

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

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Forum 1 American Exceptionalism

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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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"American Exceptionalism" is best understood in a vast historical context



by William Perdomo - Thursday, April 12, 2018, 12:36 PM

The problem I had with the video is that each of the speakers was making their cases very much out of context. To be more specific, anyone saying that America is exceptional has a tendency to look within the length and breadth of their own lifetimes; through the lens of their own moral systems; and more specifically: how good their current orientation in time and space allows them to be. What do I mean by this? I've noticed that when some people judge the past they do it from the high perch of their contemporary position at the end of linear time as though time itself is forever on a natural, upward swing towards justice, the terminus of which just so happens to be when you're old enough to call everything that occurred prior to your birth immoral, unethical, or superstitious. Barack Obama himself, and many Progressives like him, have a tendency to use the accusation that whomever is opposing them is, "on the wrong side of history," as though, once again, there is some hidden prime mover that is all knowing, all good, and superlative in every way and that only they, the enlightened ones, can commune with for the proper course of action in the present; and for the just condemnation of all those who came before who did not live up to the special code of the universe that was only revealed just right now when we, the good ones, got here! Sounds rather religious, almost revelatory to me but I suppose the replacement of God with the god of the State is just what we're talking about in the era of the 1900's-1940's. I digress, and what I meant to say before I went off on a tangent is that America is not a 242 year-old experiment; but a 2,612 year-old one that began when the Athenians expelled the Tyrants and had old Solon write the Constitution of Athens thus birthing the Athenian Democracy. Nothing that radical had come before and contributed to the notion in the West of the citizen being a bundle of political rights as a member of a community rather than a slave or a serf that is at the behest of kings. Not until the founding of the Roman Republic (509 BC) do we get another radical uptick in this notion of "freedom" that the Greeks got started with philosophy and which was compounded in the one great contribution the Romans made to civilization, Roman Law, the idea that everyone who calls themselves citizens is entitled, whether rich or poor, to equal protection under Roman courts and that their private property would be respected. Like the Greek attempt, the Roman experiment lapsed into tyranny, oppression, and vast inequality that eventually yielded to greater martial strength, as the Greeks had when Philip of Macedon extinguished Greek liberty in 336 BC before his son, Alexander, made himself both master of Asia and the Balkans. Same thing happened to the Romans who first in the West lost their liberty to despotic emperors and then finally to the superior arms of Germanic tribes who eventually superimposed themselves on Roman customs to carve out medieval kingdoms that were, once again, based on divine, or a brute's, right to rule. Basically, what I am saying is that Tyranny; not Liberty, is the normal state of world and human affairs. There is no nation on earth

that has in its constitution what the citizen has a right to and what the government can't do. A perusal of global constitutions will yield quite the opposite: that the government has the right to do X while the citizen must contort himself around the rules, regulations, laws, and demands of the state. What Obama doesn't understand, and what the other speakers kind of gloss over, is that American Exceptionalism doesn't mean we're superior in a racial or cultural way to other nations but that, when history is taken into account, we're nuts! We have these weird ideas of equality before God, of limited government, separation of powers, right to bear arms. Right to bear arms? Are you Americans crazy!? How do you keep the citizen from rising up and overthrowing an.....oh, wait.... an oppressive government. Yeah, that's not usually something those in power want those out of power to have the ability to accomplish. So, in my opinion, we're exceptional because we're the odd balls out of the historical and contemporary bunch who would never dream of allowing the citizen (even though it's diminishing) that kind of individual autonomy and authority.

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Re: "American Exceptionalism" is best understood in a vast historical context
by [Kevin Gable](#) - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 12:32 AM

I am a little confused in that this seems more like a philosophical argument than necessarily a historical one. Sure there is no doubt that Ancient Greece and Rome influenced our style of government but we are not a 2,600 year old experiment. We in fact are a country that was founded by the signing of the Declaration of Independence in August 2, 1776. And if I am not mistaken our Constitution spells out very precisely what the citizens have the right to and what the government does not have the right to do. And I don't necessarily agree that in the 1900's they were trying to replace God with the god of State. If anything they were very reilgously motivated in their pregressive ideals. They wanted a more democratic capitolism and generally believed in their racial and religious superiority. (class lecture 4/12).

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Re: "American Exceptionalism" is best understood in a vast historical context

by [William Perdomo](#) - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 1:52 PM

The framers of the Constitution were children of the Enlightenment which means that they were part of an intellectual movement that rediscovered Athens and Rome as sources of knowledge about mankind and as models not only for education, but for government as well; specifically in the case of Athens, of what

not to do. When I refer to the American Nation as a 2600 year experiment, I am not being literal; obviously, I know that our founding document was not excavated in a cave on the acropolis of Athens; and I am pretty sure God didn't come down from heaven to put his hand to the parchment with quill to sign the US Constitution. What I am saying is that the founding fathers were historically minded men who knew every page in Greek and Latin of Cicero, Plato, Aristotle, and Thucydides. Cicero in particular is a strong philosophical and legal influence who wrote not only about good government and the role of morality in civics; but of what kind of citizen is required to accept and protect liberty because liberty itself is not an innate as I made clear on the post you replied to, but an exception which is why it has only been tried three times in all of human history- the US being the third and possibly last try for a good long time. If you read the letters between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson during their twilight years they are constantly making references to Rome as a stark warning about how easily one generation can destroy the liberty of another while trading worries that the new American Republic will degenerate into a mob that will vote itself out of existence such as was the case with the Athenian Democracy.

