

Challenging American Exceptionalism in the 21st Century

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“A decade of dreaming was coming to an end. The dream had been simple that Americans could have it all without having to pay any price, and that national suffering of almost any kind could be domesticated into an experience of virtual terror akin to a theme park ride or a Hollywood blockbuster...terrorists had achieved the literal annihilation of the most commanding twin edifices of American capitalism”

Frank Rich

It was a regular Tuesday morning in early September, I was in my 9th grade gym class when a teacher came into the gym and announced that a plane had hit the World Trade Center in New York City. Instantly, there was a sense of mass confusion amongst students and staff. Questions were asked ‘Who had done it?’ ‘Was it an accident?’ ‘Why would anyone want to perform such an awful act?’

In every class after the first plane hit the whole school was glued to the television watching history unfold as the second plane hit the South tower. As the news of the Pentagon attack and the downed plane in Shanksville came pouring in, there was no question that these events were not an accident. The collapse of the north and south towers left everyone in the classroom I was in speechless; many students became visually emotional. Throughout the day, teachers did their best to make sense of these events with their classes by having open discussions where students could voice their opinions and feelings. All after-school activities were canceled and students were advised to go directly home after school to be with our families.

When I got home, I continued to watch the news coverage of what was to be called Ground Zero. I sat stunned and in disbelief as I watched the images of the attacks play in constant repeat. I was trying to piece together why this was happening. I knew instantly that this day was going to change the course of history; I just did not have the slightest idea just how much. America was under attack from

an enemy that I knew very little about; there was a great deal of paranoia and uncertainty in the air from the beginning. It seemed as if nobody knew what was going to happen next or just what people were capable of doing. The events of 9/11 made me much more interested in the events of local and global politics. In the aftermath of the attacks, I witnessed Americans being called on to be patriotic. In order to serve their country, they would have to avenge those that were lost in the attacks by supporting President Bush and his policies concerning the newly declared Global War on Terror. I saw President Bush use the 9/11 attacks as a mobilizing event to gain public support for his policies and future military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For me, September 11th 2001, will forever be remembered, not only for the horrific events of that Tuesday morning, but also for the actions taken by the American leadership following these attacks and their lasting effects on the position of America within the international community. The decisions and actions of the Bush administration have cost America dearly; not only have we lost the lives of many young men and women in combat, but we have also lost much of our credibility and influence around the world while simultaneously placing ourselves in a great deal of debt.

American Exceptionalism = American Nationalism

"America is a Nation with a mission - and that mission comes from our most basic beliefs. We have no desire to dominate, no ambitions of empire. Our aim is a democratic peace - a peace founded upon the dignity and rights of every man and woman."

George W. Bush

In 1993, Samuel Huntington wrote *The Clash of Civilizations* where he argued that cultural and religious identities would be the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world (Huntington, 1993). Huntington describes the United States as the leader of the West, which is caught in a clash of civilizations between the non-western powers of Asia (China) and the Muslims of the Middle East. There are some problems with this 'clash' interpretation, which are pointed out by Michael Hunt and Edward Said. Hunt views Huntington's "notion of civilization as monolithic, static and essentialist, much like the Cold War era view of the Communist enemy" (Hunt, 2002). In October 2001, Edward Said also criticized Huntington, forewarning the problems that can arise from making "'civilizations and 'identities' into what they are not: shut-down, sealed off entities that have been purged of the myriad currents and countercurrents that animate human history, and that over centuries have made it possible for that history not only to contain wars of religion and imperial conquest but also to be one of exchange, cross-fertilization and sharing" (Said, 2001). Hunt argues that Huntington sees "countries determined to find their own way are not part of a culturally diverse world, but wrong-headed rebels against a preponderant and enlightened West" (Hunt, 2002). Hunt goes on to call Huntington's thesis "one of the most ethnocentric and aggressive notions in American history," comparing him to an advocate of the 19th Manifest Destiny, where U.S. superiority rests on the basis of "moral rearmament to promote and defend Western values" (Hunt, 2002).

Another way to frame the U.S. involvement in foreign affairs is to use the concept of modernity. Modernity is the argument that the world is divided between

the old values and institutions deemed to be “traditional,” and the new values and institutions labeled “modern.” This interpretation is also ethnocentric; Hunt points out that “the new rendition of modernization...takes an implicitly American form (laissez-faire economics, cultural pluralism and political democracy) and tradition is embodied by countries cursed with seemingly static and ridged cultures that block development and breed popular dissatisfaction” (Hunt 2002). This view places the United States as the model for modernity, making it the duty of America to be on the right side of history “calling to heel those straying from the designated path, and washing its hands of ‘failed states’ hopelessly trapped in the difficult transition from traditional to modern” (Hunt 2002). Hunt accurately connects this ethnocentric and exceptional view of modernization to the emerging forces of globalization, which is intent on creating social, cultural and economic uniformity leaving behind the traditional countries that are left with the decision to conform to American modernity or collapse.

Both of these explanations of the US foreign policy bring a sense of ethnocentrism and American exceptionalism. Wikipedia defines American exceptionalism as:

“The proposition that the United States is different from other countries in that it has a specific world mission to spread liberty and democracy. It is not a notion that the United States is quantitatively better than other countries or that it has a superior culture, but rather that it is “qualitatively different”. In this view, America’s exceptionalism stems from its emergence from a revolution, becoming what political scientist Seymour Martin Lipset called “the first new nation, ‘other than Iceland, to become independent”, and developing a uniquely American ideology, based on liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism and laissez-faire” (2013).

This concept of America as the exceptional model for modernity, or as the exemplar civilization is ethnocentric from its inception. It places the American model of

governance and political ideals at the pinnacle of success, putting America on a benign global humanitarian mission to spread its ideas and values. American exceptionalism can be used to discredit both Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* and the concept of modernity because both arguments are formulated from an exceptionalist perspective. Both views place America as the exemplar making democracy and capitalism the focal point of the American global mission, and in turn vilifying or marginalizing any country or group that does not want to buy into the exceptionalist rhetoric.

Before 1992, the term "American exceptionalism" was only mentioned 12 times in U.S. publications. By 2002, it had been cited 75 times, and more than doubled nearing 155 citations by 2004 (Kohut and Stokes 2006). Similarly, prior to 2002 the American empire was mentioned less than 200 times per year until 2003 and the invasion of Iraq when the number of citations skyrocketed to 1000 (Kohut and Stokes 2006). In his book *Soft Power*, Joseph Nye argues, "America was intent on 'cultural imperialism' through its export of television, music, films, and videos" (Nye 2003). According to Hunt's analysis of the modernity argument, which places American goods and culture as the model for all nations aspiring to be modern, Nye's argument of cultural imperialism demonstrates the concepts of American exceptionalism. The idea of cultural imperialism as described by Nye can hardly be argued against when there is at least one McDonalds and a Starbucks in almost every country on the planet. American entertainment is also dominant all over the globe, transcending mostly all other markets in film, music, sports and television.

Other scholars believe that American exceptionalism has created a political

religion determined to converting the world to its ideas. Clyde Prestowitz argues that “America is the only country with an ‘ism’ attached to its name, America was founded on a set of ideas and one becomes an American by converting to those propositions” such as liberty, equality, individualism, populism and limited government (Prestowitz, 2003). He goes on to argue that Americans do not think of themselves as better than others or view their creed as exclusive because “the nice thing about this religion is that it is a kind of super church that anyone can join regardless of other beliefs or associations. Indeed the chief reason Americans are blind to their own empires is their implicit belief that every human being is a potential American, and that his or her present national or cultural afflictions are an unfortunate but reversible accident” (Prestowitz, 2003). This was demonstrated in the way that Americans have treated Native Americans and immigrants in the past; forcing them to endure a process of Americanization where they were required to learn English and memorize a nationalist historical narrative, while also having to give up their own ‘traditional’ cultures and histories. It is dissonant to agree with Prestowitz’s argument that Americans do not believe they are superior to others because of their creed when they force those who wish to become American to shed the beliefs and values of their previous culture.

Johnothan Monten offers a great interpretation of American exceptionalism by saying that it “existed from the earliest conceptions of ‘America’. With a national identity that is ideational, rather than ethnic/religious or organic, America existed as a notion before it was a nation. Removed from the vicissitudes of the European experience, by both geography and (supposedly) destiny, America was ‘conceived in

liberty', a shining light to the world, and 'tutors to mankind in its pilgrimage to perfection' (Monten 2005). He goes on to argue that American exceptionalism has taken on two functional foreign policies, that "America is to guide the world towards its natural – liberal democratic – end. The form that this direction takes can be seen in two versions: America as exemplar, beacon to the world, and America as vindicator/crusader, spreader of freedom" (Monten 2005). American exceptionalism stems from the idea that America's place in the world system is to promote the spread of democracy and American ideals while alleviating the world from any group or nation that threatens the spread of "freedom". Chris Langille points out that "America's role as exemplar of the democratic idea is to advance the cause of liberty in the support of fledging democracies and to engage in institution building" but he argues that this idea of America is a fantasy, stating that the view of America as the vindicator with the goal of spreading "America's values is not possible by the simple success of America. Utopian presumptions that the liberal world will reform unilaterally and model the American exemplar are seen as 'at best inefficient and at worst utopian" (Langille 2008). By assuming the role of vindicator, the United States is justifiably in charge of destroying the barriers of liberty and democracy that exist in the world, in turn providing the foundation for the idea that the "American military force as a tool of liberation is not seen as a failure of diplomacy but as a response to atavistic tyrannies throughout the world. The rightness of military force is then to be judged first on the ideological principals that drive such force, second from the results that such force produces. American military force as it is used against evil and not in the defense of material interests is

benign and distinct from motivations of real politick (Lipset 1997). This exceptionalism laid the ground work for the use of American military power in the international community as long as it could be politically justified using a vindicationist argument which would paint an American use of force as a benign intervention, thus putting America in the position of the ‘world superhero’, fighting the evils of the world and making the world safe for democracy. This view was humorously exemplified in the movie *Team America*. As long as an enemy poses a ‘threat to democracy,’ military force is justifiable and can be used under this vindicationist perspective even if America’s true motives are anything but benign.

In 2010, K.J. Holsti provided an exemplary summary of the essential characteristics of an exceptionalist foreign policy:

- “1. A responsibility, obligation, and mission to ‘liberate’ others, usually defined as entire societies suffering from some evil, exploitation, or fallen status. National priorities are defined in terms of subordinating self-interest to a larger, assumed universal good. It is messianic in the sense that the exceptionalist policy will ‘deliver’ the less fortunate.
2. Because of these special responsibilities, the exceptionalist state is or should be free from external constraints such as rules or norms that govern or influence the relations between ‘ordinary’ states. Redeemer nations should be free of encumbrances when meeting their global responsibilities.
3. Exceptionalist states usually see themselves existing in a hostile world. Threats are universalized. Problems with local etiologies are defined in terms of a specific example of the broader category of universal threats.
4. Governments and societies of exceptionalist states develop a need to have external enemies; for this reason, threats are often concocted or, where minor, are inflated to extreme proportions.
5. Exceptionalist states portray themselves as innocent victims. They are never the sources of international insecurity, but only the targets of malign forces. They do not act so much as react to a hostile world. They are exceptional, in part, because they are morally clean as the objects of others’ hatreds” (2010).

However, Holsti goes on to state that these exceptionalist foreign policy characteristics have “appeared from time to time in different historical contexts, and

[are] not unique to the United States. Even though rare, it [has occurred] sufficiently throughout the history of the states system to suggest that it is a type of foreign policy” (Holsti 2010). This brings up an important question: How is American exceptionalism unique?

Essentially, what makes the concept of American exceptionalism different than other examples of exceptionalist foreign policies is the unique and excessive brand of American nationalism that is taught and engrained into Americans from a young age. Minxin Pei describes how American nationalism differs from others:

“American nationalism is hidden in plain sight. But even if Americans saw it, they wouldn’t recognize it, they wouldn’t recognize it as nationalism. That’s because American nationalism is a different breed from its foreign cousins and exhibits three unique characteristics: First, American nationalism is based on political ideas, not those of cultural or ethnic superiority...That conception is entirely fitting for a society that still sees itself as a cultural and ethnic melting pot. American nationalism is triumphant rather than aggrieved. In most societies, nationalism is fueled by past grievances caused by external powers. Countries once subjected to colonial rule such as India, and Egypt are among the most nationalistic countries. But American nationalism is the polar opposite of such aggrieved nationalism. American nationalism derives its meaning from victories of peace and war since the countries founding. Triumphant nationalists celebrate the positive and have little empathy for the whining of aggrieved nationalists whose formative experience consisted of a succession of national humiliations and defeats. Finally, American nationalism is forward looking, while nationalism in most other countries is the reverse. Those who believe in the superiority of American values and institutions do not dwell on their historical glories (though such glories constitute the core of American identity). Instead they look forward to even better times ahead, not just at home and abroad. This dynamism imbues American nationalism with a missionary spirit and a short collective memory” (2003)

This concept of American nationalism is the embodiment of American exceptionalist policies. Americans see themselves as the beacons of liberty and democracy within the world. They view it as their job to keep the world safe for freedom because America is the exemplar of the world. Connecting these ideas of nationalism and exceptionalist foreign policy, Holsti concludes “exceptionalism was born of cultures that encompassed perceptions of national superiority, linked to paternalistic and

idealistic compulsions to bring one's own gifts to all mankind and to remake the world in one's own image. All the cases rested on assumptions that societies elsewhere yearned to be 'free'. As the French, the Soviets, and the Americans learned, however, the gifts and good intentions of one's own society may well end up looking like imperialism, hubris, and intolerance of resistance for others" (Holsti 2010).

These policies have created a sense of American denial. Today, Americans are in a state of denial concerning where their country stands in the world because, like Pei states, Americans want to look forward and believe that their values and institutions will carry them onto better pastures. Americans are lulled into a state of trust, believing that American leaders will make the best decisions for the country, not just for themselves and their wealthy friends. Recent history may paint a different picture. The American spirit and the American Dream feed this denial filled nationalism, as Americans are told as young children that they can grow up to be whatever they want as long as they work hard and go to school. Americans are indoctrinated in the idea that they will have a job and be successful as long as they adhere to the American way of life and work hard. However, there is an increasing rate of unemployed college graduates, and the next generation of Americans seems destined to not surpass the accomplishments of their parents and grandparent's generations. Is this brand of American nationalism and foreign policies of American exceptionalism possibly due for a revision? Could it be that this nationalist pride and exuberant exceptionalist ideology created an America that through its actions is not exceptional at all, but is in fact is the complete opposite: unremarkable at best,

destined to be remembered as the country that squandered its moment of greatness?

The Neoconservatives

“All the forces in the world are not so powerful as an idea whose time has come”

Victor Hugo

Neoconservatism in America was born out of the debates of the City College of New York in the 1930's. Irving Kristol the father of neoconservatism heralded CCNY as the 'Harvard of the Proletariat' and described the college as “an environment of mental energy, pure intellect, excitement but generally, of radical politics” separated into two alcoves (Kristol 1977). Alcove 1 consisted of Kristol and his like-minded counterparts, described as a “vibrant community of Trotskyists, Social Democrats and democratic socialists of overly obscure subject and splinter faction;” and the contrasting Alcove 2 was “dominated by Stalinists, ‘official communists who threatened to debase ‘the socialist ideal so as to rob humanity of what Alcove 1 were certain was its last best hope” (Kristol 1977). Langille concludes that the “narrative of neoconservatism’s origins is revealing. The neoconservative movement, in its various mutations over time, could not be described as a simple revision of earlier conservative traditions. Given the left-liberal milieu of neoconservatism’s youth, those who would later emerge as the first generation of neoconservatives can be clearly distinguished, in tradition and composition, from the elements of the ‘Old Right’, libertarian conservatives, religious traditionalists, isolationists and nativists” (Langille 2008). These

politicians were anticommunist and skeptical of modern liberalism and from their inception sought to develop an ideology that was contrary to the liberals.

