. The constitution that was created and prioritized order over liberty. This is why I believe that the United States is not exceptional.

Source:” American Exceptionalism- explained and evaluated” (video)

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Why America can be Exceptional
by [Kaiser Slocum](#) - Friday, April 19, 2019, 6:54 PM

Maddy

Thanks for your input!

Let’s say that Joe Escobar’s online History 203 class became so incredibly popular and got so much publicity that 195 students signed up for it Fall Term of 2019. Let’s also say that the class could be that large. Now let’s say that one of the students did very well in the class and got 18th out of all 195 students. I would say that is pretty exceptional, wouldn’t you? I mean, to do better than 177 students in a class is a very accomplished feat. Now let’s transition this hypothetical case to real life. There are currently 195 countries and America was rated 18th in economic freedom in 2018. (From wikipedia article at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_economic_freedom) Sure, America is not the best, but it certainly is doing a whole lot better than the majority of other countries.

Unfortunately, and like you mentioned; America still has many inequalities and some discrimination, most of which people don’t overtly know they are participating in. However, the average person in the U.S. is placed 19th in the world per capita income. (From www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2004rank). Also, like you said, most people in America would rather gain stuff for themselves than stuff(including freedom and health) for others. However, considering how far we came from the 19th century to now, is a pretty phenomenal improvement!

The belief in exceptionalism gave Presidents such as Wilson and Roosevelt the desire to assist weaker countries in becoming better. This is what Americans need to focus on. Not how much “better” we are, but how much more we can help others(including fellow Americans) in need. The motives behind exceptionalism are not always very good, but the actions that people will do when they believe in it are quite beneficial.

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Re: Why America is not Exceptional & Why America can be Exceptional
by [Jamie Atkins](#) - Saturday, April 20, 2019, 11:22 AM

Keiser & Maddy

I want to point out how both of your points of view expound upon an important idea in our text:

"We can assess the dramatic turn in U.S. foreign policy after 1898 either in relation to the foreign policies of rival world powers or against America’s own democratic ideals,"(Murrin text Ch 22 Conclusion p.743)

We can believe that in comparison to some (or the majority) that America is exceptional, but I believe that is less motivating than holding America to a higher standard. This standard was laid out in The Declaration of Independence:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of happiness.”

Kieser, I agree with your last paragraph, except with you lumping Wilson and Roosevelt together in "the desire to assist weaker countries in becoming better", In our text alone there are many examples of how different the motivations of Roosevelt and Wilson were.

Roosevelt: "He believed that Americans were a racially superior people destined for supremacy in economic and political affairs."-Murrin text p. 734 "Roosevelt had little patience with the claims to sovereignty of small countries or the human rights of weak peoples. In his eyes, the peoples of Latin America, Asia (with the exception of Japan), and Africa were racially inferior and thus incapable of self-government or industrial progress."-Murrin text p 735

Wilson: "Wilson’s relationship with Mexico in the wake of its revolution, however, reveals that he was troubled by a foreign policy that ignored a less powerful nation’s right to determine its own future. He deemed the Mexicans capable of making democracy work and, in general, showed a concern for morality and justice in foreign affairs—matters to which Roosevelt and Taft had paid scant attention"-Murrin text p 742 "Wilson was hopeful that America could make this struggle “a war to end all wars” and use it as an occasion to strengthen liberty and democracy in countries where these principles were weak."-Murrin text p.752

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Roosevelt and Wilson with their Foreign Policies
by [Kaiser Slocum](#) - Saturday, April 20, 2019, 7:02 PM

Jamie

Thanks for keeping me straight about Wilson and Roosevelt. (By the way my name is spelled “Kaiser” like the title of the German emperor we are reading about in chapter 23, but you can just call me Kai if you want)

