

HST 203: History of the United States Sp17 (Escobar Meta 41054 41053)

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Forum 1

American Exceptionalism

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American Exceptionalism

by Joe Escobar - Friday, April 14, 2017, 6:37 PM

This thread is for discussions on the American Exceptionalism topic.

To make your POSTS, click the reply link in this, MY post. To reply to another student's post, be sure to click the reply link within in THEIR post.

IMPORTANT - SUBJECT LINES

BE SURE to use an informative subject line for your post, something that describes which question(s) you are addressing . Do NOT simply leave it RE: American Exceptionalism

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Re: American Exceptionalism

by Edward Billings - Saturday, April 15, 2017, 2:43 PM

American Exceptionalism is an ideology of “the first new nation” as introduced by Seymour Martin Lipset this ideal is based on the merits that liberty, individualism, democracy, laissez-faire economics, republicanism, and egalitarianism.(Wikipedia) I think that depending on what part of this country one is located there is a varying degree of this ideology. If one is on a coast East, or West and pockets spotted throughout the lands there seems to be less of a conservative holding as it relates to American Exceptionalism. As far as our presidential leadership goes this too has ebbed and flowed in accordance with whatever the populist is feeling. For instance, right now our country is in a state of awareness that American

exceptionalism is what the world needs. This is often the case when there is such a polarized divide between ideals and feelings because we have learned that these ideals are just as valid today as they were when they were formulated. There is a connection that can be made through the understanding that this is not a new way of dealing with issues and problems that have plagued humans for as long as we have cohabitated. The base level of American Exceptionalism is that it's in no way perfect, but it has proven to be the best so far.

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1



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taking exception

by Jordan Okoniewski - Monday, April 17, 2017, 7:34 PM

President Obama created quite a stir in 2009, when he said he believed in American Exceptionalism the way that citizens of other countries believe in the uniqueness of their nature. He received a lot of heat for this statement, especially from the conservative right in this country, for whom unquestioning patriotism seems to be a political litmus test. However, American Exceptionalism doesn't have the most spotless past.

The Roosevelt Corollary could very easily be seen as American Exceptionalism in action. T. Roosevelt tacked on this addition to the Monroe Doctrine, saying that America had the right to interfere with other Western Hemisphere nations in order to keep European powers out. This, in its nature is American Exceptionalism (the belief that we as Americans know the best course for these countries, as opposed to their own governments or other western nations). Indeed, on page 735 of our book, it says quite point blank "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." These are some of the racist connotations of American Exceptionalism, and must be addressed if you are going to criticize someone for wanting to distance themselves from the sentiment.

We also see a prime example with the Spanish American War (though admittedly this occurred before Roosevelt issued his corollary). We helped oust the Spanish from Cuba the name of independence, only to draft the Platt Amendment giving us the power of economic and political interference over Cuba instead. It seemed we knew better than the Spanish how to intervene with the running of another nation.

Even when American Exceptionalism hasn't been the primary reason for foreign entanglements, it has still been used to justify them. You also saw it with the Bush administration, when they code named the invasion of Iraq "Operation Iraqi Freedom," and when he issued his decree "You are either with us or against us in the fight against terror." (4th Paragraph, CNN.com article 1). "We will help the Iraqi people establish a peaceful and democratic country in the heart of the Middle East," he pledged. (1st Paragraph, CNN.com article 2) 14 years later though, violence in the country has gotten only more drastic.

History has not been kind to attitudes like Roosevelt's, the Platt Amendment, or the Iraq War. For reasons like these, I'm not surprised that American Exceptionalism is an attitude that is questioned today. And there's nothing wrong with that. Ironically one of the greatest things about America is our freedom to criticize it. Lets not let go of that.

Sources

CNN article 1 - <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/11/06/gen.attack.on.terror/>

CNN article 2 - <http://www.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/europe/11/19/bush.speech/>

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Re: taking exception

by Edward Billings - Tuesday, April 18, 2017, 12:32 PM

You have presented some very valid information in this, and your stand is a point of view that is popularly excepted by a majority of humans in this day and age. Eventhough I believe that it least one part of this was stated without following the comment through to it's entirety, and maybe being led by your bias to make a comment that was hard to understand. I think that we as humans have and do learn from our experiences. This is why I believe that the human understanding of many aspects of nationalism have been jaded and in many circumstances "put to bed" if you will as we have gained an better understanding of what is right is right for everybody and what is wrong is wrong. That being said I think that nationalism is imparitive for the success of a country because nationalism is in essance a sense of pride and if one cannot be proud of thier home there is just something wrong with that. This is not to say that some humans can and will take it too far and that also is wrong. This can also swing the other way where there is no nationalism and therefore the population feels no connection to thier homeland. This is where it becomes easy for some out side entity to slide in and devide to conquer the people instilling their will on the populous. All and all I agree with your stance and I think that we are learning from our past collectively.