Jefferson worried about what the Greeks called *anacyclosis*, which is a cyclical concept that recognizes the inherent weakness of majority rule. Because of their history of constantly passing in and out of a tyranny, the Greeks identified three stages: a tyranny; an oligarchy; and finally, anarchy where a strong individual rises to bring order to the resultant chaos which brings the society right back to where it started: a tyranny. The anarchy in that cycle could also be called "mob rule" which is another term at the time for democracy. Democracy, as commented on not only by Thucydides, but Plato and Aristotle as well, is by its very nature irrational. It can't be otherwise since it is based on majority opinion, and emotionally charged opinion at that. It cannot take into consideration what the individual wants or needs because it is, as constituted, incapable of doing so. We see this constantly in Thucydides chronicle of the Peloponnesian War where someone like an Alcibiades who possesses good looks, charm, and a silver tongue can get the Athenian demos to vote on an absolutely stupid, hair-brained adventure like the Sicilian Expedition which was their equivalent of a Vietnam. Or when the Romans tacitly accepted Caesar as dictator for life for the promise of peace and plenty.

So, having said that, the framers were quite aware of the weaknesses of the two forms of government they were referencing which is why they settled on an Electoral College for voting (similar to the Tribal Assembly of the Roman Republic) and Separation of Powers (the only example in history being the Spartan Gerousia that separated legislative, executive, and judicial between three

governing bodies) for controlling centralization of powers. Obviously, the founding fathers could not use contemporary governments as their models because they were all monarchies and they themselves were vassals of one such empire which is why they had to use philosophy to make the case that monarchies do not have a divine right to rule but that man is equal to any other before the "Laws of Nature and of Nature's God." Merely making a declaration of the self evident truths of nature isn't enough to guarantee that those truths will survive the ages and not get blotted out by the greed of men, they have to be defended by virtue, morals, and reason backed up by evidence. One cannot have evidence without history; and one cannot have reason without philosophy.

I think all this fits nicely with Ronald Reagan's speech where he stated, "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same." What Jefferson argued and what Reagan made plain is that freedom is not the natural state of human affairs; tyranny is. And tyranny just doesn't manifest itself without the tacit and craven acceptance of the people who find themselves subjects of a warlord, a king, or an emperor.

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Re: "American Exceptionalism" is best understood in a vast historical context

by [Kevin Gable](#) - Monday, April 16, 2018, 10:53 PM

I absolutely agree with you on the influence. I found your use of the word enlightened very interesting because I have heard the constitution referred to as a document of enlightenment. Perhaps one of the most enlightened and exceptional thing they did in this document was not just set the country for self government, that as you said is in fact not the most common version of rule seen throughout history and I agree is honestly taking one hell of a risk if you think about it, but being enlightened and exceptional enough to address that the US of 1776 would in fact not be the same US of 2018 and therefore must be endowed with the ability to amend this document as truly needed to better grow as the nation grew too. The idea of securing a nations freedom by allowing each subsequent generation to equally proside over and defend that freedom was a huge leap forward in ideals for the time. And like you said, this is not the standard model until within the last century or so. Maybe that too contributes to the ideals of American Exceptionalism? How many governments of the world after WWI and WWII have similar version of our democracy? I also seem to recall George Washington turning down the

presidency initially because he feared it too closely resembled the monarchy of England they had just left behind resulting in the separate branches of government you were talking about?

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Who I agreed or disagreed most with in the video, and, my overall opinion on American Exceptionalism

by [Tanner Wiese](#) - Friday, April 13, 2018, 12:18 PM

First of all, I do believe in American Exceptionalism. In the beginning of the video it starts with Barack Obama. And, I didnt like what he said one bit. He said he believed in American Exceptionalism, however, I felt like he downplayed it. Comparing it to other nations believing the same thing about their country. Which I did not like, because I truly believe we are the best country in the world that has accomplished things other countries haven't. About, 1 minute 45 seconds into the American Exceptionalism I agreed with what Evan Sayet said. He compared what barack obama said to someone thinking their sports team is Exceptional simply because it is their home team (American Exceptionalism video 1:45) . Which is what Obama made it sound like in my opinion. I do think that the majority American leaders still believe in American Exceptionalism, but, clearly Obama doesn't believe in it as much as someone like Trump. In the video Charles Murray states that he believes a lot of things that made America so Exceptional are gone. For example, he stated that you cannot say we have a limited government anymore and that American neighborliness is not the same (American Exceptionalism video 4:45). And, I guess I do agree that America has taken some steps back and things have definitely changed. However, I still 100 percent believe in American Exceptionalism. Ted Cruz said it best, "the incredible opportunity of the american dream, what has enabled millions of people from all over the world, to come to America with nothing. And, to achieve anything" (American Exceptionalism video 10:20). That is beautifully worded by Ted Cruz. America offers opportunity to people from all different places. The success America has had is from hard working people from many different places around the world, and that's what makes this country so great.

