

# The story of american freedom essay

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



Eric Foner focused on the various interpretations of freedom that Americans made and social factors that enabled freedom to exist when he wrote about freedom in America. Additionally, he focused on boundaries and exclusions of freedom. He argued that Americans developed different definitions of freedom. In addition, the definitions of freedom that Americans made differed with time. However, various broad categories of definitions of freedom existed. These definitions ranged from political freedom, which allowed free participation in political processes, to civil liberties, which aimed to protect individuals. Furthermore, the definitions of freedom that Americans made included economic freedom, right to own property and equality (Foner 15). Foner noted that changes in social conditions instigated the rise of different definitions of freedom. The different definitions of freedom made America an exceptional country.

American exceptionalism refers to the distinctive nature of the United States. The United States is a uniquely free nation that harbors personal liberty and democratic ideals. The unique nature of the United States traces its history to the formation of political institutions between 1776 and 1789, the American Revolution between 1776 and 1783 and the declaration of independence in 1776. Additionally, the formulation of the constitution in 1787 reinforced the uniqueness of the United States (Ignatieff 110). However, differences in politics occurred in the United States due to differences in property ownership. On the other hand, freedom enabled these differences in property ownership to exist. Hence, in early America, some people believed that political freedom required economic

independence. American exceptionalism manifested itself in the creed that guides America.

The American creed is composed of liberty, opportunity, democracy, individuality and equality. These components are entrenched in the constitution, structure of law, and the general rationale and dream of the United States. Twelve principles compose the American Creed. These principles are the pillars of freedom. They include equality, national sovereignty, self-evident truth, natural law, inalienable rights and protection by the government. In addition, they include right to life, liberty and private property, and federalism, popular sovereignty, and divine providence. Chronological events resulted in development of these components of the American creed (Foner 34). These historical events began with the American Revolution.

The goal of the revolution was to enable the realization of independence. However, the quest for independence and freedom faced persistent restriction. The freedom of white Americans expanded while slavery persisted. Thus, slavery became another basis for interpretation of freedom. Ultimately, American creed recognized that people are equal and should have freedom. The creed is based on the principles of egalitarianism, self-determination and impartiality. These form the basis of democracy in America. During the period of American Revolution, many Americans died as they fought to create democracy (Ignatieff 14). The replacement of the class system by race as a way through which individuals differentiate themselves

in America brought about the idea of individualism. This further reinforced the fight for freedom.

The American Civil War, which took place after the American Revolution, resulted into expansion of the powers of the federal administration. This improved the definition of citizenship. Additionally, the administration was able to guarantee individuals' freedom. The definition of citizenship focused more on equality and law. Moreover, the administration gave all Americans opportunity and freedom to pursue their goals. Individuals had a right to own property and pursue happiness. Hence, because of the Civil War, the American Creed includes national sovereignty, equality, and federalism (Ignatieff 97). Consequently, sovereignty, equality and federalism enabled the development of democracy in America a long time ago. This exhibits American exceptionalism. Many other countries did not manage to develop democratic principles until recently.

Lastly, the other significant period in development of American exceptionalism is the Gilded Age. During this period, freedom to make contracts increased. Advocators for capitalism influenced the rights that workers accessed. The goal that capitalists in this period had was to exploit workers (Ignatieff 267). However, labor movements in America reclaimed the movement for freedom. The labor movements included antislavery messages in their campaigns. Racial practices increased and contracted for a long time. Ultimately, the labor movements achieved the objectives that they had. The federal government began to protect the rights of workers. Labor laws in the constitution enabled protection of workers. In the creed,

the government is for the people and controlled by the people. Thus, all men are equal before the law and the constitution. The law and the constitution does not discriminate workers and does not favor the capitalists. This shows the exceptionalism of the creed.

Based on Eric Foner's arguments, the definitions of freedom that Americans made had significant impacts in the fight for sovereignty. These definitions developed due to social conditions that existed in the United States in the pre-civil war period. Consequently, they resulted into development of American exceptionalism. The rise of American exceptionalism followed chronological events that took place during the pre-civil war period. The principal events include the American Revolution, the Civil War and the Gilded Age. Social conditions during these periods resulted into movements, like labor and anti-slavery movements, which ensured freedom was attained. Thus, from a long time ago, Americans have enjoyed both economic and political freedom.

Foner, Eric. *The Story of American Freedom*. London: Papermac, 2000. Print.

Ignatieff, Michael. *American Exceptionalism and Human Rights*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005. Print.