I did not mean to lump Wilson and Roosevelt together. You are right, they were very different and had many ideas on how to run America, much like Obama and Trump. Unlike Obama and Trump though, they both believed in Exceptionalism; even though they had different ways to get about doing this. Wilson was a peacemaker. Any chance he got, he wanted to make peace. At the end of World War 1, he was even willing to concede most of his 14 points in order to keep alive the League of Nations.(51:40 into [Woodrow Wilson - The Redemption of the World](#)) I feel like he did not really want war, and would have been glad to leave other countries alone if that would bring peace. Roosevelt believed America was very exceptional but could only continue this if we continued to push our limits as a country, expand our power, and assert dominance over weaker countries. Additionally, he wanted to proclaim to other nations that we were superior, but while also maintaining peace between major world powers such as Japan. So yes, Roosevelt and even Wilson were not the best about helping weaker nations, but they did help Cuba and the Philippines to eventually become free, not to mention Panama and helping dissuade European powers from taking over the Dominican Republic. (734, 739, 736, 735 respectively; from [Liberty, Equality, Power](#) by John Murrin)

It is obvious that they both believed in American Exceptionalism, but how they acted on the exceptionalism was sufficiently different.

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Re: Roosevelt and Wilson with their Foreign Policies

by [Jamie Atkins](#) - Saturday, April 20, 2019, 11:30 PM

Kaiser (Sorry about the misspelling before!),

Yes, exactly right. I appreciate your optimism. I think the reasons any president believes in American Exceptionalism are important because that will then define the actions and motivations of international involvement. President Roosevelt does deserve some credit for Panamanian independence and halting the progress of European Imperialism in the western hemisphere, no matter his motivations, (Murrin text p. 735). There is the argument that there can't be much influence (good or bad) without power to help Roosevelt's case. I give Wilson more credit for almost always trying to adhere to the principles of liberty and democracy, not just capitalism. I think that since America became able to expand its influence, there have been presidents who value liberty and freedom and see those as the reasons for America being exceptional, spreading those ideas and helping the world, and there have been presidents who felt it was more important to increase our power and further economic interests, but all have had to balance both to varying degrees.

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Re: Why America is not Exceptional

by [Alexandra Selig](#) - Saturday, April 20, 2019, 9:34 AM

Kaiser, You make several very good points. I do not believe the idea of American Exceptionalism is limited to one quality. It is a combination of all these quality's that gives the impression of exceptionalism. Although we may only be 18th or 12th in economic freedom and 49th in press when looking at our standing compared to those of other nations. Our mean total of greatness is quite high when combining all of these qualities together. The ability and need to share these qualities and belief with others around the world is another way that we build our exceptionalism.

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American Exceptionalism Viewpoints

by [Kaiser Slocum](#) - Saturday, April 20, 2019, 6:22 PM

Alexandra

Your thoughts summed up mine perfectly!

I think American exceptionalism can be "boiled" down to the viewpoint one has of it. If you look at America's placement in accordance to what it could be, then yes, America is doing badly. However, if you look at it compared to other countries, America is doing wonderfully. Once again, it just depends on how you want to look at it.

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War dictates public opinion on American Exceptionalism

by [Clifford Lyon](#) - Friday, April 19, 2019, 6:44 PM

I think that the idea of American Exceptionalism has ebbs and flows to it more so than it is a constant feeling. Before the Spanish-American War, the idea of America being an exceptional country probably wasn't considered much as America had very few instances that related to foreign policy up to this time. The idea of American Exceptionalism only exists when comparing America to other countries. The typical time in which Americans (or anyone else) compare their country to others is during times of war. I think back to the days, months, and years following the 9/11 attacks and I remember a country full of people who were extremely proud to be Americans. This was a time in which "Support our troops" and "God bless America" could be seen on nearly every vehicle on the road. Although we were attacked and thousands of people were killed, Americans banded together and simply believed that we were stronger, more resilient, and quite simply better than any other country in the world. As time went on and Americans grew tired of war, the idea that America is an

exceptional country began to wane. Today we are nearly 18 years into a war in Afghanistan and hardly anyone even mentions it anymore. People talk about the apparent mistakes that this country has made in its foreign policy and they forget how many people were supportive of them in the heat of the moment.