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Re: Who I agreed or disagreed most with in the video, and, my overall opinion on American Exceptionalism

by [William Perdomo](#) - Friday, April 13, 2018, 3:18 PM

There's another (see my post on Censorship) common misconception about public

There's another (see my post on censorship) common misconception about public institutions, and the people who make up their staffs, is that if they are public servants then they must be in it for the public good and, by extension, the well-being of the country. In short, if they work in the CIA, FBI, or are President of the United States then how could they not be ardent patriots? I myself, Tanner, have been yelled at for questioning Obama's patriotism because I made the mistake of reading his only two works, *Dreams of my Father* and *The Audacity of Hope*, not to mention what Obama himself has said! For the following, see Paul Kengor's excellent tome, *The Communist*, which is a biography of Obama's first serious mentor Frank Marshall Davis.

Barring Obama's (birth name Barry Dunham) family, which is riddled with all sorts of skeletons, if we just look at his subsequent associations then you can draw a clear picture of how he sees himself and the United States. Frank Marshall Davis was a Black Communist Agent who was also an ardent Stalinist that worked for the *Chicago Star* writing glowing articles in his editorials "Frankly Speaking" about the utopian Soviet State. These are especially funny to read because you can see how in lockstep party apparatchiks can be and how bereft of principles they are when towing the party line because when the Soviets signed the German (Nazi)/Russia Non-Aggression pact, which basically gave the green light to Hitler to not only swallow Poland, but throw his full might against France and Britain, Davis wrote nothing but praise for the expanding Nazi empire only do a quick editorial about-face when Hitler finally turned his attention to the East.

Frank retired to Honolulu where he was close friends with Obama's grandfather Stanley A Dunham. There he met young Barack and took him under his wing so that by the time teenage Barack left for Occidental college he was thoroughly marinated in a sack of hate not only for free market enterprise, but America as well. He admits as much in *Dreams From My Father* where he wrote:

"To avoid being mistaken for a sellout, I chose my friends carefully. The more politically active black students. The foreign students. The Chicanos. The Marxist Professors and the structural feminists and punk-rock performance poets. We smoked cigarettes and wore leather jackets. At night, in the dorms, we discussed neocolonialism, Franz Fanon, Eurocentrism, and patriarchy. When we ground out our cigarettes in the hallway carpet or set our stereos so loud that the walls began to shake, we were resisting bourgeois society's stifling constraints. We weren't indifferent or careless or insecure. We were alienated."

So, right there you have a guy who doesn't consider himself a citizen in that he is an assimilated member of American society, but a colonized person akin to a Nelson Mandela who is just waiting to get his party, his ideological tribe, into the halls of power in order to "fundamentally change America," as Obama himself so ardently declared in his inauguration speech. So what does "fundamentally change" mean? Isn't the fundamentals of America the Constitution, the family, free market enterprise, and private property? You cannot claim to love something and then want to fundamentally change it because to fundamentally alter is to change its essence, which then means it ceases to be the thing it was to begin with! So, if you are a patriot, then the last words out of your mouth would be "fundamental change." Reform, yes, but wanting to turn the US into something it never was is a whole other matter completely.

But, Will, that was when he was in college! Okay, how about the 17 years he spent in Jeremiah Wright's congregation in Chicago while he was being introduced to politics by none other than Bill Ayers and Bernadine Dohrn? The latter two were terrorist members of the Communist Weather Underground while the former, Wright, was the man who not only ministered to Obama, but married him to his wife Michele. This is a man who masquerades as a Christian but preaches a form of Black Nationalist Ideology called "Liberation Theology." Wright is most famous for gloating about America's suffering after 9-11 while saying: "Not God bless America; but God damn America," and then proceeds on a tangent about Palestinian rights and all sorts of other grievances about the imperialist aggressor.

So, when Obama grudgingly agrees that America is exceptional, he's not necessarily being complimentary but, in his own Post-Modernist way, admitting America has the greatest power militarily and economically but that's it. And in a Marxist, Post-Modern world view the only constant, since everything is relative, is power, which is something Obama would never claim America doesn't have in spades. However, he would quickly parse that, as he did, by stating all other countries are exceptional in their own way and (this is my reading of his second statement based on my knowledge of his education) are likely victims of the US in one way or another as he, and those like him, were. It's the old colonialist accusation that Western nations were only great because they stole it from someone else and that there is no difference culturally whatsoever that would explain why one group does better than the other. Power, and not anything intrinsically special about a particular population, is what makes a nation "great."

