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American Exceptionalism

by [Joe Escobar](#) – Friday, April 8, 2016, 11:34 AM

This thread is for discussions on the American Exceptionalism topic.
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Re: Right vs Left, religion & American Exceptionalism

by [Ethan Borsak](#) – Sunday, April 10, 2016, 8:34 PM

In thinking about how alignment on the political spectrum can influence how we view American Exceptionalism, I was struck by a few points made in Herman Cain’s essay, and the video of various speakers provided. In the video, Ted Cruz posits that “our rights don’t come from Man, they come from God almighty”, and Cain writes, “God, not government, bestows upon us these inalienable rights.” Cruz goes on to use the “shining city on a hill” reference, another oft-used biblical quotation that goes back all the way to Puritan John Winthrop in 1630. The idea that American Exceptionalism is tied to religion is also echoed in Evan Sayet’s critique of President Obama’s response regarding Exceptionalism. There seems to be a connection between those that find themselves on the right side of the spectrum, and the belief in a God-given component to American Exceptionalism.

I aligned myself as a moderate on the spectrum for various reasons, and I do believe, to a certain extent, in American Exceptionalism. Without engaging in a larger discussion regarding religion, I don’t, however, believe this Exceptionalism is a God-given right. It's difficult for me to believe that we have been chosen by a higher power to fill this role, although I do believe we have a position of leadership in the global community. A tactic the Salon article highlights is of the conservative Right criticizing the Left (or Obama in this case) for a lack of belief in American Exceptionalism, and somehow equating this to a lack of love for one’s country. While I do agree this is a mostly facile and lazy critique, the Salon article also seemed to shy away from taking a stance on Exceptionalism, simply pointing out consequences that a belief in it may lead to. It did a good job of pointing out how this issue can be used as a political weapon, but evaded an overt declaration of a non-belief in American Exceptionalism.

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America will always be exceptional

by [Clint Leigh](#) – Sunday, April 10, 2016, 9:03 PM

American exceptionalism is a fluid term that seems to take on a different meanings depending on who is the interpreting it. I also believe that the common meaning of the term American exceptionalism has changed. In chapter 22 Americas leaders like Theodore Roosevelt, believed that Americans were racially superior people that were destine for supremacy and that the people of Latin American, Asia (with the exception of Japan) and Africa were racially inferior and thus incapable of self-government or industrial progress. When we talked about other country and wars during this time period, it was common practice to refer to the native people as uncivilized and their Rulers, (i.e. The Spanish) as Barbaric Animals who need to be stop so we can teach their people American values. Now fast forward back to present time and now when we hear about a war, Americans are no longer exceptional but instead it is our government and our leader who apparently are the exceptional ones. We no longer talk about how other countries people may or may not be uncivilized. We don't go to war with a country to teach the masses American values. Instead we overthrow a government and then tell their people democracy is the way to go and then make them try to vote for their new government.

One common idea that both groups of American leaders new and old believe in is having a strong military. During McKinley's presidency he upgraded America's military to one of the strongest in the world. Even to this day President Obama's downgraded military uses some of the most advanced weapons (Drones) and is still one of the most powerful military forces. Even our special forces gets shown off and talked about more often, with movies being made about SEAL teams taking out Somali pirates or going in after Osama Bin Laden in top secret helicopters. American exceptionalism is always going to be there, whether it is a good thing, bad thing or if it means one thing to me and something completely different you. I can't deny that with the freedoms and diversification a long with the incredibly long list of amenities that we assume as everyday living (clean water to drink, education, open internet....) that the United States of America is very exceptional.