Foreign policy is just one area that we could focus on in this debate, but I feel like it is one that has the greatest effect on national pride. We could talk about education, health care, social issues, national debt, or any number of things and compare America to the rest of the world. I don't mean to downplay the importance of those things; I just don't think they grab the public attention in the same way that war does. Historically, when America has been fighting and winning wars, Americans have had a high opinion of their exceptionalism. When America has been fighting wars and apparently not winning, Americans have started questioning everything from foreign policy decisions to whether we have any business telling other countries what to do.

The current chapter we are reading focuses on the First World War. During the war, the Wilson administration did something that had never been done before: they decided that every American male over the age of 18 needed to register for selective service. This meant that every man in America had the potential to be told they were going to war regardless of how they felt about the war. America drafted almost three million men and the text says that "Relatively few men resisted the draft," (Murrin textbook, page 756). I believe this is directly related to the fact that Americans who were supposed to be neutral were attacked and killed. We see the same thing with the Second World War. If we compare this to the Vietnam War, which is infamous for its anti-war and anti-draft protests, America was not attacked (depending on how you feel about the Gulf of Tonkin). People took to the streets to protest the war and the draft because they felt that America was not right in prosecuting the war. The idea of American Exceptionalism was possibly at an all time low. This may not be rock-solid historical theory, but I believe that war and the reasons for going to war are directly related to how Americans feel about their country. When America is seen as a strong country that is besting its enemies, the American people are proud and supportive. When the country is apparently losing a conflict or pursuing a conflict without provocation, the American people turn their backs and begin seeing all the things they don't like about this country. I believe that war is often the rudder that steers public opinion, good or bad. This is just my take on it though and I am curious what other people have to say in response.

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Re: War dictates public opinion on American Exceptionalism

by [Alexandra Selig](#) - Friday, April 19, 2019, 8:48 PM

You make a very strong point about American Exceptionalism being driven by war. I would like to take this a step farther. As you stated, American men, even those drafted against their will at the time of WWI did not oppose going to war even if they did not support the war personally due to their patriotism and love for their nation. American Exceptionalism not only waxes and wanes with the prospect of war as you discuss but can also be seen to ebb and flow depending on the present government regime. Currently I get the interpretation from the news, social media, peer to peer conversations and even this class that we are starting to spiral toward another low point regarding our national standing on our exceptionalism. It does not currently feel as though we are a country united, but a country divided. Whether you are an individual who supports MAGA (make America great again) or can be seen posting #notmypresident we all tend to forget that it is not one person who makes us exceptional. It is all Americans and the rights that we have been given, like the freedom of choice... If we are not united like we were in the days after September 11th then I would have to agree that American Exceptionalism is dead.

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Re: War dictates public opinion on American Exceptionalism

by [Clifford Lyon](#) - Saturday, April 20, 2019, 12:50 PM

I appreciate your input and I can see how different administrations influence the feeling of American Exceptionalism. I would add that this all depends on the individual American and the assigned value which they place on different policies coming from a particular administration. If I identify myself to the far-right end of the political spectrum, then Obamacare might seem to me like our nation is plunging into socialism. If I identify with the far-left end of the spectrum, then the immigration policies which President Trump has attempted to put in place might seem like we are dangerously close to fascism. However, each of these things could be seen as the saving grace of this country if my beliefs align with the goals of those programs. It's all a matter of assigned value. If most of the goals that I have for this country are apparently being met, then my view of American Exceptionalism is probably high.

When President Wilson decided to ask Congress to vote for America to enter the first world war, there were plenty of people who thought that this was a bad idea, and I am sure that the decision ultimately had a negative impact on their opinion of American Exceptionalism (although I don't they would not have called it that). When the Committee on Public Information set out the drum up popular support for the war, they were told that America had entered in order to "make the world safe for democracy,"

(Murrin textbook, page 759). This had unforeseen effects though, as the people at home began crying out for “industrial democracy” at home (Murrin textbook, page 760). The average worker in the United States at that time did not assign “democracy for all” a value as high as the one they put on “democracy for working-class Americans.” Therefore, the idea of American Exceptionalism might have seemed unrealistic to this group based on what they valued.