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Re: Who I agreed or disagreed most with in the video, and, my overall opinion



on American Exceptionalism

by [Mirissa Hicks](#) - Wednesday, April 18, 2018, 9:27 PM

I can disagree and agree with what the video was saying. I think times have changed from the early 1900's and other countries have become exceptional in different aspects, but that's because the world has advanced, and I don't think that America isn't exceptional I just think it would be impossible for our country to try to keep up on every single thing to be the most Exceptional country. With what Evan Sayet was saying "it's nothing but the belief other than he lives here" (1:18 Exceptional Speaker Video) that statement right there makes it seem like that could be the same in other countries. I imagine not every person living around the world thinks America is Exceptional as their country. Charles Murray states "the setting, the unique setting is gone, ideology, the unique ideology is gone" (4:40 Exceptional Speaker Video) which brings me back to our point that other countries adapted our culture and have advanced with us so our Exceptionalism that made us once so great isn't unique and were starting to almost "fit in" with the other countries of our time.

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Exceptionalism Comparison

by [Kevin Gable](#) - Monday, April 16, 2018, 1:54 PM

As best as I can infer there are some similarities and some differences between the US leaders of today and the turn of the 1900's when it comes to American Exceptionalism. Roosevelt, Obama, and even Trump all seem to have the similar belief that exceptionalism requires effort. "A nation, like an individual, had to strive for greatness and cultivate physical and mental fitness; it had to build a military force that could convincingly protect power overseas; and it had to be ready to fight." (textbook, page 743) Each of these presidents have tried to improve America in ways they believed strives toward this goal. Roosevelt made policy to expand our foreign policy to expand territories for an expanding American military, (The Roosevelt Corollary). Obama made policy to expand our social support system in healthcare, (The Affordable Care Act.) And Trump has made policy to expand our economic/financial sector, (H.R. 1 also known as the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. This was the most sweeping overhaul of the U.S. tax system in over 30 years.) Not all of these policy changes affected everyone perfectly or even evenly. They are certainly not perfect but it shows to how each of these presidents believed in the "striving" to take on big issues that is required to develop "exceptionalism". The biggest difference I can ultimately find is that Roosevelt publically believed in America's racial Anglo superiority. "He believed that Americans were a racially superior people destined for supremacy in economic and political affairs". (textbook page 734).

Sum of ratings: 3 (1) [Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Re: Exceptionalism Comparison**by [Mirissa Hicks](#) - Thursday, April 19, 2018, 7:34 PM

I love the points you made. I feel as if people today get so caught up with think Exceptionalism today means America had to be great and each and EVERYTHING which I don't believe that at all. I think what Obama said may have come across like he doesn't think we are a great country I just think he's aware that we are not going to become #1 at everything when there are other countries competing to be excellent. Our presidents no doubt have made laws and changes to our country that has definitely improved it. During Obamas presidency I do agree that he did accomplish a lot to try to keep America "exceptional" a few examples was the capture of Osama Bin Laden which "In 2011, ordered special forces raid of secret compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, in which the terrorist leader was killed, and a trove of al-Qaeda documents was discovered." (Washingtonmonthly.com) Which was major since Bin Laden was one of the major reasons we were at war with Iraq. Another example would be Improving school nutrition "In coordination with Michelle Obama, signed Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act in 2010 mandating \$4.5 billion spending boost and higher nutritional and health standards for school lunches. New rules based on the law, released in January, double the amount of fruits and vegetables and require only whole grains in food served to students." (washintonmonthly.com) Which I can remember that was when childhood obesity was on the rise and for me that is an Exceptional trait for our government to be aware of an issue that will affect younger American's in the future and to actually do something about it.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1) [Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Exceptionalism in Practice**by [Kevin Gable](#) - Monday, April 16, 2018, 1:56 PM

I do believe the leaders of today use exceptionalism similarly to the leaders of the early 1900' but with a differing approach. Roosevelt believed it was critical for the US to finish the Panama canal so that it's Navy could remain strong. It ultimately secured it by convincing the people of Panama to revolt against Columbia (even going so far as providing support and troops) when the Colombian government refused terms for the US for control of the canal site. But once the Colombian government fell the US signed

a treaty giving the US OWNERSHIP of the 10 mile strip of land the canal was to be built on (textbook page 737). President Bush tried to avoid war with Iraq, Desert Storm in 1990-199, through UN sanctions and negotiations because it was believed that a war spilling into the surrounding area, especially Saudi Arabia, would sore oil prices having a significant impact on the American economy. In the end Saddam refused unless every western occupation of the Middle East was removed simultaneously; Israel out of Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon; Syria out of Lebanon and he wanted the US force in Saudi replaced with an Arab force. Bush decided it was in America's better interests to proceed with the liberation of Kuwait. One major difference is that the US under Bush's administration DID NOT take ownership of the Kuwait oil fields during the weeks that the Kuwait government was reinstated.

(original submission Saturday, April 14, 2018, 6:32 PM)

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Re: American Exceptionalism

by [Kevin Gable](#) - Saturday, April 14, 2018, 8:33 PM

I would like to qualify one statement and in the future my proof reading will be better. The Colombian government did not fall as a result of US influence in the Panama rather Colombian governmental control fell in that region. My apologies.