As the American defeat in Vietnam became evident and the general perception that America's apex of power had been reached, neoconservatives surfaced as a well-constructed movement. Michael Lind explains that the term 'neoconservatism' was Michael Harrington's, originated in the 1970's movement of anti Soviet liberals and social democrats in the tradition of Truman, Kennedy, Johnson, Humphrey, and Henry (Scoop) Jackson, many of whom preferred to call themselves 'paleoliberals' (Lind, 2004). The movement's focus was on confronting the Soviets and the defense of New Deal liberalism, which Langille points out is when "the neoconservatives became firmly bound to the right" (Langille, 2008). This second generation of neoconservatives "were bound together by the related beliefs that first, the Soviet Union remained an expansionist regime to be challenged, and second that American power could be revitalized as moral and necessary" (Langille 2008).

In 1976 the neoconservatives created the Committee on the Present Danger in order to write a report that challenged the conventional perceptions of Soviet power. A group nicknamed 'Team B' whose advisors included Paul Wolfowitz and Paul Nitze, both members of the Bush administrations, that conducted this report. Team B's report concluded that Soviet power was underestimated, and that the Soviets were really strengthening and updating their weaponry and demanded a reactionary build up of American arms and more aggressive anti-communism. Team B's estimates of Soviet power were later found to be a wild exaggeration, but still

found the ear of Ronald Reagan. Reagan's foreign policy was branded by the idea that Soviet power was not to be contained, but decreased. Langille points out Reagan's success in "the decline and the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union would occur in conjunction with, though not because of, an expansion of the American power and vigorous materiel and moral support for anti- communist forces in Latin America, eastern Europe and Afghanistan" (Langille 2008). At the end of the Cold War, America became the world's sole superpower that no longer had an evil enemy.

Neoconservatives still held on to their xenophobic beliefs that liberal democracy was constantly under attack by external threats, and that it is America's duty to create a world that is safe for democracy. Seeing history as a series of adversaries that opposed American democracy, neoconservatives believed "the collapse of Nazism allowed for the rise of international Communism, so did the collapse of the Soviet Union allow for the rise of Islamism as liberty's next 'existential threat,' the red menace giving way to the green menace. America, neoconservatives argued, was the 'custodian of international system' and could not except the delusions of liberal institutionalism, multilateralism, which would have America take a 'vacation from history'" (Langille 2008). This view of America as the custodian of the international system is exceptionalist to the core, it gives America the right to 'take out the trash' however it sees fit, in order to remain at the top of the international order.

This neoconservative vision of an American unipolar power movement can be traced back to Charles Krauthammer who proclaimed that there would be an "era

of weapons of mass destruction". Weapons proliferation into the hands of America's enemies would force the West to establish a new regime to police these weapons and those who brandish them" (Krauthammer 1991). The new regime in Krauthammer's vision was an unchallengeable America that does not concede power to the 'multipolar consensus or liberal institutionalism' i.e. the United Nations. He goes on to advocate that "freedom's best hope is in American strength and will, the strength and will to lead a unipolar world, unashamedly laying down the rules of the world order and being prepared to enforce them. America's unipolar movement in defense of liberty would have to become a unipolar era" (Krauthammer 1991).

The neoconservative view of America's role in the post-Cold War world continued to develop and can be found in the 1992 draft of the Defense Planning Guide as well as the 1997 declaratory statement of the Project for the New American Century (PNAC). James Mann points out that the Defense Planning Guide states that in order "to prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources would under consolidated control be sufficient to generate global power. American policy should attempt to "strengthen our ties to democratic allies to challenge regimes hostile to our interests and values to promote the cause of political freedom abroad and to accept the responsibility for America's unique role in preserving and extending international order friendly to our security, our prosperity and our principals" (Mann 2004) In the 1997 aftermath of Desert Storm, Wolfowitz and Zalmay Khalilzad argued that "military force against Iraq was not enough. It must be part of an overall political strategy that sets as its goal not merely the containment

of Saddam but the liberation of Iraq from his tyranny” (Khalilzad and Wolfowitz, 1997). The George W. Bush administration would act on this position six years later when they invaded Iraq to ‘liberate’ it from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein to promote democracy in the Middle East. Schmidt and Williams contend that neoconservatives believe “American power as essentially benign, they (neoconservatives) argue that it is unnecessary for other countries to be concerned about the global imbalance of power and conclude that a return to a multipolar balance of power would be a direct threat to both American security interests and international order” (Schmidt and Williams 2008). This notion that it is unnecessary for any other country to be concerned with the unipolar balance of power in the post-Cold War world is exceptionalist from the start, and fundamental to the ideology of the neoconservatives who believe that other nations should leave it to the United States to solve the problems of the world however it sees fit.

John Mearsheimer argues that neoconservatives believe “international politics operate according to a ‘bandwagoning’ logic, rather than attempting to check the power of more powerful states, weaker states actually join forces with it” (Mearsheimer 2001). This exceptionalist idea of bandwagoning was used to gain support in selling the invasion of Iraq. The administration claimed that by liberating Iraq and establishing a democracy, the rest of the Middle East would jump on the bandwagon. This idea also perpetuates the previous exceptionalist notion that it is not necessary for other countries to question American policies or actions; rather weaker states should simply give up resisting and fall in line with the leading country in the world.

These ideas that form the neoconservative political thought are directly in line with the vindicationist thinking of American exceptionalism described by Monten. This ideology also exemplifies verbatim Holisi's 5 characteristics of an exceptionalist foreign policy. Neoconservatives believe that in order to secure peace in the world America must become the world's police force. Neoconservatives also assert that the American military is responsible for vindicating all of the problems that the neoconservatives see as blocking liberty and democracy from forming in other places in the world, targeting mainly the Middle East. To further exemplify the neoconservative perspective, David Frum and Richard Perle's book, *An End to Evil*, explains that "a world at peace; a world governed by law; a world in which all people are free to find their own destinies: That dream has not yet come true, it will not come true soon, but if it ever does come true, it will be brought into being by American armed might" (Frum and Perle 2004).

Langille concludes that "understanding neoconservatism is understanding the American exceptionalist impulse of which neoconservatism is merely an extreme representation" (Langille 2008). The belief that that using military force will "liberate" people and develop democracies in America's image based on the bandwagoning theory is truly the antithesis of exceptionalist thought. The election of George W. Bush in 2000 created the perfect storm for the neoconservative exceptionalist foreign policy, placing them in position to implement their plans for a global vindication against the 'terrorist threat.' As Paul Harvey stated in 2005 "Neoconservatism...has reshaped neoliberal practices in two fundamental respects: first in its concern for order as an answer to the chaos of individual

interests, and second in its concern for an overweening morality as the necessary social glue to keep the body politic secure in the face of internal and external dangers,” a view that was sold to the public and the world as a foreign policy for a liberating exposition that would rid the world of terrorism and by so doing, make the world safe for democracy and American values (Harvey 2005). Nana de Graaff and Bastiaan van Apeldoorn set out to map the neoconservative network by connecting the members of the PNAC to private institutions, government, ad hoc geopolitical strategy projects, as well as corporations. De Graaff and van Apeldoorn found that “very few actors have but one connection. In fact, a substantial part of the network, 27 out of 52 actors, [are] connected on all four dimensions. These findings thus confirm the notion that there has been a cohesive neoconservative network within a vast institutional structure at its disposal, providing it with a dense and highly connected patten of channels though which ideas could be diffused and shared”(de Graaff and van Apeldoorn, 2011). The number of neoconservative actors within Republican administrations according to de Graaff and van Apeldoorn “ranges from a total of 34 in the Reagan administration to 23 in the Bush Sr. administration, with 29 in the Bush Jr. administration” (de Graaff and Van Apeldoorn 2011). This proves that the neoconservatives were in positions of power for years; now all they needed was an event that would allow their exceptionalist policies and ideology to become accepted reality. They implanted these ideas like seeds that would grow and take root among the general population.

September 11, 2001

“Freedom itself was attacked this morning by a faceless coward, and freedom will be defended”

George W. Bush

There is no doubt that there is a historical significance to the attacks that took place on September 11, 2001. The tragic events of that day have been etched into the collective American memory through many different visual aids such as documentaries and full-length motion pictures. The most interesting part of this historical phenomenon was the instant identification of 9/11 as a turning point in American history. Richard Armitage, a senior member of the State department, remembers telling people on the evening of the attacks that “history begins today.” Joanne Meyerowitz cites an editorial in the *New York Times* on September 12, 2001, which described the attacks as “one of those moments in which history splits, and we define the world as ‘before’ and ‘after,” she goes on to assert that “history never rips in two, ‘before’ and ‘after’ are never entirely severed, even in the moments of greatest historical rupture” (Meyerowitz 2002). Tariq Ali also vices this opinion and reminds Americans that it is important to realize that “tragedies are always discussed as if they took place in a void, but actually each tragedy is conditioned by its setting, local and global. The events of September 2001 are no exception” (Ali, 2002). Ali’s interpretation of these events is of high importance when studying the events of 9/11 and their aftermath.

Kerbs and Lobasz do a wonderful job vocalizing that 9/11 demanded an immediate response by the U.S government and left the door open for multiple interpretations of the attacks. However, the government, more specifically the Bush administration, developed a universal narrative that would become the desired perspective of these events. Kerbs and Lobasz attempt to analyze the significance of 9/11 and the Bush administration’s popular narrative of the event. This is a

significant approach because there are many different perspectives that can be taken with any given event, however as historians one must analyze how an event is portrayed through different perspectives in order to gain an objective point of view, if at all possible. Kerbs and Lobasz's observe that:

"The attacks ostensibly revealed a world in which state power was severely attenuated, in which the threat of mass-casualty terrorism suddenly became very real, and in which the ethical distinction between preemption and prevention seemed outmoded. This interpretation of September 11 privileged and thus underpinned numerous domestic and foreign policy initiatives, for established policies had to prove their continued relevance. It in fact presumed that what was old was inherently flawed and what was new was necessarily an appropriate adjustment to new realities. The result was a U.S. foreign policy that was far more assertive (if not aggressive), militarized, and unilateral in tone and in substance" (2007).

Kerbs and Lobasz describe the administration's narrative as a "series of binaries they contrasted, the goodness and virtue of America with the "evil" of its terrorist adversaries, the freedom that Americans prized with the despotism that its enemies represented" (Kerbs and Lobasz 2007).

This narrative places the United States in the role of the victim, suggesting that Americans have done nothing to provoke these attacks. This narrative was used by the Bush administration as early as September 20th 2001, when Bush addressed Congress and declared his global War on Terror. This war was anticipated to be unique from all wars fought in the past because the enemy faced in this war has been depicted as different and unlike any opponent America had ever faced before. "They hate us for our freedom", Bush continued to claim, thereby justifying American military involvement abroad in order to vindicate the gaping wound America had suffered because of the terrorist attacks. From the very beginning, the administration set out to create a narrative that was "us" against "them," Bush even famously stated that "you're either with us or you're against us" creating a story that

demonized Muslims and exemplified the United States. This perspective is exceptionalist from its very conception because it fails to consider the motivations behind those responsible for the attacks, as well as the foreign policy decisions regarding the Middle East that lead to this attack on the symbols of American economic and military power. This is further exemplified by Kerbs and Lobaszn by noting that “Public opinion surveys over the coming years questioned not whether the U.S. should engage in a War on Terror, but rather how that war might be most effectively waged thereby presuming its appropriateness as an organizing discourse” (Kerbs and Lobaszn 2007).

Framing the War on Terror as a reaction to the actions of the terrorists was fundamental in creating this exceptionalist mentality in regards to the administration’s narrative of 9/11. As early as 2002, Nicholas Lemann had stated that the War on Terror had “entered the language so fully, and framed the way people think about how the United States is reacting to the September 11th attacks so completely, that the idea that declaring and waging war on terror was not the sole inevitable, logical consequences of the attacks just isn’t in circulation” (Lemann 2002). Even a year later there was still no question that the War on Terror was justifiable because of the September 11th attacks. Bush and his cohorts were able to use the media and their rhetoric to create this exceptionalist narrative by invoking the deep-seeded nationalism within the country creating this good vs. evil story that made America out to be the victim of senseless violence which warranted an immediate military response. America was wounded and confused and many people looked to the government to explain these events and their historical relevance.

What they were sold was a saturated story, soaked in exceptionalist rhetoric that placed America in the vindicationist position to strike against those 'evil doers' who had brought harm to our country. As early as September 20th 2001 Bush began to paint the 'terrorist threat' as people who hated democracy and freedom, comparing the Muslims to totalitarians who had no respect for human dignity and only wanted to submit the world to fundamental Sharia Law. Kerbs and Lobasz offer a great explanation for the success of these tactics stating "it suggested that at stake in the War on Terror was something even more fundamental than the lives of American citizens: the survival of democracy at home" (Kerbs and Lobasz 2007).

The primary question one must ask when creating an alternative narrative surrounding the 9/11 attacks stems from whether or not you believe America was attacked because of 'who Americans are,' or because of 'what Americans have done'. In an attempt to answer the latter, Krebs and Lobasz offer these conclusions about the accusations facing the United States:

"It had financially and politically assisted repressive regimes across the Arab and Muslim world. It had given Israel unquestioned political support and implicitly sanctioned its occupation of Palestinian territory. It had, by spreading neoliberal economic policies, threatened traditional ways of life, generated economic dependency, and promoted a race to the environmental bottom. The immediate turn to a militarized response, the War on Terror, highlighted the U.S. capitalist regime's impulse for imperialist expansion" (2007).

These interpretations of American actions pre-9/11 create a less flattering vision of America, and frame the events of 9/11 as a wake up call for Americans to change the way that they view themselves and how they act within the world. Kerbs and Lobasz go on to conclude using opinion data collected from the Pew Research Center that this alternative view "made little headway beyond those predisposed to it from the

start: opinion remained steady between 2001 and 2004 in denying that U.S. wrong doing abroad was primarily responsible for the September 11th attacks” (Kerbs and Lobasz 2007). This is not a surprising fact considering the exceptionalist framework surrounding the public narrative of the events pushed forward by the Bush administration that those who already held preconceived notions about America’s involvement in the Middle East adopted alternative views. Those who held these views were not the average “Joe Sixpack” American seeking to make sense of the horrific events of that Tuesday morning. These were Americans who have been observing U.S. foreign policy for the past 30 years; these were the Americans who have been questioning American motives and intentions regarding foreign policy for quite some time but had small audiences and little public credibility. Frank Rich points out that “the very few who had anything critical to say on the subject were greeted with such a disproportionate avalanche of invective that you could hardly guess that Susan Sontag, Bill Maher and Noam Chomsky were a writer, a late night comic, and a linguistics professor, Americans with less clout and a smaller following than a substitute weatherman on the *Today* show” (Rich 2006). These alternative views and questioning were instead barely audible mumbles under the breath of the general public’s voice.

The Bush administration used the press to continue to dominate the public with its exceptionalist narrative as it told the American people that the Muslim anti-American sentiment stemmed from the fact that Americans are free, and that America stands for democracy. Author Frank Rich concludes in the aftermath of 9/11 “the White House expected obedience not merely from entertainers but from

the press- and mostly got it. The post 9/11 presidential address to Congress was all it took for Washington to uncork a Hollywood fairy tale, or perhaps a Shakespearean one, in which the immature leader of September 10 was transformed overnight into a giant by a single scripted speech” (Rich 2007). This speech resulted in a comparison of Bush to Abraham Lincoln in The Washington Post article “Echoes of Lincoln” by David Border. He stated “like Lincoln, Bush has tried to make it clear we are not warring on other peoples, not Muslims nor Arabs, but rather on those who threaten the safety of the Union and our God-given freedoms” (Border 2001). Comparing Bush to Lincoln elevates him to a high standard with the American public; average Americans look at Lincoln and see him as “Honest Abe,” and by comparing Bush to Lincoln, Bush becomes trustworthy.