To the men who volunteered to fight during the war, their belief in the goals of Wilson and the Allies likely led them to view American Exceptionalism in a more positive light. If they believed that America had entered the war for the right reasons and that their service in that war was going to create positive change in the world, then their belief in the greatness of their country was almost certainly high. Many of the African American men who volunteered to fight did so out of a hope that they would reach a higher rung on the social ladder upon their return, so we can argue that they likely did not think very highly of America from their own personal experiences, but still believed that America would be willing to change its opinions of them.

Americans rarely if ever reach a unanimous consensus on anything, and as a result the idea of American Exceptionalism is different for every person. Most Americans agree that “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” are good guidelines, but we also have very different ideas of how to make those things a reality. Therefore, the concept of American Exceptionalism varies so much from person to person.

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Re: War dictates public opinion on American Exceptionalism

by [Alexandra Selig](#) - Sunday, April 21, 2019, 9:01 AM

I agree that the concept of American Exceptionalism changes based on personal impression and is dependent on an individuals personal standing regarding political stance. But should that be what makes us exceptional in the first place. The ability to choose what your want to believe... Is that not what makes us great. The vast culture that is accepted within our borders and protected outside of them. The ability to believe in one god, or many. The freedom to stand by your government by choice or to peacefully, publicly appose them.

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Poll reflection/forum part 2

by [Kathy Holmes](#) - Saturday, April 20, 2019, 1:53 PM

I am surprised that our poll was similar to that done by barna.com. 33% of our class agreed that “The idea that all human beings have a God-given right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” is part of what makes America Great, compared to 24% in the barna poll. With our poll being much much smaller, this is comparable in terms of amount of people. My choices in the survey for the most part did coincide with both surveys but were different in some ways as well, more so in the “most at risk” question. I do agree with the results overall. I think if I were to rank the items in the survey from most to least likely to contribute to Americas greatness it would look slightly different but overall I agree with both the class and the barna poll.

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Trumps rejection of American Exceptionalism

by [Kathy Holmes](#) - Saturday, April 20, 2019, 2:02 PM

Historically, all presidents have been supporters of American Exceptionalism. Trump has expressed his views otherwise. In the Washington time Article “Persistent patriotism” the very first paragraph states “...92 percent of Republicans are “extremely” or “very” proud to be an American... Democrats on the patriotic meter: 67 percent said they were proud, along with 73 percent of independents.” As Trump is a Republican, I think much of the uproar surrounding him disagreeing with the claims about American Exceptionalism stem directly from his political party. It is a stereotype that this article agrees with that Republicans’ bleed pride for this country and Democrats may be more skeptical of that.

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Re: Is America Exceptional

by [Autumn Pitzer](#) - Sunday, April 21, 2019, 11:22 AM

I do believe that America is exceptional. It is still a place that many people dream to live. We have freedom of speech and religion while other countries are very strict in their religious beliefs. While I believe that America is exceptional and I feel like most Americans do, I do not feel that it is as great as it once was. President Obama said when asked if he still believed in American exceptionalism, He states, "I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I am sure the Brits believe is British Exceptionalism, and the Greeks believe in Greek Exceptionalism. He pretty much said he didn't believe that America was anything special and it was only exceptional because he lived here. I agree with Charles Murry in the video on," Is the U.S. and Exceptional Nation", he states that America was and is exceptional just not in the same manner as it once was. He also brings out in the 1900s America had the promise of the frontier and was flourishing.

