

# American exceptionalism: declaration of independence essay

[Economics](#)



Since the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the United States has held countless aspirations, including the idea that America needs to be the perfect example of what a democratic state should be. With that goal in mind, the United States has evolved into the most powerful state in the world, surpassing nations in every demographic at one time or another.

America's values are so influential, a term known as "American Exceptionalism" has sprung up to describe the nation's power and strength over other countries. American exceptionalism refers to the theory that the United States occupies a special niche among the nations of the world in terms of its national credo, historical evolution, political and religious institutions and unique origins. (1) Though America is currently dealing with major issues involving the economy, education, health care, and military entanglements overseas, the United States remains truly exceptional when compared to other countries because of how its leaders decided to handle major world events. This paper will discuss what factors led America to its position of power and whether or not being an exceptional nation is beneficial or detrimental to Americans and the world as a whole. Before World Wars I & II, inhabitants of the world could read the signs that America was growing into the most influential country on the map. Realists believe that, prior to the World Wars, America chose to remain completely isolated from the rest of the world due to the sentiment left by the British monarchy. However, as Daniel Deudney and Jeffrey Meiser stated in chapter two of U. S. Foreign Policy, realists believe that America stayed isolated for too long due to the isolation stance that liberalists took as a necessity during a time of global chaos. In turn, according to a realist point-of-view, if the country

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remained neutral any longer, the ramifications on America's power and influence in Europe could have been devastating. (2) Nevertheless, Deudney and Meiser point out that because America was "dragged" into the wars and forced to become an internationalist nation, opportunities arose that, if refused, would have been extremely foolish of its leaders to not take advantage of. In addition, although some have claimed that America's involvement in World War I was inevitable, it is more beneficial to believe that these world-changing events (Lusitania, Zimmerman Telegram) were blessings in disguise since they formed the groundwork for the international superpower that America has become. The choice that President Franklin D. Roosevelt took to again remain neutral during World War II only benefitted the internationalist approach that America was taking because again, America was forced to deal with the chaos going on around them.

Although conspiracies have been created that claim Roosevelt had prior knowledge of the attacks on Pearl Harbor and chose to turn the other cheek so as to boost the American economy by going to war, the "guise of neutrality" that he took only portrayed America further as the "world police" and contributed to the exceptionalist idea. Now that the beginning of America's stance as internationalists has been established, this paper will turn its focus on the divisions of American society and how they have contributed/benefitted from its foreign policy. The question remains: what makes America an exceptional nation in the grand scheme of countries of the world? The American economy has been viewed as the prime reason for its exceptionalism. The economy of the United States is the world's largest

national economy. Compared with other countries' gross domestic product, the G.

D. P. of the United States was estimated to be nearly \$14. 7 trillion in 2010, which is approximately a quarter of the nominal global G. D. P.

3) The United States is home to the world's largest stock exchange, the New York Stock Exchange. It also houses 139 of the world's five-hundred largest companies, which is almost twice that of any other country. (4) Recently, in 2008, it was revealed that a severe global economic recession occurred, which increased unemployment to record high levels and left the people of America with billions of dollars in debt.

America has become so influential in the global economy that many nations felt a humongous dip in their own economies due to America's recession.

Now that America's economy has been shown to be the most significant economy, standing out dramatically from all other nations, what factors in their foreign policy position contributed to their status as the richest and most profitable nation in the world? With the discovery of the Western Hemisphere came the idea of " virgin land", allowing American citizens overtime to claim land as their own and start private businesses. This led to the ultimate idea of capitalism, where the means of production are privately owned and operated in a free market of supply and demand. Discovering that this system is the fairest and most just economic system, the forefathers knew they had to use and perfect it.

Since then, America's leaders promised to uphold a strict capitalist ideology and showed a deep commitment to the preservation and expansion of the system. This alone has produced countless trade policies with other nations and has also restricted who America chooses to trade with. The first international trade policy that America made was the Open Door Policy with China at the turn of the nineteenth century.

The policy was put forth by Secretary of State John Hay who pushed for free trade between China, America and European nations. After its victory in the Spanish-American war, the Treaty of Paris granted the Philippines to the United States, making America an East Asian power. John Hay then sent out his infamous Open Door notes which defined the main principles behind his policy: " China must remain whole, united and under Chinese control, so the entire country would be open to U. S.

trade and missionaries. His open door notes opposed colonialism and vigorously supported open foreign markets (in which the new American economic dominance could compete successfully against anyone). " (5) Hay was successful in his capitalist aspirations and, in turn, created a system with the American seal of approval that boosted countless economies by allowing free trade between nations that otherwise would have remained completely isolated from one another. Another factor that influenced American exceptionalism is the need for global security, as to avoid a third World War. Because the League of Nations failed to prevent World War II, the United Nations was created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1945 to "

maintain international peace and promote cooperation in solving international economic, social and humanitarian problems.