Sum of ratings: 0 (1)

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Video Arguments

by [Kevin Gable](#) - Monday, April 16, 2018, 1:56 PM

When listening to the speakers in the video something that Sen. Ted Cruz said stuck out at me. He said that "Our rights, they don't come from man. They come from God almighty." (9:50 into video Speakers on American Exceptionalism.) Unless god or Christ himself showed up to sign the Declaration of Independence or the US Constitution then I argue that every single right we have did in fact come directly from man. God had absolutely nothing to do with our freedom directly and physically. Every right we have has been proposed by, argued by, ratified by, and defended by us citizens, men and women. I believe this to be a failure in American Exceptionalism. What makes us exceptional when it comes to our freedom is that it is provided and protected by us. Relying exclusively on the source of these "guaranteed" rights being a deity is part of the problem that fueled the progressive racial nativism attitude in the early 1900's. They believed so much in their Anglo superiority they pushed their beliefs understanding that it would infringe on immigrant's religious customs. Catholics were the wrong kind of

white Christians therefore it was okay if Prohibition interferred with the wine portion of Catholic Mass. (Class Lecture 4/12)

(original submission Saturday, April 14, 2018, 6:33 PM)

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Re: American Exceptionalism

by [Zachary Denton](#) - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 10:48 AM

Part 1

There is definitely a difference in how some leaders today view American Exceptionalism than the ones in Chapter 22. "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." (textbook p. 734). This shows the dedication and passion that leaders had to America at the turn of the century. Compared to when Obama said in response to a reporter, "I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism." (third paragraph spectator.org article/ speaker video). He implies that every country and its people have exceptional views towards their country. While leaders from chapter 22, and some today, believe that there is a special quality that the US and no other country has.

In some ways I think that our leaders today use exceptionalism as they did at the turn of the century. For instance, when 9/11 happened, President Bush used that tragedy to unite the nation under the idea that their freedom was under attack by terrorists that hated our country. Much like when the de Lomé letter was stolen, and the US warship Maine exploded in Havana Harbor. Papers issued "Remember the Maine!" (textbook p 723). They did this to fire up and unite the nation to go to war to "defend" their freedoms from the Spanish.

Part 2

I think the majority of the people on the right side of the political spectrum relate to American exceptionalism, as evident in the Washington Times article releasing a poll saying that 92% of Republican are "very" or "extremely" proud of their country while only 67% of Democrats think the same. "The probability that I happened to be born in the greatest country on Earth – or, even more so, the greatest country ever to exist on Earth in all of human history – is minute. Isn't it far more likely that I believe this because I was taught to, rather than because it's true?" (salon article 7th paragraph). This also shows more evidence that makes me believe Republicans show more exceptionalism than Democrats. The quote from Salon.com shows the views of

Democrats only believing it because they were “taught” it growing up while Republicans whole heartedly believe it and not because they might’ve been taught it.

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Re: American Exceptionalism, Part 2 The responsibility of exceptionalism

by [Kevin Gable](#) - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 11:24 AM

I would imagine that a person would potentially see this issue very differently depending on your side of the spectrum. It's not an easy clear cut division. On the extreme right one might say that the US is exceptional because we are inherently obligated to defend and even disseminate our moral and ethical ideals of freedom. On the extreme left one might say we have the obligation to strive for greatness through the actions like those in Libya as a way of defending or even disseminate our moral and ethical ideals of freedom. But this view changes over time. Roosevelt was a Rep and on the right. He believed very much that exceptionalism was to be strived for. (textbook page 734) He expanded our foreign policy in a pretty unique way with the The Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. This gave the US the right to keep European powers from meddling in hemispheric affairs and further gave the right to intervene in the domestic affairs of the nations in the Western Hemisphere. (textbook page 735) This basically self appointed the US as regional magistrate over ½ of the globe. But it's not that simple either. Remember, during the turn of the 20th century the US was actually paying cash settlements to Spain and later Colombia for “losing” territories to the US or it's interests. (class lecture 4/10) No one on earth was doing that at the time. This meant something new that seemed to contribute to the ideal of American exceptionalism that continues today. “With great power comes great responsibility.” (Benjamin Parker)

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Do our leaders today believe in American Exceptionalism?

by [Mirissa Hicks](#) - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 4:43 PM

It seems that there is a big difference between on how our nation's leaders today view American exceptionalism. When Obama stated that “I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism.” (spectator.org article) and listing to Evan Sayet saying, “It's not a belief that anything that he lives here” (1:50 into Exceptionalism speakers video) it makes it seem that our leaders today don't believe that America is exceptional in anyway unique way compared to other countries; but Obama isn't the only leader who has made his point of that. During Presidents Trumps entire campaign

he used the slogan "Make American Great Again" which brings a up the point if our country was exceptional like we've been saying for over a century why would we have to make it great again? Charles Murray was asked if he thought America was Exceptional and he responded with "well we use to be" (2:48 into Exceptionalism speakers video) he also talks about one thing that made our country exceptional was that "our government was a small part in American life" (3:55 into Exceptional speaker's video) which today that is much different politics are a part of our daily lives it seems like.