The White House used the press to continue to sell its version of 9/11 and to gain the trust and consent of public opinion. Slogans such as “Never Forget” became a part of the American lexicon overnight. Bush used the press to tell the people that through the War on Terror, the U.S. would avenge the injuries suffered on 9/11 by looking to the future and creating a world safe for democracy using the American ideals that motivated the terrorists to attack America. The White House controlled the press to such an extent that when the first military strikes were made in Afghanistan in October, “there were no pictures available except from Aljazeera, the Arab network based in Qatar...it was also Aljazerra that on the very first day of U.S. military action broadcast a video in which Osama bin Laden threatened further terrorism. Bin Laden was preceded on screen by his deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, who asked, “American people, can you ask yourselves why there is so much hate

against America?" (Rich 2007). This video and those images were censored not made mainstream because they did not perpetuate the narrative of the White House, and could have fueled the alternative argument that set out to ask, "what has America done" to be reviled and attacked.

Failing to address and acknowledge any alternative perspective or point of view, or to discredit, patronize and even terminate those that held these views became common practice for the Bush White House. The notion of 'you're either with us or against us' became not only the standard policy toward other nations but for all Americans too. These actions and policies are exceptionalist in their purest form as Bush's narrative requires the complete submission and faith of those who follow it, to believe fully that there is only one perspective and truth behind these attacks and it is only 'our' version that is creditable. Kerbs and Lobasz conclude that the exceptionalist Bush narrative of 9/11:

"explained the day's horrendous events to a shaken public. They identified for the domestic audience the dramatis personae (villain, victim), their chief characteristics (tyrannical, fascistic, evil; free, tolerant, good), and the motivation for the murderous action (hatred) and for the response (righteousness). Relatively little attention was paid in representations of the War on Terror to considerations of pragmatism (What are the net costs of military action, as opposed to other policy instruments?) or justice (What laws have the terrorists violated? For what crime might they be prosecuted? How can they be held legally accountable?). In the immediate aftermath of the attacks President Bush and his inner circle were inarticulate. Yet over the succeeding days and weeks, they asserted themselves as the chief authors of the dominant narrative, and the media hardly deviated from the official line. The result was a prose of solidarity rather than a prose of information. The Bush administration expended its rhetorical energies primarily on articulating a vision of America and of the values it holds dear" (2007).

In order to adopt an alternative narrative of 9/11 one must be ready to look at American history since the end of the Cold War objectively, without an exceptionalist lens. Historians must be more critical of their biases when studying an event as colossal as 9/11 because of the historical implications it has had for

America and the entire world. By creating the popular narrative described above, Bush and his administration were able to create public support to justify military action in Iraq in less than two years by using the same strategies of dominating the public narrative by using the press to sell their exceptionalist policies. Bush used the press to attack those that did not agree with him and to promote the policies and positions of his administration. He rendered support of the public by tapping into the exceptionalist and nationalistic tendencies of the general American public and to silence those who opposed the administration's narrative. This approach to the War on Terror can be traced back to the days and weeks after the 9/11 attacks in that the administration used the attacks of September 11th to manipulate a vulnerable general public that was hurt, confused and easily persuaded when confronted with binary arguments about American freedoms. Since these tactics were so successful in creating an accepted exceptionalist public narrative of 9/11, it was able to be extended and used to drum up support by scaring the public into supporting military action in Iraq and Afghanistan.

By fruitfully shaping 9/11 as a world-changing event that required a global War on Terrorism, which could only be won using the American military to spread American ideals, and its style of governance in the name of saving democracy at home and liberating those abroad in order to make the world safe for democracy; the Bush administration had an unprecedented opportunity because of its publicly accepted and published exceptionalist rhetoric. They used this to expand the War on Terrorism by shifting the public's attention to Iraq and Saddam Hussein in order to continue their exceptionalist plans of spreading American ideals and democracy

through the use of military force, thus conveying to the international community that America was ready defend its ideas and geopolitical interests by using military force.

Operation Iraqi Freedom

“America goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own. She will commend the general cause by the countenance of her voice, and the benign' sympathy of her example. She well knows that by once enlisting under other banners than her own, were they even the banners of foreign independence, she would involve herself beyond the power of extrication, in all the wars of interest and intrigue, of envy, and ambition, which assume the colors and usurp the standard of freedom. The fundamental maxims of her policy would insensibly change from liberty to force. She might become the dictatress of the world. She would be no longer the ruler of her own spirit.”

John Quincy Adams

Successfully building a neoconservative narrative of the 9/11 attacks was the crucial first step in the Bush administration’s plan for using the War on Terror as justification for future military action in the Middle East. Lloyd Gardner describes that only “a few days after 9/11, Bush met with his aids at Camp David. Present were Secretary of State Colin Powell, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz... Wolfowitz argued for attacking Iraq” (Gardner 2005). In Bob Woodward’s book *Bush at War*, Bush recalls that “Powell asserted that everyone in the international coalition was ready to go after al Qaeda, but that extending the war to other terrorist groups or countries could cause some of them to drop out [Bush] said he didn’t want other countries dictating terms or conditions for the war on terrorism [because] ‘At some point, we may be the only ones left [and] that’s okay with me. We are America” (Woodward 2002). This quote is the zenith of American exceptionalist thinking in that Bush wanted America to be in control of the War on Terror from the beginning so that his policies would be those implemented regardless of what the implications were for America’s standing

in the international community. He was so confident in the American mandate to lead the War on Terror that he was willing to alienate America and stand alone against those who opposed his policies regarding the future military actions against terrorism groups and nations 'sponsoring and harboring' terrorism.

Iraq had been a strategic target of the U.S government, especially for the neoconservatives since the first Gulf War of 1991, and many of the George W. Bush administration members had been instrumental in the execution of the first Gulf War, viewing Iraq as critical to U.S. energy interests. Vice President Dick Cheney was one of the most prominent, having served as Secretary of Defense under George H.W. Bush who "had resisted the call to topple Saddam Hussein," which John Paros suggests "ten years later must have rankled with him [Cheney]" (Prados 2005). Paros goes on to explain that in 2003, Cheney's records were opened by a court order and "included maps of Iraqi oilfields, documents listing Iraqi oil development programs and other material on the Iraqi oil industry" while no other similar documents were found on any other nation (Prados 2005). Shortly after the attacks on 9/11, "the president linked Iraq with Iran and North Korea in an 'axis of evil' and he claimed for the United States the right to wage preventive war against regimes that sought weapons of mass destruction. During the autumn and winter of 2002-3, the administration built a case that Saddam Hussein was developing such weapons, which he might himself use against the U.S. or other countries or which he might transfer to terrorists" (Brands 2006).

The evidence the administration used to build public support for military action in Iraq came as early as December 2001 from intelligence information from

an Iraqi defector who described himself as a civil engineer who “personally worked on renovations of secret facilities for biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons in underground wells, private villas and under the Saddam Hussein Hospital in Baghdad as recently as a year ago” (Rich 2006). The Bush administration also did their best to connect Saddam to the attacks of September 11th, having Dick Cheney stating on national television that “new information has come to light revealing that the lead 9/11 hijacker, did apparently travel to Prague on a number of occasions and on at least one occasion, we have reporting that places him in Prague with a senior Iraqi intelligence official a few months before the attack on the World Trade Center...vice president [then] ran through a list of other possible links between the two going back many years” (Rick 2006). Schmidt and Williams are also quick to point out “neoconservatives, especially Dick Cheney, are never tired of making the link between the 9/11 terrorist attacks and Iraq. They portrayed a picture to the American public of Saddam as a serial aggressor who could not be allowed to possess WMD” (Schmidt Williams 2007). The administration argued that Saddam was attempting to acquire materials such as aluminum tubing and yellow cake uranium; materials necessary to create nuclear weapons that Saddam intended to sell to terrorists. This rhetoric was fed to the media to produce support for military action by fabricating a hypothetical situation, which ended with Saddam selling these bombs to terrorists. The administration justified the invasion of Iraq stating, “we don’t want the smoking gun to be in the form of a mushroom cloud” pandering to those in the public who were fearful of terrorists acquiring a nuclear weapon and detonating it (Rich 2006). The drums of war were pounding loudly and the Bush

administration used the previous methods of strategically using the press in order to acquire public support for a preemptive invasion of Iraq that fit their exceptionalist narrative and policies. One decision that supports the exceptionalist actions of the Bush administration is “the administration’s willingness to proceed unilaterally [in invading Iraq]... to defy the will of much of the international community, including the UN Security Council” (Schmid and Williams 2008). This supports Woodward’s notion that Bush was willing to do whatever was necessary to be the dominate force in the War on Terrorism and would even stand alone against the international community to progress their exceptionalist policies through the use of the military. Schmidt and Williams go on to present the connection between neoconservative exceptionalist ideology and the Iraq War stating that the Iraq:

“situation has unspurisingly given rise to intense scrutiny of not only the internal rational for war, but the political dynamics which led to the policy’s formulation and execution. The focus of this reexamination has been neoconservatism. If at the beginning of the Bush presidency there was a general failure in the academic community to appreciate the influence that neoconservatism had on American foreign policy, there is today a torrent of literature and documentaries illustrating how in the days after 9/11 neoconservatives were able to steer America’s response to terrorist attacks in the direction of an invasion of Iraq” (2007).

Echoing the previous conclusion of James Prados, that only “President Bush, Vice President Chaney and the people around them” can answer the question of why we invaded Iraq; they “assumed themselves to be ‘the best and the brightest.’ *They* had the answer to terrorism, make an example of some other country (Iraq)...The ideological blinders were on tight, not only did the neocons refuse to deal with any objections to their intended course, but administration officials and their political allies often responded to questions raised about their course by impugning the patriotism and motives of the questioner”(Prados 2005). The neoconservatives

within the Bush administration were not to be questioned on their tactics or policies and would attack those who opposed them.

Another claim of the Bush administration was that “by removing the dictator Saddam Hussein democracy would bloom in Iraq” (Schmit and Williams 2007). The White House wanted to use a humanitarian argument, stating that by invading Iraq they would be spreading democracy to those who desperately needed it because of the oppressive leadership of Saddam Hussein. According to the neoconservative view that the creation of “Iraqi democracy will succeed, and that success will send forth news from Damascus to Tehran, that freedom can be the future of every nation. Promoting democracy and freedom in the Islamic world, by force if necessary was viewed as a crucial element of the overall strategy of countering radical extremism and terror” (Bush, 2003). Barry Munslow and Tim O’Dempsey agree with Schmit, Williams and Parados, declaring “gross policy miscalculations were directly the result of the ideologically driven neoconservative agenda, adopting a missionary zeal to spread a neoconservative American version of freedom and democracy to the Middle East by military force” (Munslow and O’Dempsey 2009). They highlight Paul Pillar who stated in 2006 that “in the wake of the Iraq war, it has become clear that official intelligence analysis was not relied on in making even the most significant national security decisions, that intelligence was misused publicly to justify decisions already made” by the administration, who repeatedly ignored information that was contrary to their exceptionalist policies and ideology (Pillar 2006). One effect, Munslow and O’Dempsey describe is that Iraq “has had serious implications for humanitarianism world wide...the great gains in

the development of humanitarianism, pioneered by Western enlightenment values, have been undermined by the Bush government's categorization of, and strategic implementation of, a war on terror. The means used to fight the war defeated the very principles and humanitarian values that the West has developed and propounded over time, undermining the credibility of the project" (Munslow and O'Dempsey 2009). These views are also apparent in Francis Fukuyama and Michael McFaul's analysis: "the years since the September 11 attacks, the rhetorical attention devoted to promoting freedom, liberty and democracy has greatly outpaced actual progress in advancing democracy. To date, democracy has failed to take hold in the two countries in which Bush ordered the forcible ouster of autocratic regimes, Afghanistan and Iraq" (Fukuyama and McFaul 2008). These actions and policies of the United States have created an environment in the Middle East where "autocratic regimes in the region have used the excuse of terrorism (Egypt and Pakistan) or the alleged threat of U.S. invasion (Iran) to tighten autocracy" (Fukuyama and McFaul 2008).

In a more recent account, "Iraq stands today as a country close to collapse, with mounting political, societal, and judicial problems. Ten years after the war, Iraq could soon become a failed state unless there are structural changes to the way the country is ruled, including a stronger, more just, and more equitable central government" (al-Oraibi 2013). In this latest portrayal of the American failure to spread democracy through the use of military force, al-Oraibi describes the last ten years in Iraq as a 'decade of lost opportunity,' however he argues that fixing the problems in Iraq "will require the support of key allies, most importantly, the United

States, which remains the country with the most potential influence and yet seems to shy away from it”(al-Oraibi 2013).

Colin Powell warned the President and other neoconservatives about the dangers of invading Iraq, using what became known as the Pottery Barn rule of ‘if you break it you own it.’ In an interview with David Samuels when asked about this conversation Powell said “The famous expression, if you break it you own it—which is not a Pottery Barn expression, by the way—was a simple statement of the fact that when you take out a regime and you bring down a government, you become the government. On the day that the statue came down and Saddam Hussein’s regime ended, the United States was the occupying power”(Samuels, 2007). Charles Tripp offers a synopsis of the problems that faced the Bush administration after the invasion and overthrow of Saddam: “the U.S. administration seemed intent on setting up a fully functioning liberal democracy, within a very short space of time...Yet the way the U.S. administration set about this ambitious task was at odds with its declared goals. The result was a troubled and increasingly insecure country in which insurgency, lawlessness and sectarian conflict claimed growing numbers of Iraqi lives, in addition to taking a mounting toll of the occupation forces” (Tripp 2007). Thomas Ricks explains that “the US position suffers from the strategic problem of the fruit of the poisoned tree—that is , when a nation goes to war for faulty reasons, it undercuts all the actions that follow, especially when it won’t concede those errors” (Ricks 2006). President Barack Obama has attempted to concede on the errors of the previous administration, and distanced themselves from Iraq immediately, describing the withdrawal of

American troops from Iraq on the White House website as “the fulfillment of a promise Barack Obama made to the American people even before he became President” (The White House). al-Oraibi argues that:

“Iraq is in itself a missed opportunity for the Obama administration” citing that “U.S. policy in Iraq has thus far meant a loss of critical possibilities which could have strengthened Washington’s position in the Middle East. As the U.S. map of regional allies is redrawn with political changes on the ground, it would help if the United States could rely on Iraqi support and cooperation in key areas such as the Syria crisis or fostering Gulf security...The U.S would therefore benefit from reconsidering its alliances inside Iraq, and work to develop a relationship with those truly committed to a country which respects the rights and interests of its people and allies (2013).

al-Oraibi is calling on the Obama administration to do what the Bush administration and the neoconservatives refused to do because of their exceptionalist ideology and agenda: ‘fix’ the problems that were created by the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq in order to save face and recuperate from the last ‘decade of lost opportunity.’ In attempting to promote democracy through the barrel of a gun, America and her exceptionalist and ambitious policies and actions have created a situation that threatens its standing within the international community.

Collapse of American Power?

“I must here address Americans on the subject of the decline of their own country, and I do not see how a normal human being could take pleasure in telling other normal human beings that their country is ill, that it has made foolish strategic choices and that they as Americans, must prepare for a reduction of their power and most likely, of their standard of living”

Emmanuel Todd

The period following the Cold War era brought about the arrival of the ‘unipolar world’, where America was viewed, and viewed itself, as the ‘lone superpower’ on the geopolitical stage. Due to American unilateral intervention in Iraq and American exceptionalist policies after 9/11, there has been considerable

debate in recent years regarding the current status of American power and its role within the international community.