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Re: taking exception

by Jordan Okoniewski - Thursday, April 20, 2017, 6:44 PM

I don't know. Maybe I have a different idea of American Exceptionalism than others do. When I think of American Exceptionalism (and similarly of nationalism in general) I think of the belief that we are the greatest nation in the world by default. It's because of our democracy and our constitution, and our freedom, and the genius of our founding fathers. And though I do see America as probably the greatest nation in the world I see it stemming from our deeds; it's a title we need to continuously earn. I think historically we have earned that - reigniting the torch of democracy back in 1789, the National Park System, progressive labor reform, the blues, technological advancements, and our role in WWII just to name a *few* amazing things we've given to the world. But also I think that things like the Iraq and Vietnam Wars (when "it was fervently believed that the expansion of "godless communism" must be opposed by a *godly crusade*." *vietnamfulldisclosure.com* paragraph 2), which we justified with American Exceptionalism are times that diminished our greatness. And therein lies the risk of American Exceptionalism too - when you spend too much time justifying your mistakes, you don't really learn from them.

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**Re: taking exception**

by Jordan Okoniewski - Thursday, April 20, 2017, 7:13 PM

oops, didn't cite my link:

<http://vietnamfulldisclosure.org/index.php/american-reckoning-the-vietnam-war-and-our-national-identity/>

Sum of ratings:0 (1)

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**Re: taking exception**

by Jordan Okoniewski - Thursday, April 20, 2017, 7:17 PM

That being said though, I think that the conservative backlash to Obama's comment is kind of a load of bullshit because of two reasons -

A) Just because Obama didn't want to bask in the light of American Exceptionalism, doesn't really mean his foreign policy was that different. Our actions in Libya really weren't that different than our actions in Iraq, at least from a perspective of rationale. We took down a middle eastern dictator, figured we'd know better for the future of their country, and now have another giant miasma of strife on our hands.

B) We currently have a Republican president (who has been accused of a lot of things, but being politically correct has never been one of them) who got elected on a campaign slogan that was basically "America Sucks Right Now." And though his "America First" agenda definitely reeks of Exceptionalism, you look at some of his quotes from the campaign and he clearly has a very different attitude about the level of reverence necessary when speaking about America. "You go to different places in China, different places in Asia, different places in the Middle East, you look at some of the airports they have. You look at the roadways they have. You look at the transportation systems they have and the trains they have. We're like a third world country." (time.com) "Our country is a laughingstock," he said. "All over the world, they're laughing." (latimes.com, 6th paragraph) I can only imagine the scorn Obama would have received from Conservatives if he had campaigned with statements like that. And though I realize that sounds like an incredibly partisan thing to say, I write it because I think it serves a much more important point - what used to be a pretty clear cut red vs blue issue is now a lot more complex.

<http://time.com/4245134/super-tuesday-donald-trump-victory-speech-transcript-full-text/>

(please just edit+find the quote, the transcript is written in a way where it would be a nightmare to number the paragraphs)

<http://www.latimes.com/nation/politics/trailguide/la-na-trailguide-updates-trump-s-closing-argument-the-u-s-is-1478540304-htmlstory.html>

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2



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Re: American Exceptionalism

by Jason Pickens - Monday, April 17, 2017, 8:03 PM

American Exceptionalism: **Separated by over 100 years, what similarities or differences can you infer concerning the country's leaders of Chapter 22 and the leaders of today and their understanding of American Exceptionalism.**

With the leaders of today and the leaders of Chapter 22, I noticed differences that varied from leader to leader. For example in(chapter 22 page 735) "Roosevelt believed that the people of Latin America and Asia, (with the exception of Japan) and Africa were racially inferior and incapable of self governing." Now I don't think that any modern day American leader would come out and say this in the open, but back in this era this may have been a form of American Exceptionalism. In the Obama Video, He explains he believes in American Excpetionalism as any person would love the country they are from. He wasn't coming out and saying "we're number 1" because we are the strongest nation, but saying he believes in the concept because he is an American and loves his country like a Greek or a Briton would love their country.

How does someone's identification on the right side or left side of the political spectrum influence their analysis of this issue?

Based on how I have observed Americans in my generation, I would guess that now days the majority of the people on the left side of the spectrum would believe less in the concept of American Exceptionalism in the case of meddling in foreign affairs. At least in Chapter 22, and the reference "Splendid Little War" on page 723. I don't think that modern day people on the left would ever refer to a war as "splendid". I guess this is because times and wars have changed from "Splendid" to all out horrific. At least that has been my observation.

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2

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Masked Exceptionalism

by Andrew Erkert - Monday, April 17, 2017, 10:59 PM

I would say that the leaders of Chapter 22 were more open and explicit about American Exceptionalism than the leaders of today. I credit this to the culture of 'political correctness' that we have had for a while now. In Ch.22, people were proud to brag about their nation and its successes for the most part and the politicians then wanted ways to express America's greatness. Theodore Roosevelt was the strongest example I saw in this. For example, his Great White Fleet that he sent around the world (txt p. 740) was certainly a display of America's fast growing and world power naval force. When comparing this to Barack Obama's speech in response to actions against the Libyan dictator, I would say that what Obama had said was certainly a belief of being exceptional but a censored/filtered version in comparison to Theodore Roosevelt and Americans of that time. Obama labeled us as the "responsible world leader" of protection of world affairs. Roosevelt pushed the agenda of proving our power and competing with other nations to remain exceptional. There were also instances where Americans felt like they were doing a service for the natives of the land taken during their imperialist era, like converting the Filipinos to the

'right' type of Christianity to civilize them similarly to how us Americans are. Overall I think we have toned our exceptionalism down a bit but do still believe we are the best nation out there.