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Re: Do our leaders today believe in American Exceptionalism?

by [Tanner Wiese](#) - Tuesday, April 17, 2018, 2:44 PM

I really liked this argument. I agree that there is a difference between how our nations leaders view American exceptionalism. But, for some reason I automatically assumed Trump was a leader who believed in American Exceptionalism more than most. And, now I realize that his main slogan during his campaign was "Make America Great Again". Which is clearly stating that he believes America has lost some of its exceptionalism, and, that he wants to get it back. I think a big part of the reason he made that his slogan was to try and bash Obama's terms. But, I do believe he thinks America lost certain things that made it special. And, this brings me back to what Charles Murray said in the video. I really agreed with what he said at about 3:30 in the video. He stated several things proving that America was more exceptional years ago. And, that we have lost certain things that made us unique. Which I believe is true, and, proves why Trump used the "Make America Great Again" slogan.

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Re: Do our leaders today believe in American Exceptionalism?

by [Zachary Denton](#) - Wednesday, April 18, 2018, 4:31 PM

I agree with both you and Mirissa, Tanner. I do believe Trump has shown more exceptionalism than past presidents, but your points about his campaign slogan make perfect sense and I hadn't looked at it like that before. I also think that he mostly used that as his slogan to take departing shots at Obama and his two terms in office. Very good points that you made.

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[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Make America Great Again Implies Lack of American Exceptionalism**by [Rachel Gragg](#) - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 5:40 PM

At the turn of the century, the leaders of the United States definitely believed in American exceptionalism and practiced it heavily. In the video, Andrew Basevich said that, "our claim to exceptionalism is not that we are different, but that we are better... we represent what the world is supposed to become" (video). The practice of imperializing and taking over other nations shows the idea of American exceptionalism that the leaders had back then because of the belief that the American way of life was better than the way of life in other countries. As our textbook states, imperialists of the United States, such as William McKinley and Alfred Thayer Mahan, pushed the imperialization of other countries. It was for military protection, but also to expand America and make our presence known because they believed we deserved to be known because of our greatness.

Politicians definitely use American Exceptionalism today. Donald Trump's entire slogan is "Make America Great Again" because he believes we were once exceptional, but have since fallen, but we deserve to be the greatest nation again. I even found an interview where he says that America was greatest at the time period we're studying, he said when America was greatest, "was during periods of military and industrial expansion at the onset of the 20th century and again in the years after World War II. [Trump]: 'If you look back... there was a period of time when we were developing at the turn of the century which was a pretty wild time for this country and pretty wild in terms of building that machine, that machine was really based on entrepreneurship'" (CNN.com). Donald Trump uses the possibility of American exceptionalism becoming reality once again under his administration as promotion for his ideas. I don't necessarily believe any country is better than the next. Yes America is exceptional in certain aspects, but we have our problems that lie way deeper than just governmental administration. Other countries are stronger in those aspects and weaker in others. Every country has its strong points and I think that is more of what Barack Obama meant when he said what he said about American exceptionalism. What do you guys think he meant by those words?

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[Permalink](#) | [Show parent](#) | [Edit](#) | [Split](#) | [Delete](#) | [Reply](#)**Re: Make America Great Again Implies Lack of American Exceptionalism**by [Kevin Gable](#) - Monday, April 16, 2018, 9:42 PM

I think there may be two ways you could look at Obama meant when he answered the question on exceptionalism. 1, maybe he meant that it's likely that in most developed nations it's possible that one grows to believe in the exceptionalism of ones own country because they were taught to.

"The probability that I happened to be born in the greatest country on Earth — or, even more so, the greatest country ever

to exist on Earth in all of human history — is minute. Isn't it far more likely that I believe this because I was taught to, rather than because it's true?" (Salon.com article)

Or 2, which might be just as likely that he meant exceptionalism is not something you are born into or simply inherit. Rather, exceptionalism is something you must strive for. His choices in reference are unique in that Ancient Greece and Great Britton did not become the vast empire of their times by simply being there. They took great effort, the morality of actions not being argued in this format rather the historical fact, to expand their empires or to significantly change the way of their citizens lives. The Ancient Greeks helped father the ideas of democracy as William Perdomo was explaining in his post and at one point "The sun never set of the British Empire" as Professor Escobar mentioned in class last week.

Or perhaps he meant a bit of both.