In *After The Empire*, Emmanuel Todd, a French scholar, describes the actions of America in the post 9/11 world prior to the invasion of Iraq in 2002 predicating that the United States cannot continue to behave on the international stage the way it has in the recent past. Todd notes his motivation for writing the book in saying, “the recent behavior of the United States—its emergence as a major factor in the world’s disorder and armed conflicts – that has made me become a good European, and by some token, politically opposed to the United States” (Todd 2002). Todd’s central thesis is that America is engaging in what he calls “theatrical micromilitarism” by “the aggressive preemptive strike of the world’s leading military power against a military midget—an underdeveloped country of twenty-four million inhabitants exhausted by a decade long economic embargo” (Todd 2002). Todd describes America’s exceptionalist policies as targeting weak countries (Iraq and Afghanistan) in an attempt to display its military dominance in order to remain the “indispensable nation” by being a “militaristic, agitated, uncertain, anxious country projecting its own disorder around the globe” (Todd 2002). Todd concludes, “America’s real war is about economics not terrorism. The country is battling to maintain its status as the world’s financial center by making a symbolic show of its military might in the heart of Eurasia, thereby hoping to forget and have others ignore America’s industrial weakness, its financial needs and its predatory character” (Todd 2002). Todd accurately described the economic problems facing America, which were apparent as early as 2002, eerily predicting the financial crisis

of 2008 saying, “one can predict that in the years or months to come financial institutions in Europe and Asia with heavy investments in the United States will lose a lot of money—the fall of the stock market being only the first stage in the disappearance of forging holdings in the United States. The dollar is dropping, but no economic model allows one to predict how low it will go since its very status as reserve currency is becoming uncertain” (Todd 2002).

A more contemporary look at the economic problems confronting America can be observed in Christopher Layne’s *“This Time Its Real: The End of Unipolarity and the Pax Americana”* In this article Layne agrees with many of Todd’s conclusion, and goes on to provide a great deal of statistical evidence that supports the claims that America’s biggest problem is its economy and provides analysis of Todd’s prediction that there would be an economic crisis that would reveal the weakness of the American Economy. Layne states “the Great Recession has had a two-fold impact. First it highlighted the shift of global wealth—and power—from West to East, a trend illustrated by China’s breathtakingly rapid rise to great-power status. Second it has raised doubts about the robustness of the economic and financial underpinning of the United State’s primacy” (Layne 2012). Layne uses statistics from the World Bank to illustrate the end of American unipolar power stating “that six countries—China, India, Brazil, Russia, Indonesia, and South Korea—will account for one-half of the world’s economic growth between 2011 and 2025” (Layne 2012). Layne also goes on to observe the two major problems that the exceptionalist policies concerning Iraq and Afghanistan Wars have brought on the economy are “the spiraling US national debt and deepening doubts about the dollar’s future role

as the international economy's reserve currency" (Layne 2012). Layne and Todd agree that the role of the dollar as world reserve currency within the international economy is crucial to America's geopolitical power. Layne offers a wonderful explanation of how arrogant American exceptionalist ideology and practices have taken advantage of this historically unprecedented economic situation, stating:

"The dollar's role as the international system's reserve currency allow[ed] the United States to live beyond its means in ways that other nations cannot. As long as others believe that the United States will repay its debts, and that uncontrollable inflation will not dilute the dollar's value, the United States can finance its external ambitions ("guns") and domestic social and economic programs ("butter") by borrowing money from foreigners...The dollar's reserve currency status has, in effect, been a very special kind of "credit card." It is special because the United States does not have to earn the money to pay its bills. Rather, when the bills come due, the United States borrows funds from abroad and / or prints money to pay them. The United States can get away with this and live beyond its means, spending with little restraint on maintaining its military dominance, preserving costly domestic entitlements, and indulging in conspicuous private consumption, as long as foreigners are willing to lend it money (primarily by purchasing Treasury bonds)" (2012)

The recent actions of America and its ability to manipulate the international economy by having this "credit card" at its disposal is just another example of America's exceptionalist ideology and policies. The role of the dollar has created an environment that places America in an exceptional role, but America has abused its mandate, and failed as the economic hegemon of the international system. America is supposed to be "the lender of last resort in the international economy" since its dollar is the basis of the world economic system, however "the U.S. has become the worlds largest debtor" proving that it has failed as the economic hegemon and is also declining in international influence and power (Layne 2012).

Joseph Nye offers a different outlook for the future of America in his article "The Twenty-First Century Will Not Be a 'Post-American' World" concluding that "The United States has very real problems and certainly needs to deal with its debt

and deficit problems, but the American economy remains highly productive. America remains first in total R&D expenditures, first in university rankings, first in Nobel prizes, first on indices of entrepreneurship, and according to the World Economic Forum, the fifth most competitive economy in the world (China ranks 26th)” (Nye 2012). Nye goes on to compare the U.S. and China stating “China can draw on a talent pool of 1.3 billion people, while the United States can not only draw on a pool of 7 billion people, but can also recombine them in a diverse culture that enhances creativity in a way that ethnic Han nationalism cannot” (Nye 2012). Nye is exceptionalist in his view of America, playing into the nationalistic notion of a melting pot by assuming that America can attract its talent from the entire world’s population and not just its own due to its ‘diverse’ culture. Nye concludes that

“The United States faces serious problems regarding debt, secondary education, and political grid- lock, but one should remember that they are only part of the picture...universalistic values are also in the nature of our political culture, but we often promote these values best by being what Ronald Reagan called “a shining city on a hill.” The global information age of the twenty-first century will be different from the past century and will require a better strategy than America used in the past decade, but it will not be a ‘post-American world” (2012).

Nye does not mention the role of the dollar as the major problem facing America in the future, and calls for a new strategy moving forward in order to secure a favorable position for America within the international geopolitical system. Nye is suggesting a new strategy but fails to discard the old one; he is exceptionalist throughout his article and even quotes Reagan’s ‘city on the hill’ speech, which is exceptionalist to the core. Nye must remove himself from his exceptionalist bias in order to accurately argue against Layne and Todd. Nye gives a contemporary exceptionalist argument that offers no real solution other than a ‘better strategy’ but never once acknowledges his exceptionalist ideology as the root cause for these

problems facing the United States. Nye's conclusion that "there are solutions to current American problems" is correct but they will never be reached if he and the majority of Americans continue to see the world through an exceptionalist lens.

"The true test of the American ideal is whether we're able to recognize our failings and then rise together to meet the challenges of our time. Whether we allow ourselves to be shaped by events and history, or whether we act to shape them. Whether chance of birth or circumstance decides life's big winners and losers, or whether we build a community where, at the very least, everyone has a chance to work hard, get ahead, and reach their dreams."

Barack Obama

In order for America to remain a major competitor on the international stage, it must take off its exceptionalist glasses, and move forward with an understanding of the recent past. The United States must create a post-9/11 narrative that answers 'what have we done' rather than 'we are hated for our freedoms.' By analyzing the arguments of Todd and Layne, it can be argued that the unprecedented freedom of having the world's reserve currency at our disposal only made our exceptionalist policies worse. It created a blank check situation for the United States, and America took advantage of it. This has resulted in a profound sense of American arrogance supporting the idea that America is "too big to fail." I believe this to be false, and my fear rests in the fact that the rest of the world is ready to allow America to reap what it has sown. Todd concludes that "At the very moment when the rest of the world now undergoing a process of stabilization thanks to improvements in education, demographics, and democracy is on the verge of discovering that it can get along without America, America is realizing that it cannot get along without the rest of the world" (Todd 2002).

In order to reverse the lasting effects that exceptionalist ideology and practices have had on America's international standing, future educators must make

it their mission to address these sentiments whenever they can throughout the teaching of the history of the United States. Exceptionalism and the ideology surrounding excessive nationalism can be curbed by objective and unbiased education that requires students to analyze the actions of America since the end of the Cold War to determine whether America is truly 'hated for our freedom' or 'hated for our actions.' Examining American press releases and comparing it to foreign press releases on the same issues and events can encourage students to read international opinion pages, and could be a way to help reduce their exceptionalist perspective. Analyzing what other people in different countries write and comparing it to what is being written in the United States may offer students an improved, well-rounded interpretation of events, helping them shed any exceptionalist ideals that have been created within them.

This must be a goal of all American educators because in order to maintain a positive and active relationship within the international community, Americans must accept that they are not exceptional, that no nation is. Educators must communicate that we are all human beings, sharing this planet and that no nation, race or creed is superior to another. If educators can teach students to celebrate our diversity as a species, and that America has had a place in advancing human history but is not solely responsible for the world in which we live, social studies educators can help to eliminate the exceptionalist ideology that has created a world in which America has become the schoolyard bully.

"The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much it is whether we provide enough for those who have little."

Franklin D. Roosevelt

In the current global age, the United States of America has created a unique position for itself in the geopolitical arena. As I have chronicled since 9/11/01, America has attempted to create a world in its own image. The American government has acted unilaterally, and repeatedly ignored international law and organizations all while believing that they were acting in the best interests of their country and the world. The exceptionalist mindset is a product of denial, and learned hyper-nationalism. From a young age, Americans are taught the exceptionalist narrative that excuses all of the negative actions of America (Native American removal, anti-Immigrant sentiment, Japanese internment during WWII, treatment of “terrorist” prisoners at Guantanamo Bay) as methods necessary for the greater good of the country, the broken eggs that were essential to American progress. This narrative has made it difficult for Americans to admit that they must undergo a stark change in the way that they see themselves. America has created and accumulated a vast amount of wealth and prosperity since World War II. However, after the events of 9/11 gave way to the exceptionalist policies of the Bush Administration and his predecessors, average Americans have been left with an outstanding bill to pay and a tarnished international image to reconstruct.

As a future educator in a globally competitive world, it is imperative to rethink how students are prepared for the changing world they live in. Students must be taught the necessary skills to shed the American exceptionalist mindset so that America can remain a relevant world power. To do this, students need to be taught how to be active citizens who are engaged and involved with their government on all levels. Teaching students to form their own opinions on issues that America is facing based on facts and statistics from different sources could create a new political base that this country

desperately needs. We as educators must help students realize the significance of current conditions that exist in America in order to inspire these students to solve these complex problems. Americans need to look at their values both politically and socially to formulate their own educated opinions on the growing gap between the rich and poor, old and young, and Democrats and Republicans so that they can see for themselves that currently Americans are not living up to their exceptionalistic rhetoric. America is more divided now than it has been since the Civil Rights movement, now more than ever is the time to band together as Americans and shed the differences that have become the hindrance to our progress. Educating students on contemporary issues and bridging the gaps of race, age, creed and political ideology will make them better informed citizens more capable of working together and putting aside differences to solve our national troubles.

“The most effectual means of preventing the perversion of power into tyranny are to illuminate, as far as practicable, the minds of the people at large and more especially to give them knowledge of those facts which history exhibits, that possessed thereby of the experience of other ages and countries, they may be enabled to know ambition under all its shapes, and prompt to exert their natural powers to defeat its purposes.”

Thomas Jefferson

A social studies teacher’s goal is to develop a sense of citizenship within his or her students. Social studies class is the study of human kind’s advancement throughout the span of time. The present time period often gets overlooked in traditional survey history classes. When teaching U.S. history of the past 50 years, students should feel that their social studies class relates to the world now. Creating this connection provides a way for the past to be more engaging for students. Including current events in lessons makes students aware of public issues and gives them the opportunity to formulate their own opinions and views. First, we must understand where Americans are obtaining their

information about current events; then we can use that information to curb civic engagement through teaching skills that utilize the current trends in news consumption.

According to the Media and Public Opinion Research Group (MPO), in 2013 the majority of Americans (60.4%) were getting their news from watching television ("Where do Americans," 2013), with 36% from watching cable news, and 29.8% from watching network television. The Internet was in third place with 14%, then newspapers at 10.8%, followed by radio with 10.1%. 66.1% of those who depend on cable television for the news cited Fox news as the network that offered the best journalism ("Where do Americans," 2013). This is a surprising fact and causes one to question whether these viewers have ever watched an alternative news program. NBC, CNN and Fox were closely contested as the best networks according to the network television viewers. Meanwhile, 29% of Internet newsreaders favor news outlets not listed on the survey ("Where do Americans," 2013), which makes one wonder where they are getting their information.

A similar study on trends in news consumption was completed by the Pew Research Center. In 2012, 39% of the people polled stated that they received their news from the Internet, an increase of 15% since 2004 ("Trends in news," 2012). According to the Pew Research Center more Americans are getting their news digitally on their mobile devices and social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. In 2012, 19% of the people polled said that they got their news for social networking sites such as Facebook and Google+ ("Trends in news," 2012). The use of the Internet as a news outlet will only continue to rise as more people refuse to buy print sources. The increase in the access to technology has made the Internet a social tool for change. The amount of knowledge and

information that is readily accessible is unmatched in human history. With that power comes a great responsibility from those who use it.

The Internet has the potential to unite the already existing factions in this country. Educators must teach students how to use the Internet to find accurate and reliable information. Not all of the information on the Internet is valid or accurate; anyone with limited experience with web page design can make a halfway decent web page that says anything they want. On the other hand, the Internet has the ability to connect people with similar goals, dreams, and aspirations from all of over the world. It has helped people in the Middle East topple their oppressive governments, it has been used to leak vital information about the American government spying on its own citizens, and it has been used to raise funds for those suffering from horrific disasters. Teaching students to harness the knowledge and power of the Internet to find information that is unbiased and accurate is a vital skill necessary for developing an informed citizenry. By giving students their own window to the world, the Internet can be used to help students shed their exceptionalist lenses and develop informed decisions based on their own values and opinions. Students must be aware of where to find factual and unbiased information. They must be taught how to find and analyze multiple primary sources on a subject to create their own opinions.

Teachers must be informed on the methods in which their students receive information. In my student teaching placement in New York City, my placement teacher used class time to discuss current events for a portion of the class. She required students to bring in a newspaper article detailing an event in their own communities, the country, or the world. We would share these headlines and discuss the importance of the events

and how they impacted the community. I observed that many of the students would cut their newspaper articles out of the free AM Metro newspaper that could be obtained when exiting the subway, others would print articles off of the Internet, and the remainder of the students refused to participate. Very rarely did these articles come from the New York Times, or Wall Street Journal. In a world of smart phones and tablets, print media is simply lackluster for students. After sharing the headlines of the articles and discussing them we would watch a weekly news recap called Flowcabulary ("December 13,2012: The," 2013). This was a video recap of the weekly news done in the form of a rap song. Flowcabulary was an activity that brought students the news in an engaging, fun way. They all looked forward to it and used the accompanying lyrics sheets to participate in the quiz that accompanied each video. These activities had me envisioning a class where students could find news clips of current events, and show and discuss them as a class. A class where students are responsible for creating their own Twitter accounts and posting news stories to it daily based on what we discussed in class. A class that encourages active student participation through the Internet on issues that they are interested in, and have thoroughly discussed and debated. This is a very utopic technological future, but it can be obtained if students are taught how to use the Internet effectively to obtain, share, and discuss news information.

“The true test of the American ideal is whether we’re able to recognize our failings and then rise together to meet the challenges of our time. Whether we allow ourselves to be shaped by events and history, or whether we act to shape them. Whether chance of birth or circumstance decides life’s big winners and losers, or whether we build a community where, at the very least, everyone has a chance to work hard, get ahead, and reach their dreams.”