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Re: American Exceptionalism

by Katherine Spriggs - Monday, April 17, 2017, 11:01 PM

Before I could begin to even answer what I believe American exceptionalism to be at this point in time in comparison to the turn of the 20th Century, I decided to search for an exact definition. Although I found no definition, among wordpress and Wikipedia as well as other internet based articles I noticed some similarities or repeated information. The rough the definition I could find for this term was: American Exceptionalism is the idea that the US has a unique set of God-given rights, and that we are meant to imperialize the world in our own form. They also seemed to agree that the US was founded on higher ideals in comparison to other countries such as, England, France, Germany, Russia, etc. In the article given the first paragraph says "American Exceptionalism is the standard that our laws reflect the understanding that we are afforded certain God-given rights that can never be taken away. We know that God, not government, bestows upon us these inalienable rights, and because of that, they must not be compromised by the whims of man. This makes us a unique nation, a nation that remains, as President Ronald Reagan once said, 'a model and hope to the world.'" This also seemed to follow the trend I had seen, then when I got to the videos given some politicians and writers seem to believe this term to mean other things entirely. Charles Murray explained what he thought made the US exceptional, this being one of his examples: "What made America's ideology unique in the 19th Century what's the degree to which the government was an extremely small presents in American life. No other country, including Britain came remotely close." (Speakers on American Exceptionalism 3:46) Murray goes on to talk about how nayborly our country was in comparison to others and further that this idealism no longer exists in our time, nor may it ever exist again. Ted Cruse on the other hand spoke about how our rights as Americans and humans are God given, not of man. He speaks of how that light and presence of God seems to be ever fleeting due to our government, but that there's hope to obtain this again. (Speakers on American Exceptionalism 9:45) After reading and listening, I do believe the original form of American Exceptionalism has gone extinct within our country. We are no longer a country based on a deep Christian belief system who makes decisions for other countries "benefit." We as a country have broadened and are open to ideas of other faiths. Some still cling to their "God-given rights" but others believe in what our government has told us our rights are.

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2

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Re: Obama, comparisons, and exceptionalism

by Eden Stellavato - Thursday, April 20, 2017, 8:25 PM

The most current, and obvious connection to the governments view on American exceptionalism one hundred years ago, is in Trump's slogan and campaign promise to "Make America Great Again." On the other side of the spectrum, we have the comparison of views on immigration leading back to explosion of Ellis Island and the large amount of Europeans immigrating to a country they were led to believe was better than their own because of the

propaganda of American exceptionalism. Even before Trump in the post 9/11 attacks, George Bush invaded the sovereign nation of Iraq killing their leader (Saddam Hussein) who had nothing to do with 9/11 to extend access to Iraq's oilfields. This is a blatant display of imperialism, comparable to Teddy Roosevelt and his involvement in the Spanish American war for land and resources.

Out of all the speakers in the eleven minute video I still agree with Obama the most. He wasn't saying that we're not the most exceptional country in the world, he was implying that everyone believes that THEY are the most exceptional. By comparing our exceptionalism to Britain and Greece, he was just explaining that everyone has belief that their country and their people are the most exceptional.

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American Exceptionalism: The Political Spectrum

by Michaela Ensele - Saturday, April 22, 2017, 1:45 PM

The way people view American Exceptionalism does depend on what side of the political spectrum that you are on. In the Washington post article it starts with a poll about how proud each party is of America. The results conclude that the republicans are "more proud" than democrats. People that lean more towards the right are more conservative and through these articles and the speeches in this forum they tend to have more of an optimistic perspective on the future and history of America. Whereas someone who leans more to the left of the spectrum are realists or more pessimistic of American Exceptionalism. I personally lean toward the left of the spectrum and found myself more stuck in the middle of the idea of American Exceptionalism because I like to think of myself as optimistic and a realist.

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Exceptionalism: Now vs. Then

by Amelia Salzman - Saturday, April 22, 2017, 11:15 PM

The question of American exceptionalism is interesting. After reading these materials it is more complicated than I first thought. It seems unlikely to me the views of our past leaders in regards to exceptionalism are the same as are leaders today. In the video (3:15) the point is made that historical exceptionalism vs. Current exceptionalism are different. In the past, during the time of W. Wilson and T. Roosevelt it seems to me the view would be different because the history was different. As brought up in conclusion of chapter 22, there was a dramatic change in U.S. foreign policy. I believe the new found power in the world vs. long standing power would bring different views. These leaders we learned about in the chapter had worked to build the foreign policy that made us exceptional. Today it is seen as common place for America. (Much like voting, it seems once you have the right, you become much less interested) As for Obama's statement, it seems like he interpreted or misrepresented what exceptionalism means. It seems he distilled it down to simple pride in one country. All countries have citizens who have pride. I understand what he was trying to say. He used the wrong word. Guess I'm not as offended by it as most.

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