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Re: American Exceptionalism Obama's contradiction

by [Benjamin Glaeser](#) - Monday, April 11, 2016, 7:51 PM

In my opinion American exceptionalism is the belief that American is the best country in the world and because of the has the ability as well as the responsibility to help, fight, and pretect others. It is not the belief that the country you are from is exceptional just because it is where you are from. As Obama said in the video about Brits and Greeks believing in Exceptionalism, I feel he completly denied the belief. The biggest difference to me and where the contradiction lies if the fact that the answer to the reporter was his response, what he actually thought. The other response about Libya was a speech probably written by somebody to make him look good. It is also my belief that America has fallen from the top of the world, China in my opinion has surpassed us as the mostbpowerful country in the world however I still believe we are the best and can be the most powerful again if changes are made. On my spectrum I believe that what America was founded on is superior and exceptional to any and every other country.

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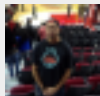
American Exceptionalism Then and Now ft. Hermain Cain

by [Haley Anderson](#) - Monday, April 11, 2016, 8:39 PM

"We see the American story as one of tenacity and triumph, not as one inherently flawed and in need of rewriting. We recognize the times we have stumbled but are assured that it is not due to weakness of our foundation, but instead the imperfection of mankind." A quote said by Hermain Cain in his response to Obama's statement of exceptionalism not being something that sets the United States apart. Cain makes it extremely clear his conservative ideals on exceptionalism I personally think that he has some good points. The American story of freedom and individuality was not something that was extremely normal in the rest of the world when we built democracy and a place for people not doing well in other countries. We are a nation of immigrants from all over the world and to forget that and to assume that our whole history is "inherently flawed" as Cain says would be an injustice to our own history. As an example from class Escobar discussed how with the rebuilding of Roosevelt middle school people are thinking of renaming the school. I think that if we are going to start changing the names of landmarks and ignoring our past even if it is bad would be a huge injustice to everything that we have become as a country. The U.S. would not be as progressive and including if it weren't for the injustices that we have faced within our country and throughout the world.

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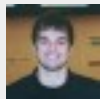
Re: American Exceptionalism Then and Now ft. Hermain Cain

by [Jonathan Whittington](#) – Saturday, April 16, 2016, 2:08 PM

Haley I completely agree! I'm glad I'm not the only one who follows and pays attention to Herman Cain, as a great country, we can not just simply look past all of the flaws that our country has had throughout history, without all these "bad times" we certainly wouldn't be the country that we are today. In regards to changing the names of schools, I think this is somewhat hypocritical because if they are going to change Roosevelt they should change every historical site named after our founding fathers because you could say that they were all racist slaveholders. This just doesn't seem practical. Without some of those men, the country certainly wouldn't be where we are today.

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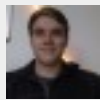
Re: Andrew Bacevich

by [Triston Thomason](#) – Monday, April 11, 2016, 11:42 PM

After listening to the five speakers, I personally agree with Andrew Bacevich most. He stated that "every nation is unique," and explained that our American exceptionalism in politics has us believe that we are superior to others rather than just unique. Andrew also pointed out that basically our political American exceptionalist view suggests that "we represent what the world should be like," and uses Iraq as an example of the U.S. imposing its idea of freedom on other countries and how that didn't turn out so great. In his opinion, we should "end our mission" in attempting to convert other nations to be like us and I agree with that.

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American Exceptionalism

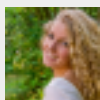
by [Kyler Paselk](#) – Tuesday, April 12, 2016, 11:19 AM

American Exceptionalism is a tricky idea. In many ways i believe that we are an exceptional country. We treat our citizens better than most other countries do and we Have more opportunities than most countries do. But to call our selves an exceptional country we need to take it a step further. We do treat most people in the united states fairly and equally, but many people in the United States are still faced with discrimination and racism. We do have opportunities, but for some those opportunities are shot down because of a lack of money. Like Ted Cruz said, for a lot of people our American dream is becoming unrealistic. Our country is exceptional for only those people who don't face discrimination, racism, and a lack of opportunity due to high education costs. If we start to fix these problems then i believe we can call ourselves exceptional.