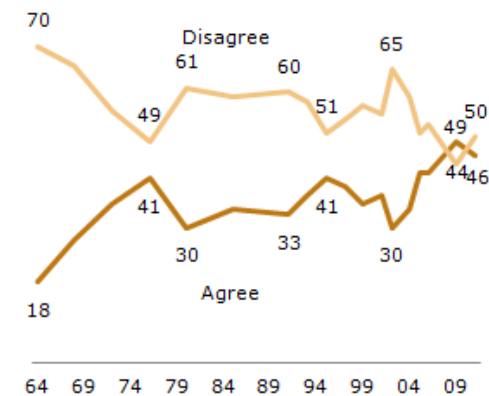
Barack Obama (Obama, 2005)

Many people have told me they do not like watching or listening to the news because it is depressing. This depression and lack of interest in current events allows for situations similar to the public’s acceptance of the Bush administration’s 9/11 narratives, which were used to create positive public support for the War on Terrorism. The events of the financial crisis and the Iraq war quagmire have caused many Americans to change their opinions surrounding America’s foreign policy. 49% of the people polled in another Pew Research survey believed that the U.S. should “mind its own business internationally and let other countries get along the best they can on their own” (Kohut, 2013). This can be seen in Figure 1, which displays that this neutralist sentiment is the highest has ever been since the question was first asked in 1964 (Kohut, 2013). The War in Iraq has

Figure 1 divided the public into two major camps; 46% believe that the Iraq War was

Americans Now More Likely to Favor Minding Own Business

The U.S. should mind its own business internationally and let other countries get along the best they can on their own.



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successful while the other 44% believe using military force was the wrong decision (Dimock, 2013). Some Americans have become aware of the consequences of acting unilaterally, and without a clear articulated reason for engagement. Others have become aware that America’s power is in its military and not in its economy. The War in Iraq has caused the American people a great deal of hardship, which

has led them to question the motives of the current foreign policy and how it impacts their lives domestically. The financial crisis has illustrated America’s glaring economic weakness, creating an environment where foreign policy has become a diminished talking point due in part to the economic problems confronting the country highlighted, “in the final month of the 2012 presidential campaign no more than 6% of those surveyed cited a foreign policy issue as the most important problem facing the country today”(Kohut, 2013). This is a considerable difference from 2004 when 37% cited foreign policy as their largest concern, and in 2008 when 17% cited the War in Iraq exclusively as the largest concern facing the country (Kohut, 2014). According to Figure 2, since the beginning of 2009, after the anger and confusion created by the constant wars and the developing financial crisis, Americans began to believe that the President should focus on domestic problems rather than continuing to engage in foreign affairs. By shifting the focus away from foreign issues, America has taken an integral step forward discarding its exceptionalist mindset. The next step involves reprioritizing the perceived threats to American power.

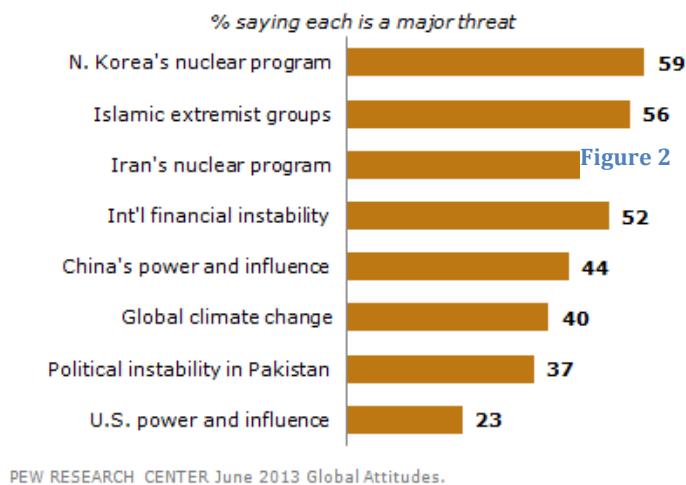
According to the 2013 Global Attitudes survey, Americans view North Korea, extreme Islamic groups, and Iran as the top three major threats to American security. This is not surprising considering the state of the country and the submissive acceptance of the demonized ‘Axis of Evil’ following the events of 9/11. The second set of threats that Americans are focused on includes the instability of the international economic system, China’s rise to power, and global climate change. It is

	President Should Focus on...		
	Domestic policy	Foreign policy	Both/ DK
	%	%	%
2013	83	6	12=100
2012	81	9	10=100
2011	78	11	11=100
2010	73	12	14=100
2009	71	11	18=100
2008	56	31	13=100
2007	39	40	21=100

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Jan. 11-16, 2012. Q11. Trends from Jan. of each year except 2010 from Nov. 2009.

comforting to know that these three are ranked as high as they are on this list, however it is the least ranking threat that gets my attention. As illustrated in Figure 3, U.S. power and influence ranked last on the list with 23% of those surveyed agreeing that America is its own biggest threat (Kohut, 2013), further proving that few Americans are more willing to see their countries' actions as a threat. It is interesting that Americans view foreign threats such as North Korea, and Iran as the greatest threats to the security of the country but fail to look at American actions when considering the countries largest threats.

Public Sees WMDs, Extremists as Major Threat



This ranking of the threats to America demonstrates how easily manipulated the American public can be when presented with black and white narratives of good vs. evil. Americans have been told repeatedly that these religious

and political extremists are the most dangerous enemy to the American way of life. Meanwhile other truly pressing issues such as our own international actions and power, a rising China, a changing climate and the stability of the global financial system have become secondary issues. Americans need to focus on these 'secondary' issues in order to eliminate their exceptionalist mindset. These second tier issues belong closer to the top of the American priority list because they are global issues that have arisen from past American actions. In order to accurately analyze these threats Americans must begin to

see themselves as global citizens, in a world where every person and every nation has its own responsibilities to the global community. America does not have to be the policemen or liberator of the world intent on spreading democracy. We must evolve from the idea that Americans are the elite citizens of the world; we must see that our actions have had a serious effect on our international image. Americans must be forced to see themselves for what they truly are: a nation that is living beyond its means, a nation that is divided by partisanship, race and economic status.

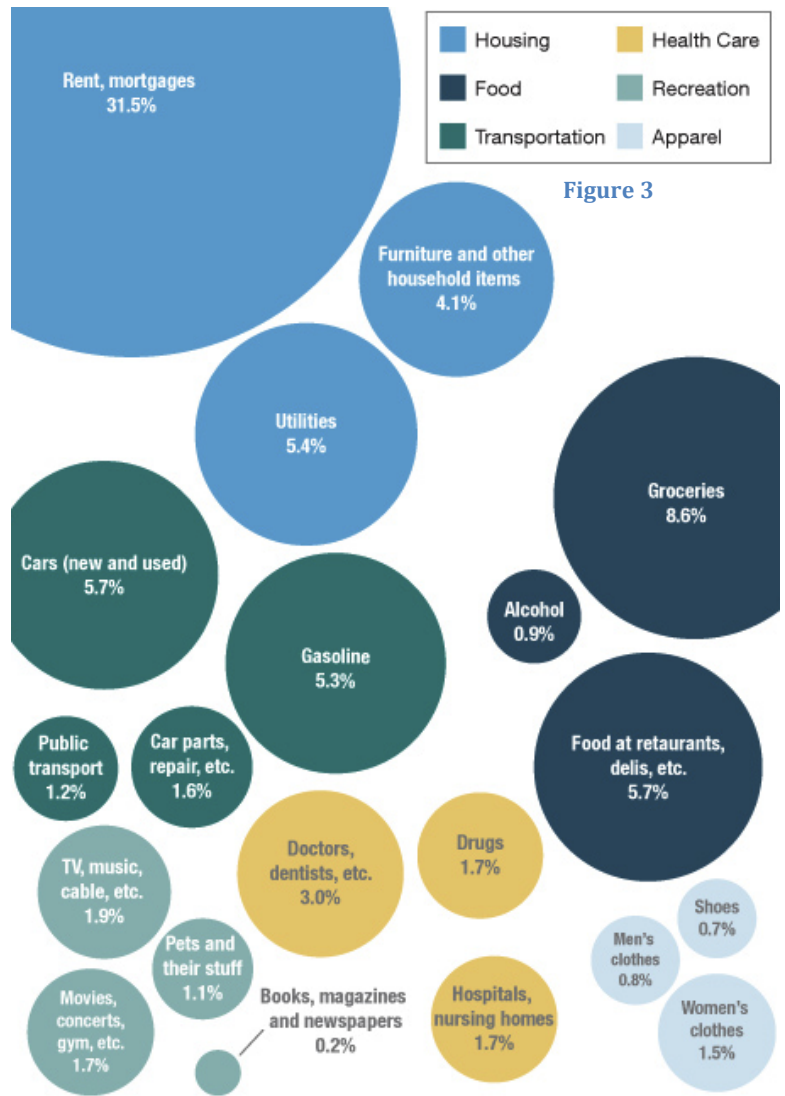
“We do not have a money problem in America. We have a values and priorities problem.”

Marian Wright Edelman (Wright Edelman, 2014)

Money is one of the most important tools within a society. It creates value, determines importance, and inevitably creates a social hierarchy. What an individual chooses to spend his or her money on correlates to what is important to them and what they value. According to the Department of Labor, Americans spend on average 41% of their income on housing, 16.9 % on transportation, 15.4% on food, 7.1% on health care, 6% on recreation, and only 3.6% on clothing (Thuy Vo & Goldstein, 2012). Americans spend the majority of their money on their homes and their transportation. Figure 4 has these categories broken down into subdivisions (Thuy Vo & Goldstein, 2012). It is not surprising that Americans spend less than .2% of their income on books, magazines, and newspapers further proving that Americans are getting their news and information from other sources such as television, and the Internet making printed newspapers a thing of the past. More importantly, Americans spend 10.7% of their income on energy either in the form of utilities or gasoline for transportation. They are spending 31.5% of their income just on their rent or mortgages. The average American spends their income on the basic necessities of shelter, food and transportation. However these statistics could be

drastically different for any American depending on their socioeconomic status. A wealthy individual could spend significantly less of their income to pay for their mortgage, and have disposable income left over to pay other bills, go out to dinner or even go on vacation. On the other hand, a poorer individual could be spending the majority of his or her income just to pay rent, not having enough money to meet all of his or her needs. In the past 20 years, this gap between rich and poor has only gotten larger.

Using data collected by the Census Bureau, social scientist Richard Fry concluded, “in 2012 the median household income was \$51,017, still below the pre-recession 2007 level (\$55,627) and also below the all-time peak level reached in 1999 (\$56,080). So the typical American household had 9% less income in 2012 than it did 13 years earlier (all figures adjusted for inflation). The 2012 level is just above where it had stood as of 1995 (\$50,978)” (Fry, 2013). American households are feeling the strains of

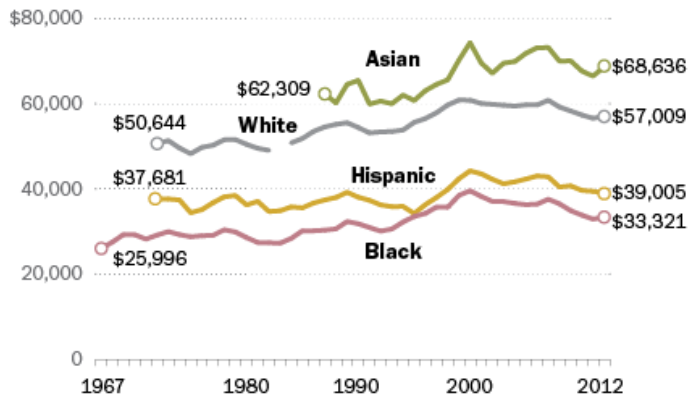


the economic recession following the economic crisis. Looking at the income tables in detail shows that there is still a large disparity that exists between race and income. Fry goes on to use Figure 5 to explain that “the gap in median income between white and black households has not changed much over the decades. In 1972, white incomes were 1.7 times black incomes. White and black incomes have both risen since then, and in 2012 white incomes were 1.7 times larger than black incomes. The white-to-Hispanic income gap has risen since 1972, from 1.3 in 1972 to 1.5 in 2012” (Fry, 2012). In

Median Household Income by Race/ethnicity of Householder, 1967-2012

Figure 4

In 2012 dollars



Notes: White households refers to households headed by a nonHispanic white. Data for Hispanics not available prior to 1972. Data for Asians not available prior to 1987. White median household income not available for 1983.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of U.S. Census Bureau historical income tables

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addition the income gap for the overall country has continued to widen. Fray explains, “Household income growth has been greater among better-off households than for lower income households. For example, household income for households in the middle (median household income) increased 19% from 1967 to 2012. But the

threshold to qualify for the richest 5% of households increased 67% since 1967 from \$114,203 to \$191,156 in 2012” (Fry 2013). It is becoming harder for the middle class to become part of the wealthier class, and in turn making it seemingly impossible for those at the bottom to rise into the middle. As these top 5% households continue to grow at a faster pace than those in the middle and bottom, they will continue to expand their share of the aggregate household income pie. “In 1967 the top 5% received 17% of the income

pie, compared to 22% in 2012” showcasing the notion that the rich are getting richer (Fry 2012). The American public has become increasingly supportive of that sentiment as well, as of “1986, the public was evenly divided over whether the gap in living standards between the middle class and poor was growing; 40% said it was getting wider, while 39% said it was narrowing. But today, more than twice as many say the gap in living standards has widened over the past decade (61% vs. 28%). The belief that there is a larger economic gap between the middle class and poor has increased among most demographic and political groups since 1986” (Pew Research Center 2012). An even larger portion of the public believes that the gap between the middle class and rich has widened; “(76%) sees a wider gap in living standards between the middle class and rich compared with 10 years ago. Just 16% say the gap in living standards has narrowed over this period” (“Trends in American Values”, 2012). Americans must begin to realize that this growing gap between the rich and poor in this country is real. The American dream, the idea that a poor American could rise up and become rich through hard work and dedication, has become an increasingly unattainable myth. As more Americans become aware of this gap, they are also becoming more aware of how their government spends their revenues.

The Center on Budget Policy Priorities reported that, “in 2012, the federal government spent 3.5 trillion dollars, 23 percent of the nations’ Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Of that federal revenues financed 2.5 trillion while the remaining amount was financed through borrowing (“Policy Basics” 2013). According to Figure 6, in 2012 the government’s major expenses were Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, Defense and International Security Assistance. The lesser expenses were transportation and

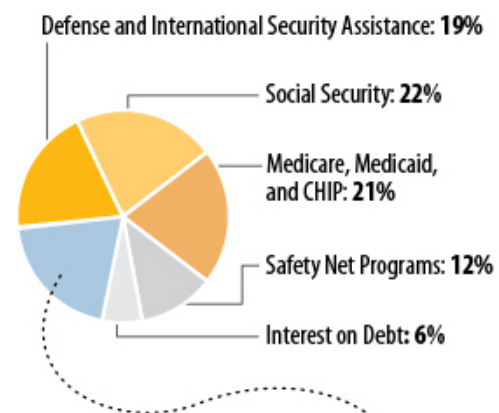
infrastructure (3%), Education (2%), Science and Medical Research (2%) (“Policy Basics” 2013). It is no surprise that Social Security Medicare, Medicaid and government retirement packages account for 50% of government spending. The baby boomer generation is aging and many of them are starting to retire and get older qualifying them for these government programs. America is currently at war and it is spending 19% of its income on Defense and International

Security. America is using its military to remain the dominant military force on the world’s stage. It is clear from the survey information that the American people want to see different approaches to how its government spends its money. The financial crisis and the War in Iraq have helped to turn the public’s focus to the economic domestic complications that face the country. It is alarming that America is spending so little on its transportation infrastructure, education, and science/ medical research. It is perplexing to think that we are spending less

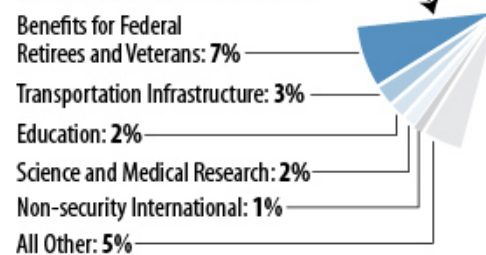
on all of these things combined, than we are on our military budget. Americans must realize that our excessive military spending is creating problems for our budget at home. After analyzing government spending Americans will realize that our government spends a great deal of money on defense, while neglecting other issues that are in desperate need

Figure 5

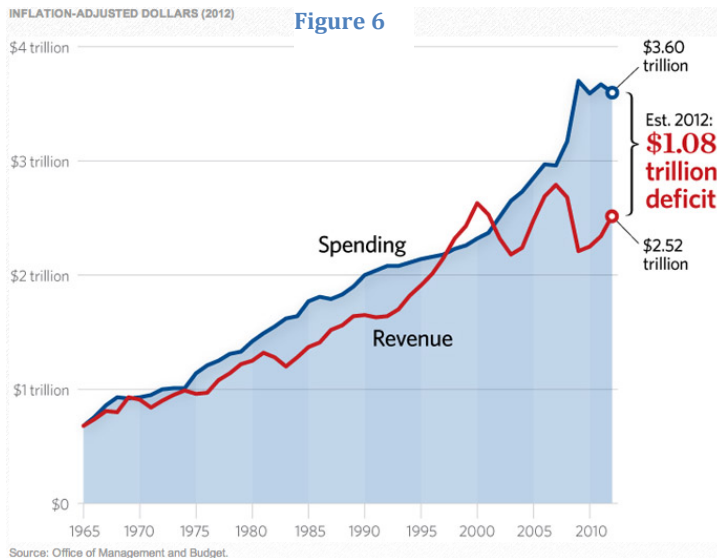
Most of Budget Goes Toward Defense, Social Security, and Major Health Programs



Remaining Program Areas



Source: 2012 figures from Office of Management and Budget, FY 2014 Historical Tables.



of financial assistance. If using our military is supposed to benefit Americans in the long run why isn't the American government interested in investing in its future through education and scientific research and development? When analyzing the

amount of money spent on the military it begins hard to ignore the growing amount of American debt.

