

# 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.

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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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#### Assumptions Made for Self-Gain: Video Reflection

by Tyler Ingram - Monday, April 17, 2017, 6:55 PM

During our first speaker in the video after our previous president, we are given an interpretation of Obama's reply to a question of American Exceptionalism: "In other words it's not a belief based on anything besides the fact that he lives here." (1:28 into Exceptionalism speakers video)

I disagree with this quote, as it is entirely speculation based upon the original speaker's words. I also believe that this quote entirely disregards the context under which the question was asked at the start of the video: "Could I ask whether you, um, subscribe to, as many of your

predecessors have, the school of American Exceptionalism that sees America as uniquely qualified to lead the world or if you have a slightly different philosophy and if so would you be able to elaborate on it?" (0:00 into Exceptionalism speakers video)

Given this important perspective, it would have seemed extremely arrogant and culturally-uninterested for the president to declare his belief in America to lead the world, without mentioning that he understands other nations are important for their individual characteristics as well. As a conservative, it seems that context was spared, and assumptions were made, solely to make the opposing party look weaker, so that his party would seem stronger in comparison.

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### **Moral exceptionalism**

by Matthew Molinari - Monday, April 17, 2017, 7:18 PM

Woodrow Wilson once said that the United States would use force "only for the elevation of the spirit of the human race." An obvious case of American exceptionalism, as he preceded that statement with one about how other countries only use force "for the oppression of mankind." This can be seen as a strain of moral exceptionalism, as the US is the only right and true country. This moral exceptionalism can be seen throughout our political stage today, as the Iraq war was started for the good of the war to keep nuclear weapons out of the hands of less worthy countries, requiring predominantly US intervention. The type of American exceptionalism seems to be saturated with the Judeo-Christian values that Evan Sayet briefly spoke of in the video. This fact is illustrated further by McKinley's desire to "educate and Christianize the helpless Filipino people," as Joe mentioned in a lecture in class, and in Ted Cruz's speech from the video, where he proclaims that the American dream is a god given right.

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### **A Shining City on the Hill**

by Kevin Smolek - Monday, April 17, 2017, 8:13 PM

The idea that America, both the land that forms it, and the people that inhabit it, is exceptional is an idea that goes back to the founding of our nation. This nation was built on the bedrock of individual liberty, self determination, and a Constitution that limits power of government. Americans see themselves as exceptional, not because we live here as Obama said, but because we can see what this country has accomplished. We are the freest, most prosperous country on earth, and have earned our status of THE world power through hard work, blood, sweat, and tears. Charles Murray at 3:20 in the video says that it was only in the first 100 years that America was exceptional, and that small government and the physical traits of our country led to that, and not that Americans were exceptional because of any unique trait belonging to us and only us. However since then we've saved the free world at least twice, so I'd argue that America can still be exceptional when it needs to be. Comparing leaders of the past with leaders of today is tricky. Teddy Roosevelt clearly believed in American exceptionalism. Chapter 22 showed how our leaders of that time truly believed that America was better than the areas that we claimed for ourselves, and we saw that in class in the political cartoons that

showed the natives as savages that needed to be civilized. Obama, given his speech at the beginning of the video, clearly does not think that American exceptionalism is anything special or unique, and that it's just a byproduct of nationalism and patriotism.

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### **Re: A Shining City on the Hill**

by Austin Muller - Friday, April 21, 2017, 3:09 PM

In your post you mention that America can be exceptional when it needs to be for the sake of the world. The foundation of American Exceptionalism however, is gone. I think in order to subscribe to the school of thought that is American Exceptionalism, one must first accept that it has wholly changed. Charles Murray refers to what made us exceptional (starting at 3:25 in the Exceptionalism video). The frontier, which he said had a profound impact on American culture, the buffer of the Atlantic, which separated us from the powers that used to run over us, and the entirely unique role of our federal government, which no other country was even close in comparison to. All of these aspects of our early nation were unique and in fact made us exceptional, with these characteristics no longer existing how can we still call ourselves exceptional? We can't, at least not in terms of the original meaning of the idea. Not that I disagree with you about America being the most freest, powerful, and prosperous nation in the modern world, we are, and there is not debating that. Those characteristics do make us exceptional, but just not in the way that we used to be.