At the turn of the century we had protestant missionaries who promoted American interests overseas. We had the businessmen who were industrialists, traders, and investors. Working on American exports and boosting American investments overseas. Imperialist who were, "Eager to assist in overseas expansion was a group of politicians, intellectuals, and military strategists who view such expansion as essential to the pursuit of world power". One of the best know imperialist was Alfred Thayer Mahan who believed that controlling the seas was key. Presidents McKinley and Roosevelt eventually manifested this into reality. I do think that America now operates under the same ideals as in the early 1900's economically speaking with regards to overseas investments but I think we are lacking in are Naval control and our military is not as robust as it should be.

Obama American exceptionalism-26 sec into video, CNN interview

Videos interviews Is the U.S. an Exceptional Nation Video 3:23 sec with Charles Murray

Chapter 22 Becoming a Word Power, pg. 719 paragraph 2

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Our System Makes Us Great

by [Clifford Lyon](#) - Sunday, April 21, 2019, 12:49 PM

I think that the top results for both polls regarding what makes America great are similar. In the Barna.com survey, the top answer was "Opportunity to become who you want to be," while in the class survey, the top answer was "The idea that all human beings have a God-given right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." I believe that these two things go hand in hand. It is because of the American commitment to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness that people in America have the opportunity to become who they want to be. Where we usually run into disagreements in this country is what life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness look like. The ongoing debate regarding abortions is a good example of this. There is one side of the argument saying that they are protecting life by attempting to outlaw abortion nationwide. The other side of the debate is saying that by outlawing a woman's right to choose, they are taking away her liberty and her pursuit of happiness.

These types of ideological debates are nothing new in this country, and they certainly aren't going to stop coming up. What truly makes America a great nation is that we have a system in place which allows us to have those open debates as well as vote for elected officials who we believe will support our side of the debate. There are countries where people are thrown off buildings as punishment for homosexuality. Likewise, women could be stoned to death for seeking an abortion. America has set itself apart from these nations because of the incredible system which the founding fathers created. Perhaps the greatest aspect of this system is that we retain the means to change the laws as times change. We do not always get it right, and I think the Eighteenth Amendment is a good example of this. However, just as with the Eighteenth Amendment, we once again retain the right to repeal laws that most people disagree with. America's commitment to our system of checks and balances, rule of law, and respect for our common man is what really makes us a great nation in my opinion.

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Re: Our System Makes Us Great

by [Daniela Rosales Name](#) - Sunday, April 21, 2019, 9:16 PM

I agree with you that the concept of "life, liberty and the pursue of happiness" goes hand in had with the idea that every person has the right and "opportunity to become who you want to be." I agree with you that the issue with these statements is that there is no clear definition about what life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is — which is why, I argue, there are so many differing idea on whether this actually plays out in America today. I also agree with you when you say that part of what makes America great is discourse. The right to freedom of speech and the ability to have a healthy discussion freely without fear of persecution.

However, I disagree with your point that America as a country is better because there are others that are much worse. Yes, in certain countries "people are thrown off buildings as punishment for homosexuality" but in [28 states you can be legally fired for being part of the LGBTQ+ community](#). You also say we are better because in some countries "women could be stoned to death for seeking an abortion" but there is a [proposed Texas bill that would seek the death penalty for women who get abortions](#). I think the issue with the system — and therefore claiming that it is what makes America great — is the application. Not everyone is treated equally, the law isn't applied equally to everyone. Doesn't that go against the claim that everyone has the "God-given right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?" Is everyone's "God-given right" different? Who decides what that "God-given right" is? I don't claim to have the answer but I do firmly believe that this needs to be looked at further and currently there are issues with the system that need to be addressed before we can say that it is great.

