HST 203: U.S. History Sp18 (Escobar Meta 41002 43590)

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American Exceptionalism
by Joe Escobar - Thursday, April 12, 2018, 9:04 AM

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 one of the questions you are addressing. Do NOT simply leave it RE: American Exceptionalism

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Why the American nation is great (American Exceptionalism)

by Maxam Robison - Friday, April 13, 2018, 1:36 PM

For Form 1, I know I need to get this far, but what else am I required to do? What question do I need to answer for this week or is this it?

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Leaders then and now

by Kayla Hadden - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 12:24 PM

I think that today's leaders share a similar goal with the leaders of chapter 22 (McKinley, Roosevelt, and Wilson). All of our nations' presidents want/wanted to do what they believe is best for our country. Every president wants to make our country better. Teddy Roosevelt's campaign slogan in 1904 was, "National Unity. Prosperity. Advancement" (Wikipedia.org). Donald Trump's slogan in 2016 was, "Make America Great Again!" Both slogans show that they believed in American exceptionalism. Both believed that our country was great and that it could be greater under their leadership. I believe that both leaders then and now use the concept of American exceptionalism from the turn of the century, but in different ways. Leaders back then were introducing the idea to the citizens, and created a feeling of pride for how far our country had come. Leaders today use it as a way to motivate our citizens to get that feeling of pride back. I think it is true of both of our most recent presidents (Obama and Trump) that they believe our country is great, but not as great as it used to be.

Of all speakers in the video clip, I agree with Charles Murray the most. In his interview he talks about how we were great in the 19th century because of our unique physical setting, ideology, and limited government(4:35 of Exceptionalism speakers video). It is clear that we no longer have the same setting, ideology or amount of government involvement. I agree with him that these are things that made America exceptional, and that not having these things has had a huge impact on our country. But at the same time I feel like a lot of people today (including Murray, Trump, and a lot of people I know) are putting effort into making America "like it used to be." I think that we need to let go of the idea that we need to "get back" to how we were. Times have changed, the world is different, so there is no way that we are ever going to be exceptional by the standards at which they are judging. We need to focus on making our own definition of exceptionalism that fits our country and the world we live in now, not the world we lived in at the turn of the century.

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Re: Leaders then and now
by Maxam Robison - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 6:25 PM

I like the way you are putting the fact that America is not like it used to be. And the reason I agree with you is that over time, technology and advancement no longer apply to the past methods that we are still using. I like what you wrote . Max

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Re: American Exceptionalism; Do our nation's leaders still use exceptionalism?
by Daniel Zavala - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 5:26 PM

To put it simply, I would argue that our current leaders for the most part have a (relatively) similar idea of American exceptionalism compared to our leaders of the past. While former President Obama's belief (paragraph 3 of the American Spectator pdf) of American exceptionalism is most certainly not in line with the thoughts of past presidents like Theodore Roosevelt who believed "that Americans were a racially superior people destined for superiority in economic and political affairs." (textbook p.734). His views are currently somewhat irrelevant considering that Obama is not the president anymore, Donald Trump is. And unlike Obama, President Trump's belief in American exceptionalism resonates with Theodore's beliefs far more closely as shown by the following statement; "Over the last year, the world has seen what we always knew: that no people on Earth are so fearless, or daring, or determined as Americans." (Transcript of the 2017 State of the Union Address). The largest difference that I can see at the moment is that Donald Trump does not include the racial aspect of American exceptionalism the way President Theodore did.

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Re: American Exceptionalism; Do our nation's leaders still use exceptionalism?
by Vanessa Heilmann - Friday, April 20, 2018, 11:52 PM

Interestingly enough I found an article that claims Donald Trump doesn't like the term "American Exceptionalism". He says "I don't think it's a very nice term, I think you're insulting the world." Although he still believes in this "dearly held principle" but has replaced it with, "at least temporarily, with an angrier tag line that conveys the same sense of national power and entitlement—America First." (www.politico.com) His choice of words have now replaced the original meaning of "American Exceptionalism" with a term that is even more conceded in my view. The definition of "First" is "coming before all others in time or order" and "foremost in

position, rank, or importance." (google.com definition) So now we are not just a nation with "unparalleled freedoms and boundless prosperity" (Spectator.org) we are the most important and come before all other nations. Interesting that he chose those words instead of the term "American Exceptionalism".