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### **Re: A Shining City on the Hill**

by Kevin Smolek - Friday, April 21, 2017, 6:39 PM

The ideal of American exceptionalism is that America its self is exceptional. Not the location of America, but the ideals we hold dear, and the freedoms we enjoy that no other country come close to. The speaker that claimed that its only the things you mentioned, location, frontier, etc, clearly doesn't believe in American exceptionalism. America is the greatest country on earth, and all it takes is a glance at the rest of the world to see that. We're not living with weekly terrorist attacks like Europe, were not stoning gays and women like the middle east, we're not a communist hell hole like China or Russia, the list goes on. America is unique, and the leaders from the past century, Wilson and Roosevelt acknowledged that. We learn form past mistakes, and don't let our failures define us. Wilson clearly wanted to keep the U.S. out of war. However when he saw that without our intervention the side that shared our beliefs and democracy could lose, he made the choice to fight, and die for what he saw as right.

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### **Re: Differences between American Exceptionalism**

by Dakota Brotherton - Monday, April 17, 2017, 8:21 PM

I feel as if over the past hundred years of American History, exceptionalism has changed substantially, almost to the point where it has been rewritten. As our textbook mentions, during the late 1880's, the United States joined Britain, Russia and France in pursuit of becoming an imperial nation and because of this as a nation we established a desire to control territories and the people in them beyond our continental borders (p. 720). Because of the pursuit of imperial dominance, America lost some of the values of liberty and independence that had characterized us in the past. For example, take into consideration the plight of the native Hawaiian's and the manipulation of their throne to meet American economic needs. During the turn of the century, the American people wanted as little influence of government as possible at home but rooted and glorified governmental manipulation abroad. American exceptionalism was therefore in my opinion accompanied with a sense of brutality and hypocrisy in a way that has followed the title into the modern era.

In the past, I feel as if American citizens took so much pride in their nationality that eventually developed into exceptionalism because of the uniqueness of the country. With the birth of our nation being the direct result of a revolution against a large controlling power, there was a higher value placed in the independence of the people in the past and the fact that we were a nation with extremely limited governmental control was something to be proud of. This is a huge aspect of where American exceptionalism differs today as Charles Murray said in his segment with the Washington Journal, "there is nothing limited about American government now," (4:50).

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### **Re: Differences between American Exceptionalism**

by Austin Muller - Wednesday, April 19, 2017, 2:48 PM

I completely agree with you, some have forgotten what exactly forged the idea of American Exceptionalism. You mention that we gained our independence from a large controlling power, however I would take it one step further and wager that we gained our independence from THE world power. Any sort of people who accomplish something like that are bound to feel a tremendous amount pride and therefore come to the conclusion that they are in fact exceptional. During that fight for independence we wrote The Declaration of Independence which states that, "...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." This is one of the most recited lines in all of American history, and yet it can be argued that it is one that we have the hardest time administering. It is impossible to say that we held true to this belief when we were looking to expand our global reach. President Roosevelt believed, "That Americans were a racially superior people destined to for supremacy in economic and political affairs." (Textbook pg. 734) He also had, "little patience for the claims to sovereignty of small countries or the human rights of weak peoples." (735) While during his presidency Roosevelt most certainly believed in American Exceptionalism, by this time though I think the foundation of it was already beginning to be lost.

You are right as well, that in the early years of the United States the federal governments power were limited, and this was another defining characteristic of the new country. However, you mention that we were rooting for less federal control domestically and rooting for a stronger grasp on our new alien territories at the turn of the century. While that may have been the sentiment of some of the American people at the time, progressives were

starting to make to push changes to the political landscape. I understand the “turn of the century” does not extend all the way up to the year 1916 when the textbook says, “The progressives, in short, had begun to create a strong national government, one in which, power increasingly flowed away from municipalities and states and toward Washington.” (Textbook pg. 715) It can’t be understated however, that the progressive view was already taking shape and beginning to turn its wheels.