Sum of ratings:2 (1)

2

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Re: Make America Great Again Implies Lack of American Exceptionalism

by [Mirissa Hicks](#) - Monday, April 16, 2018, 10:55 PM

Obama stating that "I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism." (spectator.org article) makes it seems to me is he knows we are exceptional, but we still have our weak points just the same for other countries. From the turn of the century till present day a lot has changed around the world; priorities as well as main focuses. During the 4/12/18 lecture we talked about how in the early 1900's China bought their products from the US but in present day the roles have flipped and now China is one of the US main distributors. Clearly with this tiny example our nation doesn't have the same focuses that we once had. In an everchanging environment there are somethings that America doesn't focus as heavily on anymore that at one point did make our country great. I think as of today

politicians and leaders are starting to recognize other countries have stepped up their drive to be exceptional which touches on what Obama was saying. So how is America Exceptional above everyone else when other countries basically own us on imports including different types of marketable goods, oil, and common everyday things we use to survive?

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1

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Re: Make America Great Again Implies Lack of American Exceptionalism

by [Kevin Gable](#) - Wednesday, April 18, 2018, 8:39 PM

What a great question. How is America still exceptional if we in fact are no longer self sustainable? And I am willing to bet like all these questions the answer may not be so simple. And that is kind of at the heart of all this discussion, the ever changing understanding of what it is to be exceptional by each new generation. From 1900 until now we have seen huge shifts in foreign policy as well as major reform and change at home. Through it all the two things I see as continuous is each generations has had groups and presidents that wanted to take steps that would push the country in directions they believed was exceptional while not forgetting to make things a little better for themselves. And in that there is something truly exceptional. Each generation must hand the country to the next. And it is them who will begin to judge our actions through their experience and understanding. And as the process goes on from one generation to the next there will come a time where we are seen as barbaric in action no matter how exceptional in principal we tried to be. And our constitution will empower them with the ability to change things as needed for their time as not to make our mistakes. Provided they study their history.

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1

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Re: Make America Great Again Implies Lack of American Exceptionalism

by [Tanner Wiese](#) - Thursday, April 19, 2018, 2:42 PM

You made some very interesting points here. I do agree that Obama knows we have weak points, but, I struggle to see how you got that from that quote. However, I do agree that Make America Great Again implies a lack of American exceptionalism. Along with, it just being another way for Trump to say Obama's terms were a failure. And, yes I agree that we don't have the same focuses that we once had. The question you asked is great. It is actually quite frightening to realize that we aren't necessarily self sustainable anymore. And, that is a great

point to try and prove that America is not exceptional, or less exceptional that we used to be. And, although I do believe America is still exceptional, I don't think you can deny that we are not as exceptional as we once were.

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American Exceptionalism part 1 "nations leaders exceptional belief"

by [Bryce Milke](#) - Sunday, April 15, 2018, 11:41 PM

Our nation's leaders do not use exceptionalism the same way as the turn of the century. Former president Obama demonstrates this when asked if he believes in American exceptionalism and gives a statement that clearly shows he does not believe it " I believe in American exceptionalism just as the Brits believe in British exceptionalism" (00:23 exceptional video) this statement clearly shows that he believes American exceptionalism is only that because he lives in America but if you live somewhere else it would be that countries nationality that is exceptional which is clearly the opposite of what the leaders of this nation thought at the turn of the 20th century.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

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Re: American Exceptionalism part 1 "nations leaders exceptional belief"

by [Tanner Wiese](#) - Friday, April 20, 2018, 11:56 AM

I agree that our leaders today do not use exceptionalism the same as the leaders from the past did. But, the quote from Obama, I feel belittled American exceptionalism. The leaders back in the day would never have compared American exceptionalism to the exceptionalism of other countries. Because, they believed America was by far the most exceptional county in the world. However, I do believe we have taken significant steps back, so, maybe its justified. So, yes I agree that our leaders view of American exceptionalism has changed over time, for good reason. But, I do feel Obama was bellitling American exceptionalism with that comment.

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Political Parties Correlate to American Pride

by [Rachel Gragg](#) - Tuesday, April 17, 2018, 3:44 PM

The pride of being an American definitely differs between political parties. I think since Republicans (Conservatives) believe in keeping things more traditional and not changing the way things are done and Democrats (Liberals) are more inclined to wish for change and adapting to new things and altering the way that issues are dealt with. They are similar to progressives in this way as our textbook states, “[Progressives] demonstrated that traditional American concerns with democracy and liberty could be adapted to an industrial age” (*Liberty, Equality, Power* Pg 714). It would make sense that the Democrat’s patriotism, as the Washington Post article put it, “appears to have been susceptible to considerations such as which party occupies the White House and how the U.S. is faring internationally, while Republicans’ patriotism has been more consistent over time” (Washington Post). Democrats are more inclined to look at what other countries are doing and how things are being done elsewhere and then changing things within the United States, which I think would contribute to why they have a lower level of American pride.

Personally, it makes sense to me. As a Democrat, when I look at a lot of the things Donald Trump is doing and has done, especially in terms of foreign policies and gun control, I am not as inclined to say I am proud to be an American. When I compare the way things are going in this country to the way things are going in other countries because of their different rules and policies, I find myself envying those countries. I think a lot of the things valued in this country are skewed and I definitely do not believe America is the greatest country in the world. I believe there are certain aspects where the U.S. is exceptional, but I definitely see a lacking in many other areas.