The American government is in a great deal of debt. As previously stated the US Government spent 3.6 trillion in 2012 and only took in 2.52 trillion in revenues. That leaves a deficit of 1.08 trillion dollars ("Policy Basics" 2013). This is a worrying figure, and it leaves an average person asking how can this be? In reality, the American Government has been spending beyond its means since 2001 when it declared the War on Terror, and began fighting two wars. The bailouts of 2008 have also contributed a great deal to the deficit. Figure 7 shows the spending and revenue of the US Government since 1965 until 2012 (Heritage Foundation, 2012). Through analyzing these statistics the Carter, Reagan, and first Bush Administrations, government spending outweighed its revenue. Then the Clinton Administration was able to reign in the spending, and balance the national debt creating a period of prosperity. Since then the second Bush and Obama Administrations have spent more than they have taken in, all the while committing a large portion of our federal budget to military spending as we can see in Figure 6. Continuing to ignore important domestic issues like the growing wealth gap and growing

national debt are problems that will only continue to grow if they are not quickly dealt with. The correlation between heavy investments in the military and the ongoing wars, while the national debt is ballooning out of control must be brought to the public's attention. Americans must begin to understand that their government spending is an unsustainable practice. Americans must realize that their government is spending more on its defense budget than it is on many important domestic programs. President Dwight Eisenhower warned of this in his farewell address:

This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence – economic, political, even spiritual – is felt in every city, every Statehouse, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society. In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together (Eisenhower, 1961).

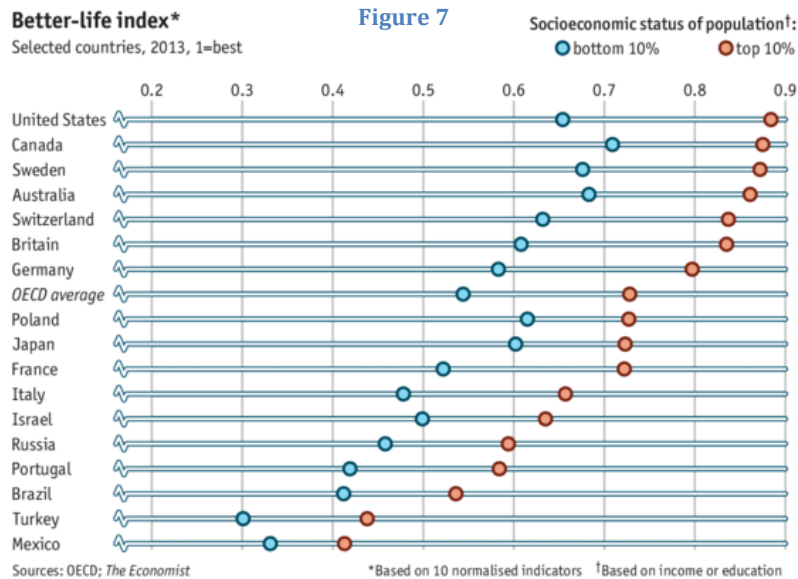
Eisenhower understood the power of the military and their influence on the workings of the government. He warned the American people to remain vigilant against the workings of the military, to pay close attention to the influences of the military on the government. He understood then that to secure democracy at home and abroad, Americans must remain knowledgeable and informed to keep a balance between using the military for defensive rather than offensive means. This realization is an important part in creating an educated citizenry capable of bringing about a change in the future of US military spending.

When comparing America statistically to the rest of developed countries of the world: the US ranks 4th in population as of 2010 with 317 million people behind China

(1.35 billion), India (1.21 billion), and the European Union (500 million) (Antholis & Indyk 2011). The US ranks first in per capita GDP or income per person with \$41,761 (in 2005 dollars), almost doubling the second place European Union (\$27,333), while China (\$6,200), Egypt (\$5,151) and India (\$2,970) remain at the bottom of the chart (Antholis & Indyk 2011). China and India have far more people than both the US and the European Union, and have significantly less wealth distributed amongst its people. America has an unemployment rate of 9.3%, slightly lower than the EU (9.6%) and India (10.8%), but much higher than China (4.3%) and Mexico (5.4%) (Antholis & Indyk 2011). The American unemployment rate has risen 5.3% since 2000 only proving that the Wars on Terror and the financial crisis has taken a great toll on Americans. Another exceptional statistic for Americans to consider is that America has been the worst polluting nation since 1980, as of 2010 Americans were emitting 19.3 metric tons of CO₂ into the atmosphere (Antholis & Indyk 2011). The EU ranked 5th with 8.1, and China ranked 6th with 5.0. Americans must realize that their CO₂ pollutions are devastating to the environment. This statistic is stunning considering that second place Russia emits 8.5 million tons less than first place America. America continues to pollute at a remarkably higher rate than other developed nations, a statistic that supports the idea of American exceptionalism.

The poorest 10% of Americans have a higher standard of living than the richest 10% of Israel, Russia, Portugal, Brazil, Turkey, and Mexico (OECD, 2012). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Better life Index is an alternative measurement of well being that includes 20 different indicators across 11 sectors in the 34 member countries. According to Figure 8, the US ranks first among

surveyed nations. The poorest individuals in America have statistically better lives than the richest individuals in other countries. In the US the average household disposable income, the amount a household has to spend on goods and services after taxes, is \$37,308 (OECD 2012). Which is much higher than \$22,387, the average disposable income across surveyed nations. On average Americans have 2.3 rooms of housing per person, more than any country surveyed except Canada (OECD, 2012). The OECD report also found that the average net adjusted disposable income of the top 20% of the population is estimated \$44,625 a year, whereas the bottom 20% live on an estimated



\$9,156 a year” (OECD 2012). This is an exceptional gap in disposable income that proves that poorer families in America are finding it harder to obtain the ‘American

Dream.’

Americans have also failed to heed Eisenhower’s warning by allowing the government to spend billions of dollars on the military. In 2010 America spent 663 billion dollars on defense, 412 billion dollars more than China (98), Russia (61), India (37), Brazil (27), Turkey (19), Mexico(5), and Egypt(4) combined (Antholis & Indyk 2011). Americans are spending a great deal of money on defense, and it has become a major problem internationally and domestically. As the national debt continues to rise,

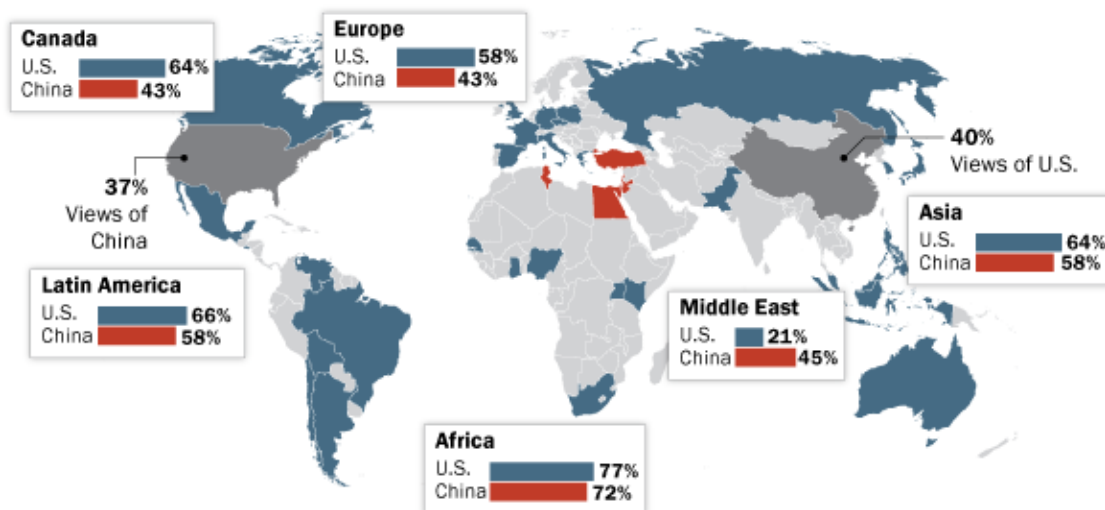
and the American international image continues to be tarnished through multiple military operations overseas, Americans have started to look at their government spending and see that it is time for a change. “After the recent near-miss with U.S. military action against Syria, the NATO mission in Libya and lengthy wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, about half of Americans (51%) say the United States does too much in helping solve world problems, while just 17% say it does too little and 28% think it does the right amount. When those who say the U.S. does “too much” internationally are asked to describe in their own words why they feel this way, nearly half (47%) say problems at home, including the economy, should get more attention” (“America’s Place in the World” 2013). Then, “when asked why the public has become less supportive of global engagements, 42% of Council on Foreign Relations members point to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, or explicitly cite “war fatigue.” About a quarter (28%) mention the struggling U.S. economy or the costs of international engagement. Other factors cited are the ineffectiveness of recent U.S. interventions (mentioned by 19%) and failures of U.S. leadership (17%)” (“America’s Place in the World”, 2013). The American public is beginning to see that our military involvement in other countries has done more to harm than help. However 66% of the American public believes that U.S involvement in the global economy is a good thing (“Americas Place in the World “ 2013).

China has become a dominant force on the geopolitical stage and has aspirations of economically surpassing America in the not too distant future. Based on the median percentages of 38 countries surveyed by the Pew Research Center, the United States’ global favorability is 63%, while China’s is 50% (“United States and China” 2013). When broken down by region in Figure 9, The United States is favored over China in

Africa (77>72). Canada (64>43), Latin America (68>58), Asia (64>58), and Europe (58>43) (“United States and China” 2013). China is favored over the US in the Middle East (21<45). “Ratings of the U.S. are particularly high in the Philippines (85% favorable), Ghana (83%), Israel (83%), Senegal (81%), and Kenya (81%). Conversely, fewer than one-in-four view America favorably in Pakistan (11%), Jordan (14%), Egypt (16%), the Palestinian territories (16%), and Turkey (21%)“ (“United States and China” 2013). Considering America’s recent military involvement in the Middle East it comes to little surprise that there is such a negative view of the U.S in these countries.

“Worldwide, China is seen positively by seven-in-ten or more in Pakistan (81%), Malaysia (81%), Kenya (78%), Senegal (77%), Nigeria (76%), Venezuela (71%), and Indonesia (70%). Conversely, fewer than three-in-ten view China favorably in Japan (5%), Turkey (27%), Germany (28%), and Italy (28%)” (“United States and China” 2013). Due to the 2008 financial crisis and the diminishing value of the US dollar, China has become viewed as the worlds most dominate economic power. “The perception that China is now the dominate economic power is especially prevalent among some of America’s closest allies in Western Europe. Today just 33% in Britain and 19% in Germany name the United States as the leading economy, 53% and 59% name China”

MEDIAN FAVORABILITY OF U.S. AND CHINA BY REGION **Figure 8**



("United States and China" 2013). When asked if the US has or will eventually be replaced by China as the world's leading superpower 67% in Canada, and 57% in Europe, and surprisingly 47% in the U.S. agreed. Almost half of those surveyed in America believed that China will or has surpassed them as the leading superpower in the world. "The United States is piling up foreign debt and losing export capacity, and the growing trade deficit with China has been a prime contributor to the crisis in U.S. manufacturing employment. Between 2001 and 2010, the trade deficit with China eliminated or displaced 2.8 million jobs, 1.9 (69.2 percent) of which were in manufacturing" (Scott, 2011). The computer and electronics parts industry in China grew the most the most relocating 909,400 jobs, 32.6% of all jobs displaced between 2001 and 2010, in 2010 the total US trade deficit with China was 278.3 billion, 124.3 billion of which was in computer and electronic parts (Scott, 2011). These are manufacturing jobs that Americans could have, to produce products that Americans are buying; instead these products are made cheaper in China and bought for a higher profit in America. This deficit is not beneficial for America and its standing in the global economy. 73% of Americans agree that having more U.S. companies setting up operations over seas will mostly hurt the economy ("Americas Place in the World" 2013). America's reputation as the economic superpower of the world has diminished and Americans are left to find a new place in the world. This is no easy task; Americans are divided and have been positioned against one another along partisan lines. This constant division has caused tensions to rise between the different groups within the American populous. There is a common theme that runs through the exceptionalist mentality, a lack of respect for those who share different views or values. This mentality has become a part of how view one

another as Americans. Americans are too focused on their differences of opinion to realize that they have become their own worst enemy. Americans must learn to respect the views of others, regardless of age, race, creed, or economic status. They must see each other as Americans, working together to overcome the current trade deficits and excessive military spending.

“Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide.”

John Adams (Adams, 2014)

Americans must examine the forces that divide them so that they can find the common ground in which to move forward with shared national goals in mind. In order to eliminate the exceptionalist mindset one has to look at what factors divide Americans so that this common ground can be found and compromises can be made. The American public is very diverse, and with that diversity comes differences of opinion and points of view. For America to overcome its exceptionalist tendencies the American public must be willing to objectively analyze the differences that exist among them. The Pew Research center found that in 2012 “the values gap between Democrats and Republicans is now greater than gender, age, race, or even class divides (“Trends in American Values” 2012). This study has been tracking the differences between Democrats and Republicans across 48 different political values since 1987. The gap between the parties has nearly doubled in the past 25 years jumping from 10 percentage points in 1987 to 18 percentage points in the newest study in 2012 (“Trends in American Values” 2012). This is highlighted in Figure 10 , which compares the average difference on the 48 value questions by key demographics such as Race, Education, Income, Religion, Gender and Political Party (“Trends in American Values”, 2012). The widening gap between the two political ideologies has significantly increased during the precedencies of George W. Bush and Barack Obama. This gap has created another form of exceptionalism, party exceptionalism, where both Democrats and Republicans alike, believe that their party is the only one equipped and prepared to guide America through this troubled period.