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Right or left side, and their effects on Exceptionalism

by [Hannah Harp](#) - Sunday, April 21, 2019, 1:42 PM

From the readings in our book so far, and the articles for this week, I've noticed that it's pretty common throughout history for democrats to fall on the left side, and conservatives to fall on the right. I think that with identifying as conservative, you are generally expected to not only accept, but believe in American Exceptionalism. As said in one article, "Conservatives see America as exceptional because of our shared belief in the dignity and creativity of the individual" (Spectator.org, 5th paragraph). This is one prime example that conservatives and exceptionalism go hand in hand. It is what's expected of you. Poll data seems to overwhelmingly back this up as well. In another article, "A new Gallup poll reveals that 92 percent of Republicans are 'extremely' or 'very' proud to be an American" (Washington times article), where as, only 67 percent of Democrats were. American exceptionalism is just that- being extremely proud to be American. So, we can see that this belief or expectation of conservatives follows through into polls as well. I don't really consider myself to identify with either party, but if I had to choose, I would say that I am probably a bit more on the liberal, or left side. Ironically, I don't quite consider America to be exceptional under the different definitions of the term we have seen throughout history. Yet, this opinion of mine seems to fall in line with the rest of the data from these articles.

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Modern Discrepancies of Exceptionalism

by [McKay Luke](#) - Sunday, April 21, 2019, 2:34 PM

Based on the information at the start of chapter 22 of Liberty, Equality, Power, one is informed of the view Americans had of themselves. Protestant missionaries were a prominent group among those with the American exceptionalism ideal as they believed that it was their "Christian duty to teach the Gospel to the 'ignorant' Asian masses and save their souls" (Liberty, Equality, Power pg. 718). I would not argue that religion is a necessary appendage to exceptionalism, but I would acknowledge many believed it to be. An example of this today can be heard from Senator Ted Cruz when he states that the rights we as Americans enjoy "...Do not come from man, but come from God Almighty" (Speakers on American Exceptionalism 9:53). The yearn to be exceptional people during the turn of the century can also be exemplified by the United State's involvement in the Spanish War. Many younger Americans at the turn of the century had not been in a war but felt it necessary as a rite of passage as they listened to stories of the civil war from the older generation. This, coupled with yellow journalism, which bolstered the public's idea of what was happening in Cuba led to an insurgence of patriotism and the need to intervene. However, war is not always an effective way to display exceptionalism as we hear from Andrew Bacevich that in 2008 it was pretty clear that "The Iraq War was a disaster and not to mention an unnecessary war" (Speakers on American Exceptionalism 6:45).

I believe that our leaders still use American Exceptionalism as they did a hundred years ago but It seems that the definition of what it is depends on the side of the political spectrum one finds themselves. Former President Obama stated that he believes in it just as much as any citizen of a nation would believe in their own country's greatness. Evan Sayet expounded on what he believes what Obama meant by his statement that his view of exceptionalism had nothing to do with our nation specifically but by simply the fact he resides here (Speakers on American Exceptionalism 1:30). I believe that President Obama shared his opinion to appeal to those who believe that the United States is not inherently better than any other nation and that many countries may be better in certain ways and that we as a nation could learn from them. This idea is progressive and I believe that Obama used these words to appeal to his supporters. Conversely, from the video "Speakers on American Exceptionalism", the two republic

speakers are strong advocates for the traditional sense of American Exceptionalism, that we as a nation are better than others and we should not look past the freedoms unique to our country that make it so great. Both sides of the spectrum have their own views of exceptionalism, and both sides can effectively use this ideal to gain support.

As I have stated in the Censorship & Morality forum, I find myself to be politically moderate. In regard to the speakers from the video, I would say that I felt I could agree the most closely to Charles Murray. In his segment, he talks of how he believes that America used to be exceptional but that has faltered from that claim in modern times. Murray postulates that at the start of the 20th century, everyone in the world that came to America was “unanimous in saying that you might like it or not like it, but there were a variety of exceptional characteristics that they all agreed were exceptional” (Speakers on American Exceptionalism 3:04). I agree with Murray that there were certain Characteristics of America that were undeniably exceptional- are still are to a degree- but have dissipated as the government has become larger and more involved. I would also argue that a reason why the United States isn’t as exceptional as it used to be is that many countries today have adopted democracy and many of the American ideals that were more specific to us a nation one hundred years ago.