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Exceptionalism: Is the dream too big?
by Maxam Robison - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 7:21 PM

"These are all of our stories, these are who we are, as Americans"… Said Senator Ted Cruz in his Presidential Candidacy speech (9:20 into Exceptionalism speakers video). "And yet…. the promise of America seems more and more distant."

What he had to say was something I felt I could relate to. He went on to speak about how we were built by great men and how American offered great ideas for those that were in need. Of course, America couldn't have been born if this wasn't the case. But I feel that Exceptionalism is becoming a dream beyond reach for the average American person. As a presidential candidate he wanted to achieve the goals to return to this dream of exceptionalism, but why is it out of reach?

As much as we want to believe we are still exceptional, there are many that are tearing this country apart internally. I can't go into a political debate on this subject but for me, it is difficult to see how the Exceptionalism of the past can compare to modern day.

I don't agree with Obama on the fact that we are as average as every other country. He didn't use those words, but more or less that is what he meant. We have made great strides and accomplished much in the short time that we have been a nation which, yes, puts us above the rest of the world. But times have changed so quickly in the last 100 years that our methods have become out of date because of the advancements. I don't feel we are keeping up with the exceptionalism expected of us.

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Re: Exceptionalism: Is the dream too big?
by Kayla Hadden - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 11:13 PM

I completely agree with you on the matter of exceptionalism. I feel that the exceptionalism that everyone is talking about is the from the past. People say we need to "get back" to the way things used to be, but realistically the world will never be the same. We have made so many technological advancements, and society has changed completely. Charles Murray talked about what made us great at the turn of

changed completely. Charles Murray talked about what made us great at the turn of the century, and how because those factors are no longer present, we are not great (4:35 of exceptionalism speakers video). We need to accept that we can still be great, just not in the exact same way as we were at the turn of the century.

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Re: Exceptionalism: Is the dream too big?
by Kayla von Stein - Thursday, April 19, 2018, 1:16 AM

I think the idea that things HAVE to be exactly as they were is not forward thinking at all. I think both you, Kayla H, and Maxam are right in that we can be exceptional... Just probably not in the same way we used to be because we are no longer in the 20th century. We aren't unique according to Murray in the speakers video because we have changed. But there are also things, where we aren't unique in the right ways because we haven't changed enough.

I will readily admit that I hadn't even thought about that until I read both of these posts.

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Re: Exceptionalism: Is the dream too big?
by Sienna Grosse - Thursday, April 19, 2018, 11:55 AM

Maxam,

If you're talking about exceptionalism being out of reach for the average American, as you stated, in terms of the 'pull yourself up by the bootstraps' ideology, than I very much agree with you.

However, you made a claim that Obama said we were as average as every other country, and didn't use anything to back that up. This is the full quote from Obama when asked about his philosophies on American exceptionalism.

"I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism. I'm enormously proud of my country and its role and history in the world. If you think about the site of this summit and what it means, I don't think America should be embarrassed to see evidence of the sacrifices of our troops, the enormous amount of resources that were put into Europe postwar, and our leadership in crafting an Alliance that ultimately led to the unification of Europe. We should take great pride in that.

that.

And if you think of our current situation, the United States remains the largest economy in the world. We have unmatched military capability. And I think that we have a core set of values that are enshrined in our Constitution, in our body of law, in our democratic practices, in our belief in free speech and equality, that, though imperfect, are exceptional.

Now, the fact that I am very proud of my country and I think that we've got a whole lot to offer the world does not lessen my interest in recognizing the value and wonderful qualities of other countries, or recognizing that we're not always going to be right, or that other people may have good ideas, or that in order for us to work collectively, all parties have to compromise and that includes us.

And so I see no contradiction between believing that America has a continued extraordinary role in leading the world towards peace and prosperity and recognizing that that leadership is incumbent, depends on, our ability to create partnerships because we create partnerships because we can't solve these problems alone." So while Obama's idea of exceptionalism may differ from his predecessors, I don't think he 'more or less' meant that we were just another average country. He mentioned many of the areas where we excel, such as our economy.