One thing that bothers me is that we call ourselves exceptional. Ted Cruz was saying that our exceptionality was god given. It seems a little bit strange to me that we would say that our god told us that we were exceptional. If i were another country i would argue against that. Maybe i don't believe in your, or any god. Maybe i don't like your definition of being exceptional. Even if our exceptionality is true, i still just think that we say it to make ourselves feel better, and to justify the things that we do.

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Is American Exceptionalism unrealistic?

by [Haley Anderson](#) – Wednesday, April 13, 2016, 2:56 PM

In the previous post by Kyler Paselk I completely agree with the statement that "American Exceptionalism is a tricky idea." We do treat our citizens fairly, we provide opportunities for success, and we continue to try to create a successful country of people, as was said before; lack of funds and discrimination still run rampant throughout our country. It seems that we have forgotten that our country was built on the foundation of discrimination of race and religion. First with the protestants who arrived here due to the lack of religious freedom in Europe and there are countless examples of mistreatment of people because they were different, i.e. the Native Americans, African slaves being brought here, discrimination of Russian and Irish decent, lack of acceptance of Asian immigrants as well as today with Muslim discrimination. The idea that we are trying to improve our society and eradicate discrimination as well as violence all together makes our country exceptional the one-mindedness of everyone being American and everyone being connected by this country that has created success helps us to come together and stop violence and stop discrimination.



Re: Is American Exceptionalism unrealistic?

by [Kyler Paselk](#) - Thursday, April 14, 2016, 10:57 AM

I really like your reply to my first post. I think you changed my mind a bit from my original thoughts. When you said "The idea that we are trying to improve our society and eradicate discrimination as well as violence all together makes our country exceptional." We do have so many people fighting for equal rights and equal treatment of all people. I like your way of looking at how far we have come as opposed to how far we still need to go. It's a more positive and encouraging way of looking at the current state of our country.



Re: American Exceptionalism

by [Ethan Borsak](#) - Thursday, April 14, 2016, 11:59 AM

Kyler kind of touched on a theme that I think is interesting when talking about American Exceptionalism. To me, our exceptionalism is kind of tied to our belief that the American dream is/can be attainable. Cruz may be right that it's becoming unrealistic, but I don't think it's unrealistic yet. I think this drive to achieve the American dream is a big part of what we call "American Exceptionalism". That being said, this may be easier said than done. Discrimination & racism are still huge issues that affect our country on a daily basis, we're certainly far from solving these problems. I think being able to work on these issues at local, state, and national levels, and having the power to try and effect change do contribute to why many have a belief in us as exceptional.



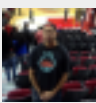
National Exceptionalism Leaders then and now

by [Haley Anderson](#) - Saturday, April 16, 2016, 8:24 PM

I think that Ethan did a great job of summing up this whole conversation about American Exceptionalism when he said "Discrimination and racism are still huge issues that affect our country on a daily basis, we're certainly far from solving these problems. I think being able to work on these issues at local, state, and national levels, and having the power to try and effect change do contribute to why many have a belief in us is exceptional." We are a country who has flaws, lots of them, but so do so many other countries with worse problems. The world is always going to have problems but as a country and society we are working together to make a better world for us and for the rest of the world. The leaders of the times tend to really try to do what they think is best for the American people. For example, President Roosevelt was all for the expansion of the United States territories, where as people today recognize him as not being a very good leader because of some of the choices he made as a leader. His way of thinking was so different than our thinking today that its almost silly to compare our leaders today to the leaders of the past. Obama also had some words to say on exceptionalism when he said in regards to the issues happening in Libya "For Generations, The United States of America has played a unique roll, as an anchor of global security, and as an advocate for human freedom. mindful of the risks and costs we are naturally reluctant to use force to solve the worlds many challenges but when are interests and values area at steak we have a responsibility to act. That's what happened in Libya, to brush away away America's responsibility as a leader and our responsibility as out of fellow human beings. To ignore that would be a total disgrace, other countries may be able to turn a blind eye from atrocities in the world, but we as a Nation can not." I think that he speaks from where our leaders of the past such as Roosevelt and Wilson would when it comes to wars happening in other countries as well as expansion at a time when the world was still small and the U.S. had not made a name for itself.

