

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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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.

by Abigail Gierut - Saturday, April 15, 2017, 5:26 PM

I believe that American leaders of today have very similar views as some of the American leaders from 100 years ago on American exceptionalism. Many politicians today, such as former president Obama, believe that "our exceptionalism is forever ingrained in our founding documents that spell out exactly the role of the federal government in relation to individual rights and states' rights." (7th paragraph Spector.org article) This is a strong belief that American Exceptionalism at its core, is founded, maintained and enforced by the centralized

government through in forcing certain laws that keep our country's unique individual liberties. This is very similar to the views about what made American exceptional in the 1900s according to the progressive movement. At the start of 19th century, the idea of a centralized government being the "enemy of liberty" was quickly replaced by the belief that America needs "an activist government to right political, economic, and social wrongs." (textbook pg. 685) "The progressives had to build a new case for strong government as the protector of liberty and equality" (textbook pg. 687)

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Leaders Then vs. Now

by Bailey Davis - Monday, April 17, 2017, 6:15 PM

Charles Murray, author of American Exceptionalism: An Experiment in History, has said that the United States "used to be" as exceptional country. However, he claims that America's exceptionalism is "less clear now" (3:00 into Exceptionalism speakers video). I would say that he is not far off the mark. Theodore Roosevelt, president from 1901-1909, believed very firmly that the United States was an exceptional nation. The textbook says, "He believed that Americans were a racially superior people destined for supremacy in economic and political affairs" (pg. 734). Nowadays, that brash claim of supremacy, or exceptionalism, is something that our leaders tend to avoid. When author Andrew Bacevich was asked if he believed that the United States was unique, he replied with "every nation is unique" (7:30 into Exceptionalism speakers video). Even President Obama avoided the question by saying "I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism"(3rd paragraph Spectator.org article).

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Re: Leaders Then vs. Now by Bailey Davis

by Abigail Gierut - Friday, April 21, 2017, 2:24 AM

I agree with you when you say that Charles Murray was "not far off the mark" when he said that the United state "*used to be*" an exceptional country and that America's exceptionalism is "*less clear now*" (3:00 *exceptionalism speakers video*). In the 19th century it was very clear what made the United States an exceptional country. Charles Murray addressed some reasons that he believes made the U.S. exceptional then and what conditions made that possible. "*Think of the things that made us exceptional: the physical setting--the buffer of the Atlantic ocean on the east, the existence of the frontier moving to the west. Both of which had profound influence on American culture. The American ideology--what made American ideology unique in the 19th century was the degree to which the government was an extremely small presence in American life. No other country came even close to the degree at which we had limited government. And you can also take the civic culture that the United states had--American neighborliness. Very few cultures have had people living in physical proximity to each other, who have cooperated the way Americans did*" (3:20-4:37 *exceptionalism speakers video*). What really caught my interest, as he listed the things that he believed to contribute to American exceptionalism in the 19th century, is when he spoke about the American ideology. He explained that American ideology was focused on limited government, which is what I would say has most

drastically changed since then. We might not have exactly the same civic culture as in the 19th century (in regards to "American neighborliness"), but I think the increased involvement of the government in our daily lives has changed exponentially since. The American government is now very active and I would consider it to be leaning to the far right side on a progressive scale. The far right, (in regards to the progressive scale), tends to be more pessimistic about people making change for the better on their own and begins to head towards forcing the people to be good. Examples of this today could be the measures 66 and 67 that we discussed in class. These measures were made to force a larger tax on wealthier people, instead of just being optimistic, (like the left wing of progressives), that they would pay more taxes out of the goodness of their hearts. If the biggest difference we have made to those conditions that made the United States exceptional in the 19th century is increased government involvement, is it safe to say that not having a more limited government the reason why the U.S. doesn't hold the same American exceptionalism as it did in the 19th century?