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### Re: Republican Consistency

by Nick Coleman - Monday, April 17, 2017, 8:25 PM

Someone’s political identity absolutely affects how he or she might observe an issue. Barack Obama in his speech about Libya showed his belief in American Exceptionalism and America’s responsibly to act upon it. In earlier speeches he resisted the idea that America was inherently the best. I think Obama was using a strategic move to appeal to both liberals and conservatives. Where he was in his political career may have had an effect on what he said at different times as well. I would argue that all politicians are guilty of this to some extent. In the Washington Times *Persistent Patriotism* article, it states “92 percent of Republicans are ‘extremely’ or ‘very’ proud to be American”(Paragraph 1). Democrats currently have the lowest approval rate and frequently fluctuate. It says that democrats have been “susceptible to considerations”, where as Republican’s patriotism has been “more consistent” (Paragraph 3). This appears to me that liberals are likely more critical and thoughtful of all aspects of a country and republicans are more unswerving in their views. I believe a thoughtful person is more likely to change their views over time. I can’t say all liberals share exactly the same views and all republicans share exactly the same views, but these statistics lend themselves to the latter idea. Another consideration to make when reading these articles is who is writing them and what perception/agenda they may have. Each side of the spectrum has its flaws, but it’s important as the reader to be aware of them.

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### Why do we believe in American Exceptionalism?

by Austin Muller - Monday, April 17, 2017, 9:48 PM

In the 11 minute video of the speakers discussing American Exceptionalism, I agree with Andrew Bacevich the most. He points to the fact that, *every country in the world, and even every state in our nation is unique.* (7:30 into Exceptionalism speakers video) If one understands this simple fact than I think the idea of American Exceptionalism would be hard to come to terms with. I can understand being proud of our country’s uniqueness and the freedoms it provides, in comparison to another country’s. Where I have a hard time following those who believe wholeheartedly in American Exceptionalism, is when they would like to see it be forced on to other nations and their peoples, simply because they believe that is what we are supposed to do. Bacevich elaborates further to say that *In our politics, this claim to exceptionalism comes with a notion that we are better than others, we are chosen, and our idea of freedom has a universal application.* (7:44 into Exceptionalism speakers video) Obviously there are going to be countries in the world who have huge problems with that idea. Without explicitly asking the question of “What makes America so exceptional?” Bacevich certainly raises the matter for consideration.

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by Nick Coleman - Thursday, April 20, 2017, 12:31 PM

Even Sayet, in the first couple minutes of video, made some good and logical arguments about Obama's answer on American Exceptionalism, but I disagree with some of his deductions about liberals. Sayet claims that "Leftists" train Modern Liberals at the New York Times that "You must be neutral". I would argue that (ideally) it is the job of the media to be neutral when presenting information. But I would agree Obama is somewhat deceptive with his response. Although his statement doesn't portray America as the *best* nation, his actions show that his administration is ready to take responsibility of that role. He clearly through out his 8 years took many steps in the Middle East to "maintain peace" in foreign countries.

The world America exists in today is much different than that of one hundred years ago. Modern Presidents, especially Obama, I would argue has a more neutral posture when it comes to U.S. foreign policy (first speaker in video, 0:20). But figures of one hundred years ago had a much different stance. Teddy Roosevelt is an example of a turn of the century leader who had a very different foreign policy than today. He had no objection to showing his country's power and dominance. Between the Roosevelt Corollary, Panama Canal, his presence in Latin America, and negotiations in the Russo-Japanese War, Roosevelt clearly ranked U.S. dominance high on his foreign policy objectives (p.735)