Re: American Exceptionalism

by [Jonathan Whittington](#) - Thursday, April 14, 2016, 2:34 PM



The idea of American Exceptionalism has been part of America for years but my question would be do you think that it still exists in the minds of many Americans today? Today it seems instead of trying to spread how great America is we lean more toward working and learning from all cultures and countries

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Re: American Exceptionalism

by [Triston Thomason](#) – Saturday, April 16, 2016, 12:27 PM

In response to your question Jonathan, I believe that American exceptionalism does still exist in the minds of many Americans just going off of speculation. But I also think more people are starting to consider that maybe we don't represent how all other countries should be, and that while still a great country, we have room to improve. Maybe we should work with and learn from other countries even more, And instead of spreading how great we are, we should instead prove that by improving economically, politically, and academically.

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Re: American Exceptionalism

by [Jonathan Whittington](#) – Saturday, April 16, 2016, 1:58 PM

I completely agree Triston. I had the same thought about how we should prove that we are great. Once we can reach number 1 in our academic system and in our economic system we can say we are great, until then we have a lot of learning to do from other countries, especially some of the northern European countries

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Is America Really That Great?

by [Tanner Mitchell](#) – Saturday, April 16, 2016, 9:30 AM

Is America really that great? We, as Americans, would like to think so. We try to detach ourselves from the issues of the rest of the world, act like America doesn't struggle with those issues. A theme I noticed when Woodrow Wilson was deciding whether or not to enter World War I is a sort of isolationism, the thinking that America somehow exists in a vacuum and Europe's problems don't affect us. Clearly, we don't now and didn't then.

Given how much trading America did then with European nations, the war clearly did involve America. Not only did we trade with the Allies, we also did business with the Central Powers.

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To be American AND proud

by [Christopher Cockman](#) – Saturday, April 16, 2016, 10:21 PM

Derived from the spectator.org link that was provided, there is one major similarity in the ideals of American Exceptionalism between now and a century ago and that is "we are afforded certain God-given rights that can never be taken away". The founding of this nation was on Christian morals, and today in the federal court of law, we are still asked to swear over the bible, this proves that we are still a very Christian based nation. In terms of American leaders in the 20th century such as Roosevelt and Wilson, American Exceptionalism blazed the path for American Imperialism as well. Since we were the greatest nation on the Earth, why not expand our prosperous and dare I say Christian ideology unto smaller minorities that could use some help (in our minds).

Much like Roosevelt used this notion to gain possession of Hawaii, Obama has continued American Exceptionalism for means to implement the War on Terror. We are engaging in affairs in countries overseas for the prosperity of our Imperialism. However today Obama's words about American Exceptionalism being correlated to what Britains call British Exceptionalism is not something I think Roosevelt would say in his time because of his highly conservative mindset and the break from Empirical Britain that still had swooning realism

over his presidency.

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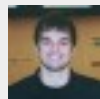
What the speakers say

by Christopher Cockman – Saturday, April 16, 2016, 10:22 PM

I agree a lot with the speaker Charles Murray because he says that we "once were exceptional" and from what I understood is that now we are not because we have more of an open and liberal ideology, mostly in terms of cooperative culturalism. We are now open to many minorities living within the boundaries of America whereas in the times of slavery we clearly were not. Most of the speakers had the same notion that we no longer hold this "unique Ideology". It seems that we use to hold true to American Excpotionalism but have now become more open minded as a nation.

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Re: What the speakers say

by Triston Thomason – Saturday, April 16, 2016, 11:52 PM

I also liked what Charles Murray had to say. I interrpruted his "American Ideaology" more as people would go out of thier ways for thier neighbors and and that our culture had been more tightly knit in a sense.I don't know if he meant that allowing immigrants in is what forfeited our American exceptionalism but if that were the case in his opinion id disagree. Being open minded as you said shouldn't make the U.S. not exceptional.

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