As of 2012 the biggest differences between Democrats and Republicans were their views on the Environment, Social Safety Net Programs, Labor Unions, Immigration, Religion, and

Equal Opportunity. The Republicans believe that it is not the government's role to guarantee a social safety net for those less fortunate; they believe the environment is not a high priority, and that labor unions are too powerful and unnecessary. Republicans tend to be more religious, less supportive of immigrants, and tend to oppose affirmative action and equal opportunity employment ("Trends in American Values" 2012). These values mirror those of an exceptionalist who does not care for the opinions of others who do not believe what they believe. Both parties are guilty of party exceptionalism and rhetoric, but now is the time for change. As the general public's opinions have matured "the largest shift in partisan values has occurred on general assessments of the government's effectiveness and proper scope" ("Trends in American Values" 2012). Due to America's actions after 9/11, and the financial crisis of 2008, the American people have become increasingly critical of their government. Intriguingly, "in 2012 a record low 56% of Americans (thought) of themselves as either Republicans (24%) or Democrats (32%)" compared to the 62% that self identified in 2008 and 64% in 2004" ("Trends in American Values" 2012). This partisan gap between Democrat and Republicans could not be larger than it is at this point in time. However as less Americans self identify as members of either party there is hope that the future of this country could be less partisan. Americans must place their party exceptionalism aside by compromising and finding a common ground that effectively address the issues. Today party members continue to hold on to their own exceptionalist mentality, believing and acting like one party is better than the other. Both Democrats and Republicans see working together politically as a sign of failure and weakness. The political system in America has no chance of ever recovering from the sickness of party exceptionalism as long as Americans see things as Red or Blue issues. Americans must see that

by bickering across the aisle the government has placed America on a slippery slope. Progress no matter how little must be achieved through working together and collaboration, it is clear that the political parties in America are finding it much more difficult to work together because of this increased party exceptionalism.

In addition to growing divides along party lines there seems to be a large difference between the beliefs of younger and older Americans. These differences are to be expected considering that with age comes experience and knowledge. However, when looking at statistics there are apparent divides between the old and the young. When asked on the survey if they favor allowing gay marriage, 65% of those younger than 30 agreed, while only 31% of those over 65 agreed (“Trends in American Values” 2012). When asked if it was all right for blacks and whites to date each other 95% of those younger than 30 agreed, compared to 68% of those over 65. When asked if a free market economy needs government regulation in order to best serve the public interest 74 % of those under 30 agreed, while 57% of those over 65 agreed (“Trends in American Values” 2012). This survey show that younger people are more excepting of social changes and favor regulations on the economy and government. While older people tend to favor *laisze faire* capitalism and are less likely to accept social changes, such as interracial relationships and gay marriage. These statistics mirror some of the values of the Democrats and Republicans. The younger people seem to agree with the Democrats while the older people surveyed seem to have more Republican views. Older people tend to be much more critical of the government as well; 69% of those over 65 agreed that “when something is run by the government it is usually inefficient and wasteful,” compared to only 47% of those younger than 30 (“Trends in American Values” 2012). Younger Americans seem more likely to trust the

government while older Americans appear more cynical and pessimistic when the government involved with the economy.

The world that we live in now is remarkably different than the world that older Americans grew up in; it is impossible to expect their views and values to be in line with those of the younger generation. The older generation was educated and lived through the era of American Exceptionalism. They have been indoctrinated to believe that America is the most exceptional country in the world, and that American' values' like democracy and capitalism are worth fighting for. They are the people that fought in World War II against Hitler, they are the people that lived through the Cold War to see America triumph over Communism. The younger generation, those under 30, have grown up in a much different world than those over the age of 65. Computers, the Internet, smart phones, satellites and other technologies have changed the world entirely. The enemies and threats to America are also different; there is no war to keep the world safe for democracy. The younger generation must be educated about a future world they will inherit in order to inspire them in to action.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”

Nelson Mandela (Nsehe, 2013)

There is a need for a great change in America. It is a change that has to start with the way that we view ourselves. Our wealth cannot last forever; it has become increasingly evident that our government spending is not sustainable and must be effectively addressed. This is a gut check for Americans, and now is the time to educate every citizen to the realities that America faces. We have squandered our economic supremacy and continue to operate in the red. It is time for Americans to remove their red, white, and blue colored glasses and examine the current

situation on these many fronts in order to gain a true perspective on what needs to be done in the future. Our expensive military involvement in the Middle East coupled with our growing national debt must be evaluated and addressed in the very near future. The rifts that exist between Americans must be examined, and overcome. Democrats and Republicans must look past their differences and see that now is the time for the bickering and lethargy to end.

There must be a discussion about the wealth disparity gap that exists in this country and how this gap has translated to a public coconscious that the rich continue to get richer while the poor get poorer. This idea contradicts the exceptionalist idea of the American dream, which perpetuates the idea of America as the promise land where anything is possible. Americans seem to be ready to relinquish their exceptionalist ideals, as more people become aware of the current situations, these problems can become a galvanizing force for a change in American actions. All Americans must realize that regardless of age, race, creed, or political affiliations America's international image has been tarnished because of our extensive military endeavors in the Middle East. Creating a new image of America will take time, and a great deal of action by all Americans.

The Social Studies classroom is the perfect place to grapple with the American exceptionalist ideals. American exceptionalism can be used as a thematic view point that teachers can use throughout teaching U.S. History especially when studying the removal of Native Americans and concept of Manifest Destiny, the treatment of Immigrants, how Americans react historically to perceived "threats." Having students trace the qualities of the exceptionalist ideals through the course of American history will only make them aware of their own exceptionalist tendencies. Creating a change starts with admitting that there is a problem. If

students are taught about these problems then they will be better served to solve them. Educating students about the recent history of the United States is critical teaching them about its more distant past. Students need to be engaged in history, it must be tied to the present for that to happen. Students need to see and analyze those connections. Teaching the concept of American exceptionalism while teaching the history of the United States creates a narrative that leaves room for a great deal of debate, and forces the students to answer many complex questions about their past and present.

American exceptionalism has existed even before the sovereignty of the United States. Sarah Vowell explains “the country I live in is haunted by the Puritans’ vision of themselves as God’s chosen people, as a beacon of righteousness that all others are to admire” (Vowell 2008). She goes on to explain that Winthrop helped to create an American worldview that was based on the puritan ideal “we’re here to help, whether you want our help or not”(Vowell 2008). Vowell believes that this hero mentality has been used as an excuse for military action throughout America’s history. She accurately summarizes America’s past military engagements that were fought in the name of ‘helping’ those being attacked:

“President William McKinley will pray to God and God will tell him to help the Filipinos by Christianizing them (even though they have been Catholics for two hundred years), ‘and the next morning’ he says ‘I sent for the chief engineer of the War Department (our mapmaker) and told him to put the Philippines on the map of the United States.’ So westward sail the gunboats toward Manila Bay. And then in the 1960’s, President John F. Kennedy, believing that the United States must ‘bear the burden...of helping freedom defend itself,’ invades Vietnam; otherwise, he explains, ‘if we stop helping them, they will become ripe for internal subversion and a Communist takeover.’ So westward sail the aircraft carriers toward Saigon Harbor. And then, because the U.S. will keep on going west to help people until we’re going east, the warships and the F11 stealth fighters hurry toward the Persian Gulf. On March 19, 2003, President George W. Bush announced that ‘American and coalition forces are in the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger’(Vowell 2008).

Vowell has touched on many vital examples of America using the military to 'help' other nations. Students must be able to question, analyze, quantify and assess American exceptionalism by using an evidence-based approach, so that they can create their own concept of American exceptionalism. Students must understand that this concept has a history of its own, beginning with the Puritans, and extending to the present. American exceptionalism is a concept that students in the 21st century must be made aware of, because it provides an alternative viewpoint. Introducing students to the concept of American exceptionalism allows them to interperate and engage with history in a different way, allowing them to gain a more mature perspective on American history. By incorporating the exceptionalist concept throughout teaching American history students can be exposed to alternative interpretations of American history that will cause them to question, and evaluate the exceptionalist ideals, as they have existed throughout the course of our history.

Sadly, only "28% of graduating high school seniors believe that what they do in classrooms is meaningful and useful to their lives or futures" (Bachman, Johnston, & O'Malley, 2008). As social studies teachers, it's disturbing to hear and a statistic that we need to address. My research shows that teaching Social Studies in the 21st century is dependent on engaging your students with the material that is relevant and useful to their lives. My goal as an educator is to teach students the skills they need to be successful in the 21st century. The common core standards state that "To be ready for college, workforce training, and life in a technological society, students need the ability to gather, comprehend, evaluate, synthesize, and report on information and ideas, to conduct original research in

order to answer questions or solve problems, and to analyze and create a high volume and extensive range of print and nonpoint texts in media forms old and new” (Hobbs, 2013).

Today’s teachers know that preparing students for their future means that they will be able to incorporate technology, social media, and the Internet when teaching their students. Social Studies educators are uniquely situated to use the new technologies and the Internet to help their students become engaged and active citizens. The Internet is a familiar medium that educators can use to engage their students with the material they are learning. It gives students access to a multitude of sources, but they must be taught how to find, analyze and discuss accurate sources to form educated opinions. By doing this, teachers can transform students into “the actualizing citizen whose engagement in the public sphere is connected to person and social identity (Hobbs 2013). Students must be given the 21-century skills necessary to become “both ‘readers’ and ‘writers,’ participating in discussion and debate that advances action. New forms of civic learning include a focus on producing information that is created and shared by peers, learning to use self-produced and self-distributed digital and social media, and participating in peer-centered special interest groups. These creative practices of civic participation are dependent upon an appreciation of the role of media in democratic societies” (Hobbs 2014).

Social Studies education must seek to “train active and democratic individuals who have desired behavioral outcomes, developed decision making skills, and contribute to current events by reacting...integrating current events in social studies courses makes it easier to develop these skills and social studies teaching more interesting and effective” (Deveci, 2007). In 2000 Hass and Laughlin found that newspapers and television were the

most commonly used resources to teach current events (Deveci 2007). However, “almost half of the social studies teachers stated that the students were indifferent to current events” (Deveci 2007). The main concern is that there is not enough time to discuss current events, especially when students seem to be indifferent on the subject. Students must be educated on current events and study their connections to America’s recent and distant past. This is the one way for students to overcome their exceptionalist ideals, when they learn to question the present and look to the past for answers. Students must be made aware of the exceptionalist narrative as a theme throughout the history of the United States using current events as the final chapter. If teachers are asking students to understand how America has become the country that is by looking at its past, then we must also include the present in that discussion. Using multimedia resources from the Internet teachers can engage students with the news in a format that they are well acquainted. Teaching students current events in a way that makes them responsible for what they learn is also important. Current events lend themselves greatly to teaching American Exceptionalism in the post 9/11 world, however teachers must hold students accountable for their own learning. The goal in my classroom will be for students to acquire a nuanced understanding of “American exceptionalism.” Strategies that will be used to reach that goal include: researching the term individually and collaboratively using electronic resources to reach their own conclusions about American exceptionalism. Having students form a connection to current events could inspire them to learn more about their own interests and values by performing research, analyzing their findings and openly discussing their conclusions. The Internet provides multiple outlets for students to become civically engaged.

“In order to accurately gauge the impact of the Internet on civic engagement in the U.S, we must first determine the degree to which all citizens have access to the Internet” (Vanfossen 2006). I have experienced first hand that not all students have Internet access. When I student taught at the School of Health Care Professionals in New York City, my mentor teacher used a companion website. She had been using it for a few years and required that I use it while I was her apprentice. Having this course management website was great, I could post all of my lessons, communicate with the students, and even grade homework that students turned in electronically. There were many students who used the website frequently to check their grades, hand in their homework, ask questions if they were confused, or even print off the notes that they had missed if they were absent. All of my resources were at their fingertips, however I began to notice quite early on that there were at least 40 students out of 115 that did not have access to the Internet at home. There were many who did not own a computer but could use their cellular phone to access the Internet. My teacher gave the students access to a lap top computer cart every class, they were allowed to come in and do work on the computer before and after school and during their free periods. Computers were also available in the computer labs and the school and public library. I do understand the constraints of not having access to the Internet when you are a student, throughout high school and into my freshman year of collage my family home was not connected to the Internet. Though the circumstances behind my digital divide are much different than the student’s I taught, I do understand what it is like to not have access to such a valuable resource. Teaching students to use the Internet and technology must become a part of the social studies curriculum. Brining the Internet into

the classroom allows the students without access an opportunity to learn Internet skills and use them effectively which prevents them from technologically falling behind their connected counterparts.

Social Studies educators must realize that the “internet may have its greatest influence on those individuals already engaged in the political process because it reduces time and cost of acquiring information and makes it easier for those who want to participate to engage in politics” (Vanfossen 2007). Teachers must use the Internet to make students aware of the world around them and teach them the technological skills necessary to engage the political process in the 21st Century. “Voting is an integral part of any healthy civil society, but civic engagement can, and must involve more than simply voting” Americans must see that civic action is a large part of civic engagement (Vanfossen 2007). Social Studies teachers must emphasize the responsibilities of citizenship that extends beyond voting “civic engagement is inherently an act of optimism about human nature, social organization and the future” (Hobbs 2013).

I have created a website that I would use as a companion to a unit that focuses on the history of the United States since 9/11. This website serves as a teaching resource that would be used throughout the unit. This unit is divided into 3 major components: 9/11, the wars in the Middle East, and the financial crisis. Throughout the unit students will use the website for multiple activities. As a final assessment students will be paired together and assigned a country of the world. Each pair will create a multi media project using the resources on the website to compare America to their assigned country.

9/11/01 is a date that holds meaning for just about every American. It is known as a horrible day of loss, suffering however we will never forget the events of that day. To introduce the unit I would have students write down all the things they know about 9/11 in their classroom journals. Then as a class we would come up with a master list of words and phrases that they associate with 9/11. After the list is created I will use these words and phrases to create a Wordle of these ideas (Wordle, 2013). "Wordle is a toy for generating "word clouds" from text that you provide. The clouds give greater prominence to words that appear more frequently in the source text" (Wordle, 2013). I would print off each classes's Wordle and hang them in the room.

Then I will show the class clips from the History Channel documentary 102 Minutes That Shook America (Rittenmeyer & Skundrick, 2008). This film captures the events of 9/11 in real time as they were unfolding from different vantage points throughout New York City. This film allows students to experience the events of 9/11 up close and personal. Students must see how this event effected many individuals in different ways. They need to be aware of how Americans reacted during the attacks and after. After the video clips students will be asked to write in their journal about how this film made them feel, and give 3 reasons to support why they feel that way. Then students will be asked who is to blame for these attacks? I will create a running list of the culprits on the board. If America does not get mentioned, then I will raise the case for the exceptionalist view of 9/11. This view places America as the blameless victim, who was attacked for no reason other than their love of freedom.

For the remainder of the period students will be given a laptop from the cart students will use my companion website to access the 9/11 Digital Archive. “The September 11 Digital Archive uses electronic media to collect, preserve, and present the history of September 11, 2001 and its aftermath. The Archive contains more than 150,000 digital items, a tally that includes more than 40,000 emails and other electronic communications, more than 40,000 first-hand stories, and more than 15,000 digital images” (The 911 Digital Archive, 2002). Students will be instructed to find 2 different sources from the website and write 2 paragraphs describing their similarities and differences. Then for homework they will also be responsible for interviewing 3 people older than them asking them to recall the events of 9/11 as they remember them.

Each student will share his or her favorite 9/11 stories with the class while I record them with a video camera. I will record all of my classes’ recollections of 9/11 every year until I retire, I am curious to see how 9/11 will be remembered many years from now. These videos could be used to help answer questions such as why is 9/11 so important to American history? Finally students will be taken on a virtual field trip to the 9/11 memorial using photos gathered from the monument’s website. If budget and proximity allowed I would attempt to bring my classes on a field trip to the 9/11 memorial. Students will be asked to reflect on the monument, how it represents this tragedy and compares to other national monuments.

The second lesson of the unit will focus on the Iraq war. In the first part of this lesson students will watch and analyze quotes and video from President George W. Bush’s speech on September 20 2001 when he declared the War on Terrorism (USA Patriotism!