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Re: Leaders Then vs. Now by Bailey Davis

by Bailey Davis - Friday, April 21, 2017, 12:22 PM

Abigail,

You've made some really great points. It is true that our government has been getting bigger and more active since the early 19th century. During the progressive movement, our textbook states, "Progressivism was popular among a variety of groups who brought to the movement distinct, and often conflicting, aims. On one issue, however, most progressives agreed: the need for an activist government to right political, economic, and social wrongs" (page 695). I think the call for the government to get involved in peoples lives, even down to their drinking habits, could be a contributing factor in why our government began to grow to the size it is today and why (according to Charles Murray) America isn't an exceptional nation anymore. Another huge growth in government happened during World War 1, when our government became even more involved in American citizen's issues (and pockets). From 1916 to 1918, the number of people paying taxes increased from 400,000 to 4,000,000 (lecture notes). Also during that time, the government had multiple new agencies born, including the Food Board and Committee on Public Information (lecture notes). With all of this in mind, I can definitely see a possible trend, a decrease in American exceptionalism as the United States government grows.

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Maybe America Is Not The Best...

by Jaclyn Bahn - Monday, April 17, 2017, 11:37 PM

I find similarities between Roosevelt and Trump and their idea of American exceptionalism. They both believe that nationalism is the same a patriotism. Nationalism is the idea that America is the number one country (not only believing it is the best but that it should also come first above other countries) and patriotism is the manifestation of shared civic duty felt by a country's citizens, this can be shown through their imperialistic endeavors. Teddy

Roosevelt fueled american expansion into Puerto Rico and Hawaii, paralleled by Trump's pushes shows of force in the Middle East and Asia. This thirst for conquest reveals another similarity between these two presidents, they both hold a belief that American exceptionalism is for one not a goal to ever reap motivation from but an absolute standing in the world that must be won and guarded. I agreed with Barack Obama, I think it is wrong to believe the United States is the best country and that we have the most unique and glorifying history. It bothers me to hear spectator.org's quote that "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." I feel like placing that blame of enslaving African American people and stealing land from Native Americans (two examples of our faults in history out of many) not on yourself but on "the imperfections of mankind" is cowardly. In comparison I do not see American as being the best country. "The World Happiness Report" written by the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network, the United States is ranked #14 on the happiness of the people in their countries. On Heritage.org the United states is marked as #17 in economic freedom and on a list of 28 countries, American is ranked as #21 in high school graduates (worldbank.org). Obama stating that he believes in American exceptionalism just as much as any other country would believe in their own that shows that he did not see it as a competition of who could be better but simply a strive within our country that we are going to make it the best that it can be.

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First Article Exceptionalism

by George Prigmore - Monday, April 17, 2017, 11:49 PM

One problem that our nation faces as of late is our use of the English language. Many times politicians are incorrectly using words, forcing the public to believe it has other means than its correct definition. The first article explains this with President Obama's use of the word exceptionalism.

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American Exceptionalism - Even Sayet

by Alexis Heasley - Monday, April 17, 2017, 11:55 PM

I enjoyed listening to the varying opinions, however I really found that Even Sayet had an incredible passion that I was drawn to - while I do disagree with some of his over all statements. Sayet says "...you are not allowed to report that any culture, any nation, any form of governance is better than any other." (Video 00:52) But, I'd argue that the only way to make a comparison between his examples would require immense similarities between these ideas. They share basics ideas in some areas but the point that needs to be seen is that there cannot be any one culture that is "better" or "more exceptional" than other. That is what makes it unique and incompatible. Nations have faults and so do forms of government but even then, I find it difficult to compare unless they are less unique - and can be properly measure. I find that a bias party is also necessary as it is ingrained in us to love our nations. That, in my opinion though is impossible to find.