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Re: Political Parties Correlate to American Pride

by [William Perdomo](#) - Tuesday, April 17, 2018, 5:02 PM

I'm curious about your last paragraph. You indicated that you envy other nations and that the US is definitely lacking in certain areas. Would you mind elaborating on just what you envy about these unspecified countries and how they're besting us in standard of living when immigration figures from the West (Europe) and Third World would indicate otherwise? Why would millions of people from South America, Africa, Asia, and even from Europe (due to the migrant crisis) want to immigrate to a country such as ours that is sorely lacking when the (unspecified) nations you may want to move to, or admire so, can't seem to keep their own populations stable without importing them from the Third World to the detriment of their own societies? That is, if you mean European nations rather than China which has polluted its air,

trashed its land, and has such a population problem that its poised for Pacific Expansion to alleviate the pressure which may spark another major war in our lifetime?

I suppose if we were speaking of the Social Welfare systems of European nations then you could have a point; however, as a Democrat in this modern age, I think you value diversity heavily among all other moral concerns so you couldn't be possibly suggesting that the answer to America's problems is creating an ethnostate which most of Europe, for the time being, is. Everyone being of the same race, speaking the same language, and being of the same culture sure helps when it comes to social tension, unity and cohesion. Also, that shared tribal history makes the pill of excessive taxation and lack of individual rights go down much easier.

Another concern would be America's military spending and the fact that Europe and certain Asian nations can afford to splurge on social programs and don't consciously waste countless dollars on weapons of war. If I said that, however, I would also be leaving out the fact that NATO was established by the Allied Nations after WW2 for the US to protect Europe from another World War emanating from first a Soviet, and now a Russian threat. I'm guessing, once again, that as a Democrat, you don't think too highly of that thug Putin and wouldn't suggest we pull our support from the region and force France and the rest to pay for their own defense rather than relying on the 3% of GDP the US currently dedicates to European defense (not to mention the Nuclear Umbrella we provide for Japan and our other allies in that theater). Having to equip and supply your own troops for defense would really put a damper on free college and retirement benefits; both of which you have to be a citizen to receive. Having said that, should we imitate the prudence of these nations and close our southern border? After that should we now require proof of citizenship along with an ID to vote, receive social benefits, and in-state college tuition since that is a universal requirement of every nation other than the US to immigrate? Lord knows I'd agree, but I am suspecting, and once again this is an assumption, that as a Democrat that you may be fine with open borders. And I won't even mention what most nations, especially Mexico, do to "undocumented" migrants since it is stated in their constitution in particular that the racial make-up of Mexico shall not be changed by incoming demographics. They certainly aren't very tolerant south of the border; at least not tolerant enough to offer every social welfare benefit, along with free college, to people who violated its international border.

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3

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Re: Political Parties Correlate to American Pride

by [Rachel Gragg](#) - Friday, April 20, 2018, 3:04 PM

You make some interesting points. I didn't go into specifics with countries I was referring to nor their policies because I didn't think it was necessary to make my original point I was trying to get across in my post. I don't think this forum is meant to be a platform where I state all the things I dislike about America and compare it to other countries. I felt as though my post was meant more to centralize around why Republicans and Democrats would differ in national pride, as that would be answering the question given in the materials more closely. That is the reason I wasn't specific. It seemed unnecessary as the point I was trying to get across was not that "America is bad and here is my list of reasons why."

However, since you asked, I'll tell you. I was more, personally, thinking of arguably the most prominent issue as of recently in this country: gun control. When you look at other countries, for example; Japan, Britain, Australia, and Canada, they all have implemented very strict gun laws and, as a result, in comparison to the United States there have been next to no mass shootings throughout their history. Now, I understand the 2nd Amendment and the right for American citizens to own guns, but context is everything. When the 2nd Amendment was written and put in the Constitution, there was no such thing as assault rifles. In fact, there wasn't anything even close to being an assault rifle. I believe there is no reason, under any circumstances, that any person over the age of 18 could walk into a store and purchase an AR-15 or any of the other assault weapons most often used in the plethora of mass shootings this country has faced. That is a short synopsis of what I was thinking of when I wrote my original post.

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Re: A Tenacious Country

by [Emily Hemmerle](#) - Friday, April 20, 2018, 10:27 PM

Obama's cynicism towards American Exceptionalism was taken out of context in my opinion. He understands that America is an exceptional country and Adam Serwer from the Salon article pointed out, "After Obama's speech last night. . . anyone who alleges the president doesn't believe [in exceptionalism] deserves to be laughed out of town." He also stated, "President Obama had rejoined -- or joined -- the historical American foreign policy mainstream" and "the president was unapologetic, freedom-

agenda-embracing, and didn't shrink from defending the use of force or from appealing to American values and interests." America's history has had great awakenings throughout it's history and was built from the ground up. America gets off on patriotism and an almost nationalist vibe when it comes to pride for the country.

Sum of ratings: 1 (1)

1

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