2013) (Bush 2008). Students will discuss Bush's declaration of war and analyze the exceptionalist rhetoric used within his speeches. They will discuss Bush's us vs. them mentality, the idea that terrorists hate Americans for their freedoms, and other exceptionalist highlights.

The second part of the lesson will use clips from the documentary *No End in Sight*, students will analyze this movie as a class and then write an editorial blog that explains their opinions of the war using evidence from the speakers in the movie (Ferguson 2007). These clips will show how the Bush administration ignored the State department during the build up to Iraq. They will also chronicle the major events of the War and the Bush Administration's failure to formulate a cohesive exit strategy.

The third part of the lesson will have students use a war debt calculator from the National Priorities Project. This activity will allow the students to analyze how much America has spent on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. As a class we will discuss how the actions of the government have affected the present standing of America. We will also discuss the reasons cited for entering the War on Terrorism. Then I will ask the students if they feel safer because of these wars, and whether or not, and to what degree, America was justified in their attacks on these countries.

The focus of the next lesson is to discuss the differences of opinion and political perspectives that exist in the mainstream media by looking at the coverage of the Occupy Wall Street protests. Students will be asked how citizens can be civically engaged, we will discuss methods of engagement, voting, participating in government by signing petitions, writing your representatives. Then there will be a short mini lesson on the causes and

events of the financial crisis. I will ask students to write down what they can remember about these events and how the economic downturn affected them and their families. Then I will introduce the Occupy Wall St. movement through a series of pictures and stories of protestors. I will explain that people who had been affected by the financial crisis decided that it was their civic duty to protest against the injustices of the bailouts. We will look at political cartoons from *The Modern World* by Tom Tomorrow to analyze how cartoons can be used as a form of protest (Tomorrow, 2014). We will then discuss the importance of protesting. America has protested many things like slavery, women's right to vote, bonuses for fighting in World War I, and racial equality. I will then ask students how they believe this protest was portrayed in the media. Then students will watch a short web clip from the Huffington Post. This clip combines the coverage of Occupy Wall St from Fox News and MSNBC (. While watching the video students will have guided questions to answer as the clip is playing. They will be asked to identify three differences and two similarities between the Fox News coverage and the MSNBC coverage. I will ask students to determine if either of these news casts are bias. After they have reached a conclusion I will ask which station is more republican leaning, and which station is pandering to democrats. Students will write in their journals for homework answering the following questions: how are Occupy Wall St. protestors portrayed in the news? What methods do both Fox News and MSNBC use to persuade the viewer to believe their opinions? Do you consider this clip news? Explain your answer using evidence from class and the website.

In the next lesson students will be placed in groups of 4 to play American Monopoly. The concept of this game was inspired by a Paul Piff TED talk (Piff, 2013). Paul Piff is a

social physiologist that preformed a study that had 2 participants play a game of monopoly. One player was “rich” while the other player was “poor.” Piff studied how these player’s behaviors throughout the game. This inspired me to extend the game to include 2 extra players so that students could experience scenarios similar to the participants of Piff’s study. This activity requires enough Monopoly boards for each group. Students will be grouped together by the teacher, who will give each student in the group a number 1-4. These numbers will determine the role of each student in the game.

Player 1 will be the banker, who’s responsible for all of the banking duties that go on throughout the game. Bankers hold the title cards for the board’s properties and must act as auctioneer when players wish to sell their properties. . Bankers are the only player allowed to handle the bank’s money. Bankers will start out with the most money receiving \$4,500, triple the standard starting amount. Bankers roll two dice per turn, and pays \$10 to be released from jail. Bankers earn \$500 from the bank every time they pass Go. The bank collects \$1 from the banker, \$10 from player 2, \$50 from player 3, and \$100 from player 4 every time they pass Go The bank collects \$100 for each house built and \$500 for each hotel.

Player 2 will be the wealthy player. The wealthy player will start with more money then players 3 or 4, receiving \$3,000 twice the standard starting amount. Wealthy players will also roll two dice per turn. Wealthy players earn \$300 every time they pass GO, but will pay a \$10 tax to the bank. Number 2 players pay \$50 to be released from jail.

Player 3 will be the middle class player. Player 3 will receive the standard amount of \$1500 to begin the game. The middle class player will earn the standard \$200 when they

pass GO, but are required to pay a \$100 tax to the bank. Player 3 must pay \$200 to be released from jail, however if they do not wish to post bail middle class players must pay the bank \$50 per turn that they are in jail.

The last student will be the poor player. Poor players will begin the game with \$750 half of the standard starting amount. Poor players can only roll one dice per turn. Every time player 4 passes Go they earn \$150 but are required to pay the bank \$150. Poor students must pay the bank \$200 dollars to be released from jail. Number 4 students cannot roll doubles to be released from jail so they must pay bail to have their next turn.

First the teacher will place the students in their groups assigning each member a number. Then the teacher will explain the revised rules of the game and then the students start to play. Throughout the game the teacher can create scenarios that resemble current events, like simulating a bank bailout where all players are required to give a portion of their money to the bank; or a tax reform that changes the amount the bank charges each player to pass GO.

This game gives students the opportunity to learn while having fun. Before the students begin playing the game have them predict who is going to win and why. Once the game is over have students reflect in their journals on their experiences playing the game. Answering the questions: how did the players interact with one another? How did the banker treat the other players? Where there any alliances formed during the game? Who won? Was it the player you had predicted? Why did that player win? What were some of the advantages that favored players 1 and 2? This game can be used to highlight the

differences that exist between the very wealthy and the poor. It can also give students and teachers insight into the exceptionalist mindset as it pertains to money and wealth.

The final section of the unit will be a cooperative research based assessment. Students will be allowed to pick their own partners. Each pair of students will pick one country from a list of the teachers choosing. Then each pair will use the resources on my website to compare their country to America. Students will be given ample time in class to use computers to research and present their projects. Students will have access to resources such as: Pew Research Center studies (Pew Research Center 2014) the interactive Better Life Index (OECD 2012), the CIA World Fact Book (The World Factbook 2014), and NationMaster.com (Nation Master, 2003). Students will present 5 similarities and 5 differences between America and their chosen country. Students will be assessed on their ability to create a multi media project that compares and contrasts America to another country. Then each group will present their findings to the class, groups will also be required to field a question and answer session after their presentations. Each group must have 2 questions to ask the class after their presentation. During the presentations each student in class must formulate three questions per presentation. After all of the presentations the class will discuss how America interacts with other countries, and how those countries view America. This project will give students a broader idea of what life is like in other countries compared to here in America. Comparing America to other countries can be a powerful way for students to disengage with the American exceptionalist mindset. As students become immersed with the material my goal is to inspire them to become more civically engaged by using the Internet and a

wide variety of sources to grab their attention. Students must be taught using media and technologies that they are comfortable with. Students are using the Internet and Social media to share photos of what they ate for lunch, or their favorite song of the day. Students need to be shown how to use the Internet to find reliable news sources. Then they must share this information and formulate their own opinion of the topic. Teaching American exceptionalism after 9/11 requires using more current events and multimedia technology. This period of history is one of the most documented; students need to be aware of the constructive uses for the Internet that allow them to access information about their lives.

In the activity utilizing the 9/11 digital archive, I have students comparing and contrasting two stories that recall the events of 9/11. Students would be asked to share in a class discussion the similarities and differences that they see between their two stories. This activity will facilitate learning in that “asking students to independently identify similarities and differences enhances students’ understanding of and ability to use knowledge” (Marzano et al 2001). As the teacher, I would facilitate the discussion, but ultimately leave the identifying of the similarities and differences to the students. Throughout the discussion I would create a Venn diagram on the board because it “provides students with a visual display of the similarities and differences between the two items” (Marzano et al 2001). I would lead the discussion in this way because “student-directed activities result in more heterogeneous conclusions by students” (Marzano et al 2001). I would want the activity to be student-directed in order to stimulate divergence in students’ thinking (Marzano et al 2001). I also use the comparing and contrasting method to discuss the similarities and differences between Democrats and Republicans during the Occupy Wall Street protests following the video on press biases. Focusing on similarities and

differences is an important part of the final project. Students will be required to create a comparison matrix for their chosen country and the United States. Then they will use the comparison matrix to pick out 4 universal characteristics of both countries and then compare their similarities and differences based on specific characteristics such as, life expectancy, cost of a Big Mac, infant mortality rates, average household income etc.

The information in these Venn diagrams and matrices can also be used to have students create graphic organizers that “use symbols and arrows to represent relationships” (Marzano et al 2001). Students will be asked to create Episode Pattern Organizers for each of the 3 interviews they perform for the 9/11 Oral History project (Figure 6.5, Marzano et al 2001). Then the students will choose one story to present to the class. These presentations will be video recorded and uploaded to my website so that these stories can be shared with the world. Everyone will be encouraged to upload their own videos to create a database of oral histories from the day of 9/11. Having students interview their elders about their own personal stories of 9/11 gives them the opportunity to become immersed with the events of 9/11 as a personal experience. They will understand that every America has their own view and personal attachment to those events and that day

Summarizing and Note taking are also important techniques for students. These two skills are critical to student’s future success in the professional world as well as their college career. Being able to summarize and take notes on readings, presentations, and web based sources helps student to retain information in their own words. As a teacher I believe in reciprocal teaching, this “strategy involves four components: summarizing, questioning, clarifying and predicating” (Marzano et al 2001). Reciprocal teaching creates student engagement uses “questioning,

clarifying, and predicating” to provide “for a deep level of understanding necessary for an effective summary”(Marzao 2011). In order for students to be prepared for their college and professional careers they must be able to summarize information, question the important parts of that information, then clarify the confusing points in the passage in order to predict what things will happen next based on their summaries.

Throughout the year students will be required to keep historical journals. These journals will be used to track my student’s engagement and effort throughout my class. Journals will be collected at the end of every week on Friday, before handing in their journals students will give themselves an effort grade for the week, and explain using examples from their journal to support their grade. After reading the student’s journal entries from the week and their explanations for their grades I will respond to their entries and give them a grade on their journal for the week. I will also use the journal as a filing system for passing back the student’s weekly work. This will cut down on class time lost for classroom clerical tasks and will give students encouragement and feed back for their efforts in class. This method also makes “recognizing the accomplishment of a performance, as personal to the students as possible”(Marzano et al 2001). This Journal grade will be a large percentage of the student’s grade and will be regularly used in class. Coupled with class participation this grade will reflect the student’s effort given in class resulting in a class work grades that will be factored into their final grades along with homework, quizzes, and tests.

The journal will also serve as a homework folder. Journals will never be assigned as homework and will always be left in the classroom so that students do not loose them. At the beginning of class students will have journal entries to answer as a warm up activity. At the end

of every class I will have students write an exit tweet in the journals. This exit tweet will be a summary of what they learned in class or an answer to a question from class. Students will have 150 characters to answer the questions or describe the most important things they learned that day. Journals will also be used in class as a way for all students to formulate answers to important questions, communicate concerns, and evaluate their own performance.

The use of the Monopoly game generates a hypothesis generation and testing teaching method. This activity has students predicting who will win the game and why. Developing hypotheses about the results of the game allows students to exercise deductive thinking because they are making predictions on a future event (Marzano et al 2001). . It is important for students to explain their prediction because “the process of explaining their thinking helps students deepen their understanding of the principles they are applying” (Marzano et al 2001). Directly following the activity, they reflect on the results of the “social experiment” with reflective writing on the outcome of the game. This allows students to use inductive thinking by drawing conclusions from new information (Marzano et al 2001).

The Comparison project has students placed in formal groups of 2 to compare and contrast the United States and another country. These groups are “designed to ensure that students have enough time to through complete the academic assignment” (Marzano et al 2001). This assignment allows students to engage in cooperative learning, to create a final presentation that is based on finding similarities and differences that exist As a class we will discuss which countries are most like the US and which ones are not. The presentations for the students to write an essay that answers the question will use this project; is America Exceptional? All student presentations will be available on line through the file share on my website. This will also allow

me to post any homework, class notes, or readings. It also allows students the opportunity to hand in their homework electronically. The Community forum portion of the website allows students to ask questions, post links, videos and articles. Having students analyze and compare America to other countries allows them to gather information to formulate a hypothesis on exceptionalism. Then they must decide if America is exceptional and why they believe that basing their opinion on facts gathered from the work of their classmates.

Integrating the Internet into my classroom as a teaching tool is pivotal to preparing my students for being citizens in the 21st Century. My website (Ferreri, 2014) can be used as a resource for both teachers and students to explore the concept of American exceptionalism in the post 9/11 world. It can be used to connect students to information that is not in their texts book in a format that they are familiar with. Students know how to use the internet but they have to be instructed on how to use the Internet to become informed citizens. Making students aware of the statistics and sources available on my website can help to change the exceptionalist mentality of Americans. Becoming a social studies teacher has inspired me to create a citizenry that values its engagement with current historical issues. 9/11 has changed the world that we live in and with more time passing from these events it is our job as history teachers to shape how this day is taught going forward. This is a fundamental question for future teachers to grapple with, we must give as many perspectives of these events as possible to allow students to understand them and how it effected the decisions made after that day. This gives students the opportunity to formulate their own opinions of 9/11 and what it means to them. More and more students as the years pass will only learn about 9/11 as a historic event, few will remember those events personally. Our responsibility as teachers is to make sure 9/11 is taught from every angle giving

students the ability to understand how many people were affected by these events and why it is so important to the modern history of the United States.

Students must be given the opportunity to explore and understand the concept of American Exceptionalism. President John F. Kennedy is one of the many presidents that have used the Puritan city on the hill imagery when he quotes Puritan leader John Winthrop by saying “We must always consider that we shall be a city upon a hill- the eyes of all people are upon us’ Kennedy goes on to say that “Today the eyes of all people are truly upon us and our governments in every branch at every level national state and local, must be as a city upon a hill constructed and inhabited by men aware of their great trust and their great responsibilities”(Kennedy, 1961).

Kennedy also outlined four qualities that are used to determine how a person has contributed to history:

“History will not judge our endeavors—and a government cannot be selected—merely on the basis of color or creed or even party affiliation. Neither will competence and loyalty and stature, while essential to the utmost, suffice in times such as these. For of those to whom much is given, much is required. And when at some future date the high court of history sits in judgment on each one of us—recording whether in our brief span of service we fulfilled our responsibilities to the state—our success or failure, in whatever office we may hold, will be measured by the answers to four questions: First, were we truly men of courage—with the courage to stand up to one’s enemies—and the courage to stand up, when necessary, to one’s associates—the courage to resist public pressure, as well as private greed? Secondly, were we truly men of judgment—with perceptive judgment of the future as well as the past—of our own mistakes as well as the mistakes of others—with enough wisdom to know that we did not know, and enough candor to admit it? Third, were we truly men of integrity—men who never ran out on either the principles in which they believed or the people who believed in them—men who believed in us—men whom neither financial gain nor political ambition could ever divert from the fulfillment of our sacred trust? Finally, were we truly men of dedication—with an honor mortgaged to no single individual or group, and compromised by no private obligation or aim, but devoted solely to serving the public good and the national interest” (Kennedy 1961)

These are questions that Social Studies educators must ask their students, these are questions that students need to be asking of their current political and cultural leaders. Making students aware of the American exceptionalist concepts by asking and answering these questions when teaching American history can better inform students about different historical perspectives and how they relate to the concept of American exceptionalism. Teaching exceptionalism throughout the year

as a viewpoint of American history allows students to see that the concept of exceptionalism has a story of its own, a story that has been in existence longer than the United States of America. It is up to Social Studies educators to help students separate themselves from the concepts and ideals of exceptionalism, to expose the exceptionalist historical and help to the answer questions of America's courage, dedication judgment and integrity. These are questions that Americans must answer as individuals, and then as a nation. The place to begin this conversation is the high school social studies classroom, so that students become engaged with the concepts of exceptionalism and work to formulate their own opinions through evidence based research.

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