Lastly, you say that were not keeping up with the exceptionalism expected of us, but I'm not quite sure what you mean here. Who is expecting what type of exceptionalism from us?

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Re: Exceptionalism: Is the dream too big?
by Jordan Lopez - Friday, April 20, 2018, 10:08 PM

I do believe what you stated about exceptionalism not being so exceptional today. In the video on speakers of American Exceptionalism (2:50), Charles Murray talks about how the characteristics of Exceptionalism is dissaperaing. He mentions the physical settings such as the frontier being gone. He mentions the Ideology dissapearing as well in the fact that there is not limited Goverment today. Lastly, he mentions the culture of America not being the same. The gap between nations is closing up. I feel there is an asymptotic limitation on advancement. Many countries are advancing at different rates and just because we are ahead now doesnt mean we will always be. Conflicts such as war bring on tremendous growth of advancement in many categories. Obama answers the question on American Exceptionalism bringing up the Greeks and the British. If you go to those countries

Exceptionalism bringing up the Greeks and the British. If you go to these countries you will most likely find many tools to survive. Just because our technology and economy is greater doesn't necessarily mean you will be less happy in these countries. The problem today is people are now wanting things, not needing them. A kid in the front row in class brought up the fact that the differences in poverty from then to now is so different. He mentions that even poor people have iphone. If you owned all the capabilities of an iPhone back in the 1900 your most likely to be wealthy. Also, are so called great advancements are actually worsening some issues. Technology has taken away a lot of our humanity. Such as human to human interactions and nature to human interactions. America is a great place to live, however it isnt as exceptional as we need it to be to survive. With less then 5% of the population we consume more oil then any other nation. We consume more food per person yet children here still go hungry. We have more vacant homes then homeless people. We also have a capitalist country where are stock market is referred to as legal crime. While places like Germany has many more benifits for their people such as free college education and Australia with not only a minimum hourly wage thats high but a weekly minimum wage. We are headed in a good directio, just not the best one.

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Re: Do our nations leaders still use exceptionalism?
by Sienna Grosse - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 9:02 PM

While our nation's leaders may have used American exceptionalism somewhat different at the turn of the 20th century than now, I would argue that it's still widely used. Exceptionalism has no set definition, but is more of an ideology, with some themes common to the various conceptions of the idea (wikipedia, american exceptionalism 2nd paragraph). With that in mind, the meaning of course changes across a range of contexts and times throughout history. For example Wilson, while serving as president during World War I, believed America had a mission to "serve mankind through leadership in moral purposes in advancing peace and world unity."(opencommons.uconn.edu), reflecting a common theme among American exceptionalism that success depended on becoming powerful while sticking to our morals.While this is one idea of exceptionalism, more current leaders have had very different views of the topic. Obama has a quote on exceptionalism that was harshly judged by many. It goes, "I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism." Many judged this because one of the most common themes of exceptionalism is that it is unique to our nation, and it seemed that Obama wasn't making a very strong case. But another quote of Obama's is this, "America is great not just because we're powerful, but also because we have a set of values that the world -

just because we're powerful, but also because we have a set of values that the world admires.… We don't just think about what's good for us, but we're also thinking about what's good for the world … That's what makes us exceptional. " This reflects Obama's more modern view of exceptionalism. So while the common themes and definition of American exceptionalism seems to differ over time, it is still used by our nation's leaders.

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Past Vs. Present
by Malik Jackson - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 10:25 PM

There's an extremely fine line between being a politician and giving the correct answer. Versus your honest opinion. In his 2009 remarks to a reporter, former president Barack Obama gives a politically correct answer. He makes America seem no more special than a number of European countries. In chapter 22 it is shared that Americans thought they could help the by Filipinos by giving them Christianity and more exceptional goods. This is a prime example of American exceptionalism. As Charles Murray states America was exceptional in the 19th and early 20th century(3:45 in American exceptional speakers video). This is why I feel that some politicians have not used exceptionalism as much recently. Although while in office President Trump has frequently referenced America "winning". Which is a similar concept to American Exceptionalism. Andrew Bacevich also shares the sentiment that America is isn't necessarily superior today. Saying that America is unique But that different doesn't make us especially better.