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Re: Modern Discrepancies of Exceptionalism
by [Clifford Lyon](#) - Sunday, April 21, 2019, 7:03 PM

Hello McKay,

You stated in your last paragraph that one reason why America is not as exceptional as it used to be is that “many countries today have adopted democracy and many ideals that were more specific to us a nation one hundred years ago.” While I can see the logic in this viewpoint, I also see an alternative which I would like to discuss. If America has become an example for other nations of the world to emulate, does this not speak to our exceptionalism? Indeed, I believe that this was the goal of many of the proponents to imperialism in the 20th century. Our textbook states that “By the late 19th century, sizable numbers of Americans had become interested in extending their country’s influence abroad,” (Murrin textbook, page 718). I think that the very fact that some countries have embraced ideals that were originally “American” is evidence that the exceptionalism which America hoped to spread has done just that. If the Americans of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were here today, they might say that this was exactly what they were hoping to achieve.

The difference between American Exceptionalism in the 20th and 21st centuries, in my opinion, is that we are less inclined to see it as something we have a duty to spread throughout the globe, and more inclined to see it as a way of setting ourselves apart as simply “better” than everyone else. If America could get back to the spirit of spreading peace and democracy throughout the world instead of looking for reasons to believe that we are the best nation on earth, we might see ourselves doing more good in the world. We might also find that other nations of the world find us less irritating. The American hubris is what has given us so many enemies in the world. If we truly are the greatest nation on earth (which I believe we are), we need to work harder to “share the wealth.” Help other nations who are struggling find their way without expecting territory or riches in return. This is not to say that we should run the national debt up in order to lend support to other nations, but we need to find a balance which enables us to be influential on the world stage without compromising our economic position in the world. This of course is easier said than done, but I think the balancing act is an earmark of a truly great nation.

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American Exceptionalism- Now and Then
by [Breanna Lindsey](#) - Sunday, April 21, 2019, 7:28 PM

Our country now and then (over a hundred years ago) are extremely different, but have some similarities. To many now the United States of America is the greatest nation of all time and remain so forever. There are also many people who think differently. The US ranked 27th in 2016 in education and healthcare. In the 1990’s the US ranked number six in education and healthcare in the world. That is a huge drop. The US has not been prioritizing and has made tremendous budget cuts in the education budget. In 2009, the United States was ranked 18th out of 36 industrialized nations. I know 2009 seems like decades ago, but really it was only teen years ago, and the numbers still matter. Later in April of 2009 Obama made a comment about American exceptionalism. Obama said, “I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism.” It seems that Obama is implying that we really aren’t that different compared to other nations. It also seems that are out president doesn’t think we truly are the greatest nation on Earth. It seems as another politician said that he only thinks America is great because he lives here. In the past 100 years our rankings and “greatness” of our country has fallen tremendously. Is it the way our presidents are running our nation? It is

2019 and our economy is booming. Is that because Trump truly believes America is the greatest country in the world. Trump may just be a true believer in American exceptionalism. In the early 1900’s the leaders of this country were proud to be Americans and they did not question America’s exceptionalism. Many of them and their relatives helped build this country. They fought in wars, they helped build the laws of this nation, and helped instill America’s greatness in the citizens. Of course, leaders of all eras have struggled, that is normal.

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religion and American exceptionalism
by [Daniela Rosales Name](#) - Sunday, April 21, 2019, 7:53 PM

I think the concept of American Exceptionalism has drastically changed throughout the last 100 years. The pillars of what made America exceptional aren’t necessarily applicable today —this was clear to me when I look at some Pew polling from the last few years. Although throughout the years the definition of American exceptionalism has shifted and changed there are one major selling points — if you will — of American exceptionalism that I will be discussing. Religious freedom and American’s “God-given rights that can never be taken away” (2nd paragraph of [Spectrum.com](#) article).