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Separated America

by Julie Lindholm-Couch - Wednesday, April 19, 2017, 9:40 PM

American exceptionalism may very well contribute to the downfall of the America we once knew. As we head forward into the 21st century, a time of enormous change globally, we are seeing new problems emerging with equality. America is supposed to be the melting pot of the world; a place where one and all came together and live in the beautiful, prosperous America. Immigrants from all over the world dream of their chance to come to America and start a new life here, to take part on what makes America such an exceptional place to live. This idea of American exceptionalism has brought out the best and the worst in us Americans. In a good way, it encourages us to keep fighting for our freedom and embrace this wonderful country we call home. At the same time, it brings out the worst in us as we separate into groups based on sex, religion, skin color and more. These separations cause a variety of problems regarding sexism racism and bullying of all sorts. In an article titled *In Defense Of American Exceptionalism*, Cain defends the idea of exceptionalism with the inclusion of religion: "We see American Exceptionalism not as an empty cry for nationalism, but instead, the blessings of God that keep our nation strong, independent, and free" (Herman Cain article paragraph 4). This view provides insight on the inclusion of religion in the very core of what makes us American.

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Re: American Exceptionalism

by Trevor Remington - Thursday, April 20, 2017, 12:43 AM

When it comes to similarities from chapter 22 leaders to present day leaders on American exceptionalism, the sinking of the Maine in 1898 and the Terrorist attack on the twin towers in 2001 come to mind. McKinley did not necessarily want to go to war with Spain, with yellow journalism the population of Americans were informed somewhat of what was going on in Cuba and felt sympathetic. Similarly, the American people/G.W. Bush you could say had a good idea of what war crimes were going on in Iraq during Saddam Hussein's time in power prior to 9/11 2001. On the Verge of War already, the Maine Blows up in Havana Harbor Killing 260 American sailors(pg.723). Fast forward to 2001, On the verge of war again waiting for a reason, the terror attack on the twin towers happen. Which began the war on terrorism and the liberation of Iraq to free them from Saddam's Regime and help build a democratic system. Just like we helped "free" Cuba from Spain. Seems like a big cycle really.

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American Exceptionalism. 100 years ago Vs Today

by Isaac Anderson - Friday, April 21, 2017, 9:31 PM

The concept of American Exceptionalism seems similar, although not entirely the same among leaders as it did 100 years ago, at least from my interpretation of the term. Speaking on the problems in Libya Barack Obama said that "to brush aside Americas responsibilities as a leader, and more profoundly our fellow human beings under such circumstances would be a

betrayal of who we are" (PBS newshour, 0:58). He goes on to say "we know that the United States is the worlds most powerful nation, and we'll often be called upon to help". (1:30) Go back 100 years to Teddy Roosevelt and his beliefs that America was a racially superior people destined for supremacy in economic affairs"(Liberty, Equality and Power, 734) . There is definitely 100 years of political correctness missing in Roosevelts ideas, but they both display American exceptionalism with ideas relevant to the times.

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Exceptionalism- Then and Now

by Angela Yackley - Saturday, April 22, 2017, 3:39 PM

Do our nation's leaders still use exceptionalism, as they did at the turn of the 20th Century? If yes, in what form or way?

With the apparent strain of exceptionalism running through the speech Obama gave on how we were morally obligated to help Libya it is a prevalent theme throughout history that our nations leaders use this national pride to rally the people behind them and intervene militaristically in the world. McKinley's appeal to exceptionalism appeared in the pursuit to "civilize" the Filipinos (textbook, page 752), that they weren't capable of governing themselves due to their inferior ways, as compared with ours. Or how Roosevelt's beliefs to "strive for greatness" carried our nation evermore towards imperialistic tendencies as he too, thought Americans were racially superior and were meant to dominate economically and politically (textbook page, 757). These ideas, many Americans rallied behind and still do as we've seen with our most recent election of Donald Trump. His appeal to, "Make America Great Again" is an appeal to same sense of superiority and heroism, and the "world's best hope" (7th and 12th paragraph Newsweek.com) gives rise to the same nationalistic exceptionalism that fueled the early 1900's- to win, to flex our superiority over weaker or inferior nations, to be the top dog. This rhetoric might not be as eloquent as Obama's but it flows within the same conceptual vein.

<http://www.newsweek.com/trump-way-debate-emotion-not-reason-404864>

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