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Re: Past Vs. Present
by Kayla von Stein - Thursday, April 19, 2018, 1:04 AM

So, in your view would you said that telling the Filipinos that they have to follow Christianity in order to be "civilized" was American Exceptionalism? I believe Charles Murray was more saying that within the United States itself in the 20th century that America was exceptional. He discusses the unique geographic setting and the American ideology as just a couple of things that made America exceptional then that is no longer unique or special now (~ 3:30 into the speakers video).

And like we discussed in class, I'm not sure that imperialism necessarily equates to what majority of Americans (especially at the time) would see as American

Exceptionalism.

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Political Spectrum Influence (pt.2)
by Kayla Hadden - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 11:03 PM

I think that your political affiliation has a big impact on how you perceive different issues. If you affiliate more with left side of the spectrum, you would probably agree with Obama wanting to help Libya, and share his view that it is our duty to help other countries in need. If you affiliate more with the right wing then you would probably disagree with Obama's speech since The right wing believes that we should not involve ourselves with other countries' problems. Unless you do not affiliate with either wing, then you will face some degree of bias in any type of political analysis. When a politician is speaking about something you strongly agree with, then you are most likely to analyze less harsh then if a politician was speaking about something you disagree with. I noticed this with myself when I first looked at the speech and the articles. I lean more toward the left wing, and I agree with Obama's stance on this issue so it was difficult for me to be critical toward his speech. I don't think that it's necessarily wrong for me to do so as long as I am aware of what I am doing, and am able to set aside my political affiliations to analyze important topics.

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Are Progressives Against American Exceptionalism?
by Kayla von Stein - Thursday, April 19, 2018, 12:19 AM

Of the arguments made by the speakers in the video, I don’t know if I whole-heartedly agree with any of them about American Exceptionalism. But I think it’s because as someone with a good amount of privilege and also as a person who has seen others who lacks said privilege, it’s hard for me to feel one 100% either way. I do disagree with one a little more than the others.

Herman Cain’s response to Barack Obama saying that he “believes in American Exceptionalism, just as I suspect the Brits believe in British Exceptionalism,” and etc. was that progressivism rejects American Exceptionalism. And that, of course Obama would say something so blasé in regards to American Exceptionalism because he is the “darling” of the progressive movement (https://spectator.org/38032_defense-american-exceptionalism/).

While I agree with Herman Cain in that Barack Obama's answer could have been a little more real and a little less neutral politician, I disagree with the notion that progressivism rejects American Exceptionalism. His viewpoint is that progressives see the constitution as a bump in the road to unlimited federal government. He thinks that because progressives are wanting an unlimited federal government that they are willing to sacrifice the "rugged individualism that has made the nation exceptional."

Looking at history, I can't help but disagree. If our constitution was not the way that it was, there is NO way that there could have been progressives. And without progressive measures, I don't believe that many people that were ostracized or seen as lower than would have the ability to benefit from what Cain sees as American Exceptionalism. Whether it was the NAACP to continue to fight for the civil rights for people of color or the Settlement House Workers to stop child labor from continuing (Pg 690 & 703 in Textbook)... These were/are progressive groups that made motions to make changes for the better, but could ONLY do that with the way our constitution is written.

In conclusion, I feel that progressivism is an integral part to what has made America an even more exceptional country than it was previously because it is more inclusive to ALL Americans. I'm not saying it's been totally beneficial (looking at you 18th Amendment), but for a large part of American society progressive measures have helped to improve their lives.

What's so unexceptional about that?

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Legacy of Exceptionalism

by Carley Kramer - Thursday, April 19, 2018, 9:03 PM

I feel that some leaders today (such as Obama) are less eager to adopt the idea of American Exceptionalism because it is now often associated with Imperialism, racism, and the oppression of other nations that it was connected to in the 20th century. Our textbook shows how the American Exceptionalism of the time was tied to racism and oppression: "As assistant secretary of the navy, as a military hero, as a speaker and

writer, and then as vice president, Roosevelt worked tirelessly to vault the country into the ranks of the world's great powers. He believed that Americans were a racially superior people destined for supremacy in economic and political affairs." (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 people of Latin America, Asia (with the exception of Japan), and Africa were racially inferior and thus incapable of self-government or industrial progress." (p. 735)