” (6) After the signing of the U. N. Charter, a Security Council was formed with five permanent members: France, the Republic of China, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States. It was clear that this program promoted the security of the member nations and did not want to be confused with a one-world-order. Since its creation, the United Nations has successfully given swift, peaceful endings to some of history’s most notorious conflicts, including the Iran-Iraq War, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Gulf War.

“ A 2005 RAND Corp study found the U. N. to be successful in two out of three peacekeeping efforts. ” (7) Originally spearheaded out the rubble of World War II by the victorious Americans, the U. N.

continues to act as the global police, ensuring that every measure is taken to secure the rights that every nation has and coming up with peaceful outcomes to major world issues. During the post-World War II years, the leaders of the United States took it upon themselves to secure a world filled with free trade and equal opportunity. However, due to the Communist nature of the Soviet Union, the United States had to put some of their aspirations on hold to deal with the intimidating Red country for almost a half of a century. Being a capitalist state, America and the Soviet Union refused to trade with one another and instead chose to compete with societal aspects ranging from proper lifestyles of citizens to journeying into

space, and most importantly, the production of nuclear and military weapons.

The Soviet Union pushed to expand its Communist values throughout the world, ensuring that any nation caught up in their tyranny would have to answer to Mother Russia. Nations that were feeling encroached by Communist values included Germany, Vietnam, Japan and China, which remains a unique Communist superpower in the world today. The United States, which promises to uphold capitalist values by allowing nations to grow into a working capitalist society, chose to follow a policy of containment to ensure that threatened states have the opportunity to grow their economy through private ownership and free trade. With both countries competing in a nuclear arms race, the stakes were high and the threat of global annihilation was uncomfortably close. Finally, throughout the late 1980's, "the first Bush administration, following in the steps of Reagan's breakthrough diplomacy with Soviet reform leader Mikhail Gorbachev, negotiated a set of far-reaching nuclear arms reduction agreements, the Soviet withdrawal from eastern Europe, and the reunification of Germany as a liberal democracy.

" (8) Although America likes to boast about its status as the " world's superpower", exceptionalism is a double-edged sword. It comes with a large amount of responsibility and puts a lot of pressure on its leaders to make the right decisions and also remain in the realm of capitalist thinking. Struggling nations automatically look to the United States for support, hoping that the world's superpower will have their back during their time of crisis, but unless obligated by allies to interfere, the United States can use its power to choose

whether or not to aid the state, ultimately holding the future of that nation and its policies in the palm of its hand. Along the same lines, America can choose whether to take on a nation as an ally because its leaders are pushing to obtain better trade or are interested in an actual product (oil/fuel). The United States has been accused of putting its values and necessities first and foremost over the other nations, which frightens governments around the world. Sometimes, nations are intimidated by the size of American power to the point that it refuses to trade or be affiliated with it because they want to ensure that their own nation's values are first and foremost. And to go against the world's superpower is just asking for trouble, so some nations may feel obligated to remain on America's side. Ultimately, America has leverage when it comes to deciding what is best for a nation, and the states around the world, which have economies of their own that are deeply integrated with the American economic system, has to abide by the rules and regulations set forth by the American government.

There is a lot of pressure on the "policing" United States to remain capitalist, act as policemen who aid struggling nations and also keep itself stable, all while avoiding being too greedy or selfish in its foreign policy. American exceptionalism has been described as a result of the capitalist thinking held by the government and the guarantee of security for itself and its allies. Though critics argue that America's exceptionalism has died after the turn of the century with George W.

Bush's terms and the dwindling of the American economy, citizens still believe their country still holds that distinction between them and the other



states of the world. “ In a new Gallup poll, eighty percent of those surveyed say they believe the United States, because of its history and Constitution, ‘ has a unique character that makes it the greatest country in the world’. (9) “ President Barack Obama has been the only president on record to use the term American exceptionalism” and seems to hold a liberal view of the term, although his Republican opponents refuse to believe he fully understands the meaning behind it. (10) Although America’s advantage over the other nations of the world has decreased throughout the last decade, its citizens and its leader still believe there is time to get America back to the major superpower it once was.

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