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[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Re: 100 years ago vs. Today**

by Kevin Smolek - Thursday, April 20, 2017, 1:26 PM

Liberals are the exact opposite of "trained to be neutral" at this point, and the failing New York Times is leading the charge in partisan propaganda in this day and age. A neutral media would be ideal, but now, much more so then in the past, people live in a bubble where they are only exposed to ideals that conform with their way of thinking. On Obama, you say: "Although his statement doesn't portray America as the *best* nation, his actions show that his administration is ready to take responsibility of that role. He clearly through out his 8 years took many steps in the Middle East to "maintain peace" in foreign countries." as well as: "Modern Presidents, especially Obama, I would argue has a more neutral posture when it comes to U.S. foreign policy". Don't you think that the person leading our country, and indeed the free world, should see his own nation as exceptional? The hands off approach that's been defining our foreign policy since the turn of this century is what has gotten us to where we are now. Staring down the barrel of a nuclear armed cult like dictatorship in Korea, as well as making us look weak in the eyes of other nations when we lay down "red lines" and then wimp out when they are crossed like in Syria. The presidents we are studying in class understood that sometimes it's necessary to get your hands dirty, to avoid a much larger problem down the line. "Speak softly, and carry a big stick."

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**Re: 100 years ago vs. Today**

by Tyler Ingram - Friday, April 21, 2017, 11:35 PM

I disagree with your opinion given the quote "The hands off approach that's been defining our foreign policy since the turn of this century is what has gotten us to where we are now." An extreme counterexample being the cold war, but I won't go into that because it's outside the current scope of our class.

So far, the only president we've studied that hasn't been extremely neutral was the "accidental president" Teddy Roosevelt. *"When the Republican bosses chose Theodore Roosevelt as William McKinley's running mate in 1900, their purpose was more to remove this headstrong, unpredictable character from New York State politics than to groom him for national leadership."* (Textbook Pg. 704) This implies that McKinley and other republicans at the time took a far more neutral standpoint than Roosevelt did.

Another quote: *"Taft and Knox believed that U.S. investments would effectively substitute 'dollars for bullets,' and thus offer a more peaceful and less coercive way of maintaining stability and order. Taking a swipe at Roosevelt's 'big stick' policy, Taft announced that 'modern diplomacy is commercial.'"* (Textbook Pg. 740) shows us that yet another president, this one a republican, taking a more neutral approach in the previous century.

This pattern of presidents straying from war continues onto Wilson who's second term ran the campaign "he kept us out of war" as we learned in class.

I would be interested to see you support your previous quote: "The presidents we are studying in class understood that sometimes it's necessary to get your hands dirty, to avoid a much larger problem down the line" to see some of the examples I'm missing here.

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by Kevin Smolek - Saturday, April 22, 2017, 3:12 PM

What you say about Wilson is exactly what I'm trying to say. He ran under the pretense that he would keep the US out of war, and clearly he was reluctant to make any moves that could be considered warlike. However eventually he realized that he'd need to get his hands dirty if he wanted to preserve our way of life. So campaign slogan be damned, he jumped headlong into that fight, and committed the entirety of America to making sure that we and our allies won. "War is hell" but sometimes there is no alternative. We protected our countries interests, and solidified our alliances by saving the day.

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by Dakota Brotherton - Saturday, April 22, 2017, 9:05 PM

I found Evan Sayet's statement to be the most appropriate and added an interesting perspective using one of America's past times to do so when speaking on Obama's comment concerning his belief in American exceptionalism. Sayet goes on to say that Obama finds America exceptional because of the fact that he lives here and goes on to compare it with being a Chicago Cubs fan. Obama doesn't think that America is the best nation with the best policies and all the right answers for how the world should spin around but rather he takes pride in being a citizen and for that reason stands up for the 'exceptionalism' of his country (02:23). As Evan mentioned, this was a great political way to say yes while also saying no and I feel highlights one of the biggest differences in American Exceptionalism over the past hundred years.

During the presidencies of men such as Wilson, Roosevelt and McKinley truly believed that they were residing in the most technologically and morally superior nations in the world. It was during this point of time that I felt American exceptionalism was at its highest in the sense that its citizens felt that power was more important than liberty as stated in our textbook (p. 716). We placed more importance in imperialistic pursuits of the country and establishing dominating influences than we did on spreading the ideas of liberty and democracy and did so under the guise that we were in it for the underdogs. While America was successful in making an imperial name for its nation and becoming one of the great nations, we did so without strongly questioning the moral implications/hypocrisy that came along with those decisions. I feel like at this point in time we actually began a descent from exceptionalism and started delving more towards the corrupt policies and superiority that we enforce on any nation we feel bigger than which seems to be most of them.

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