In the exceptionalism speakers video, Evan Sayet says that America’s Judeo-Christian heritage is part of what us exceptional (1:39). And while hundreds of years ago, most Americans were religious regardless of political affiliation — that is not the case now. According to this [The Atlantic](#) article in the 70s when the “Religious Right began agitating against abortion, feminism, and gay rights, liberals began to identify organized Christianity with conservative politics.” And according to [Pew](#), younger Americans are less likely to identify themselves with an organized religion than Americans over the age of 60. Also in that The Atlantic article it states that the “religiously unaffiliated are disproportionately liberal, pro-gay marriage, and critical of churches for meddling too much in politics.” So Sayet’s claim that America’s Judeo-Christian heritage and values is part of what makes America exceptional is no longer resonating with he majority of Americans.

Aside from this, in my opinion, this claim comes from a very white, Eurocentric and colonist point of view. Because, if we are discussing America’s heritage than shouldn’t we be looking at the Native peoples who were here before European forces came to colonize America? They are, in fact, America’s heritage. Claiming that Christian values make America exceptional is highlighting one religion as the norm over the others. Which is odd considering the [Barna.com](#) poll titled “What Makes America Great?” highlights freedom of religion as number four. Aren’t these two concepts at odds with each other? Can you have true religious freedom and liberty while still pushing that one is better than the rest? It is also important to note that Sayet was the only person — regardless of political leaning — that actually said American exceptionalism was still alive. Ted Cruz, also conservative, spoke more about regaining what makes America exceptional rather than asserting that we are currently exceptional.

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Re: religion and American exceptionalism
by [Breanna Lindsey](#) - Sunday, April 21, 2019, 9:33 PM

Hi Daniela!

I really enjoyed reading your points and I thought they were quite interesting! I find your point saying "So Sayet's claim that America's Judeo-Christian heritage and values is part of what makes America exceptional is no longer resonating with he majority of Americans." is very misleading. According to Pew Research center 70.6% of the United States is affiliated with the Christian faith. 5.9% of the US is affiliated with a non-christian faith such as muslim, buddhist, hindu etc. Only 38.6% of people consider themselves not affiliated with a religion or they are not sure. 70.6% is overwhelmingly over 50% of the US population and that is only branches of the Christian faith. There is still 5.9% of other religions as well, meaning religion is still very much alive in our culture today. Now this is only one valid research website, but I have looked at tremendous other websites that have extremely similar numbers! The Gallup's statistics show that in 2017 71.2% of Americans identify themselves apart of the Christian faith and 5.8% identify themselves apart of another faith. There are other websites that show similar numbers as well but these numbers are starting to get repetitive. I agree that it may be possible for young adults to be less likely affiliated with a faith then people of over the age sixty, but according to the Pew statistics that is not the case. I would love to read your article to get some better insight with that. But according to the Pew millennials statistics 63% of millennials are most likely to be associated with a Christian faith.

I think one of the greatest things about American exceptionalism is the fact that we do have religious freedom. Our forefathers were known for their religious backgrounds and I believe that they are the foundation of this country that provided religious freedom. I see your comments about abortion and gay rights. I agree that church and state should not be associated with one and other but they often are. But I know many people as well who aren't religious and oppose all those things and I also know Christians who lean more left. But I do agree that it is often known that religious people tend to lean right. I have to say I disagree with your point, "Can you have true religious freedom and liberty while still pushing that one is better than the rest?" No one is pushing anything upon anything. I personally think it is very wrong to say our country might not have true religious freedom, when the people in our country can practice any faith. In our nation we are not persecuted for our faith or punished,or beaten. Unfortunately, there will always be hateful groups in our world who do use violence, but it's against the law and it isn't considered okay. There are countries in this world that if you even speak a word about certain religions you will be killed or severely punished. Brunei just passed a law that allows gays to be stoned if they try and pursue an active relationship. This is a good example of a country that does not have religious freedom and how the government can punish you, if they don't agree with your lifestyle. In the US people are free to worship and do what they please safely. The citizens of the US are very fortunate with the freedom that we have. I would like to add that this is a debate, I am by no means trying to attack your work and I appreciate your comments!

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