Some of our leaders certainly still use exceptionalism, as we are all aware after the 2016 election. Trump's campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again," is the best example of this. For some Americans it was a welcome declaration of pride and a representation of the desire to restore the sense that America was uniquely gifted. Several of the historians in the exceptionalism video agreed that American Exceptionalism has ended, which helps tie the slogan and its "again" aspect to American Exceptionalism. For other Americans, this slogan was an alarming statement that was associated with the negative aspects of American history. I think that this is because they related American Exceptionalism to racism, imperialism, and their consequences. While America was less violent in its imperialism than other nations like Great Britain, it's still something that many Americans are not proud of and would not want to advocate or repeat, which I believe explains some of the hesitance to adopt American Exceptionalism that we see today.

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Re: Legacy of Exceptionalism
by Kayla Hadden - Friday, April 20, 2018, 5:51 PM

That is an interesting point! I didn't think about others associating American Exceptionalism with racism, and other negative ideas. I think it is because I don't associate the two ideas. That does make a lot of sense as to why some people don't believe or condone American Exceptionalism. However, I don't agree with people associating the two. I feel that American Exceptionalism should be more about celebrating how far we have come as a country, not focusing on just the negatives. Every country has some parts of their pasts that are frowned upon now, and that they are ashamed of. Why should our past control how we feel about our present? I believe we can still be great even if, as some people might say, our past was not.

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Exceptionalism 100 and some year difference
by Jordan Lopez - Friday, April 20, 2018, 8:53 PM

When comparing the perspective view on American Exceptionalism it isn't a straight forward comparison. A 100 and some years ago there was countless of variables that are different from today such as society, social media, technology, and so on. However we can still reach generalized differences between the two different time periods. When watching the videos and seeing how someone can pick apart just anything and everything that people say. To be honest, there is no single answer where everyone can agree with. Barack Obama is in a spotlight and we have all had those questions where we know how to answer it but not on the spotlight and it would take a thorough Conversation to have someone understand your viewpoint. Obamas answer on American Exceptionalism was a answer that was designed to answer a tough question with out having to explain much detail. However I do think Obama does believe in America being a great nation and will help other nations with out the influence of obligation. Trump is completley different. I believe his intentions and views of America arent how they seem to be so its hard to grab his thoughts. Plus Obama has been president for 8 years. We know him better so ill compare the past presidents with him. on page 726 of our text book it states that “McKinley and his supporters, however, believe that the “inferior“ Filipino people lack the capacity for self government“. They wanted to civilize them, but yet their focus was also to secure trading with asian countries. Their intentions were different from purely helping because they thought that was the duty of such a great nation. In fact, on page 744 in the second paragragh it states that “ Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson all placed limits on American expansion and avoided until 1917 extensive foreign entanglements and wars“. I feel as a Nation then, if it didnt benefit America then they werent going to get involved much.

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American Exceptionalism, a conflicted subject.
by Vanessa Heilmann - Friday, April 20, 2018, 10:55 PM

American Exceptionalism, an extremely conflicted subject. On one hand, America is such a powerful, unique and privileged country. Throughout time we have built a nation with incomparable freedoms and tremendous prosperity. I definitely agree that we are blessed to live in America. One could look at other countries and compare our day to day living situations and feel like they are lucky to be where they are. I am grateful everyday for the life I live. The “American Dream” has allowed people throughout time who have the motivation, inspiration, and drive to create stability, wealth and happiness in their lives. This idea has influenced many generations of immigrants from every part

of the world to settle and create their “dream” in America.

What I disagree with is the that religion had to be brought into it. This idea that “We know that God, not government, bestows upon us these inalienable rights” and its “blessings of God that keep our nation strong, independent and free” (spectator.org) is a bit excessive. I’m not one to comment on peoples religious beliefs but in saying that, doesn’t that come off as we are almighty and really disregards the successes that we as a nation made. My hard work, accomplishments and triumphs come from me, not some God. In general I dislike the word “better” for anything. There is different in this world and of course peoples opinions on what they like, believe or enjoy, but to say we are “better” just doesn’t sit with me.

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