

AMERICA AS A SYMBOL

“In the beginning, all the world was America,” wrote the philosopher John Locke in 1690. Before the emergence of the word, what is represented by the concept of America originated in Africa, when peoples moved northward to the left into Europe and to the right into Asia--all the way up and across the Bering Strait into what is now called North America, then southward through that continent. America originated as an impulse that grew into a complex of ideas: a place beyond, a different place to be discovered, freedom from the problems of this place, a place to start over, the possibility of a better life, the vision of a whole New World. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines “America” as “A place which one longs to reach; an ultimate or idealized destination or aim; an (esp. newly identified) object of personal ambition or desire.” This has been the history of the land called “America” as a symbol in human consciousness. More deeply, America is an archetypal symbol representing liberty, aspiration, opportunity, advancement, a new life, renewal and the mythic quest.

About 20,000 years after the Asians, the Europeans sailing westward began to discover America, the New World where Asians had evolved into the peoples who came to be known as Indians. Europeans responded to the early reports about the New World by projecting a romantic idealism that identified the western hemisphere with Eden, Arcadia and the Golden Age. Sir Thomas More located his *Utopia* (1516) in the West, contrasting the decay of Europe with the dream of a perfect society. In 1606 a poem by Michael Drayton located earth’s “only paradise” in Virginia. Drawings of Indian villages depicted them as more orderly than the gardens of Versailles--peaceful and clean and implicitly virtuous.

J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur initiated a pastoral literary tradition with *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) and Thomas Jefferson embodied an agrarian pastoralism in politics. Rousseau promoted the myth of the Noble Savage and the theme of the American Adam and Eve in the New World Garden became pervasive during the Romantic period--affirmed by Emerson and Whitman, critiqued by Hawthorne and Melville. The notion of America as a New Eden was subverted by satires such as “Journey to the Land of Eden” (1733) by William Byrd and *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-44) by Charles Dickens, but it was reinforced by advertising during the Westward Movement and revived by the countercultural revolution of the 1960s, with hippies and the emblematic Woodstock Festival. The tradition of romanticizing Indians continued despite mounting evidence of practices common throughout the New World: kidnapping, cannibalism, slavery, rape, torture, child murder, human sacrifice and incessant warfare. Current politically correct revisionist history perpetuates the myth of the Noble Savage. Naive environmentalists in particular think America was Eden before the evil Europeans came and imposed civilization.

Right of conquest had always been the rule in early America and the civilization of the Europeans—their guns in particular of course, but also their “Book”—prevailed as they moved westward, gradually displacing Indian cultures. The Euro-American cultural narrative or national myth that gives coherence to American literature as a written record began in 1620 with *The Mayflower Compact* and with Governor William Bradford's epic account of the Pilgrims in his history *Of Plymouth Plantation* (1620-47). The Puritans added meanings to America as a symbol, themes that recur throughout American literary history: (1) journey into the Wilderness; (2) westward movement toward liberty in a potential Garden (most Puritans were and most Americans have been farmers); (3) quest for justice and a perfect society imaged as a City; (4) aspiration into the sky: upward mobility to salvation and/or success.

As soon as the Puritans began displacing the Indians, a countercultural symbol of America as unjust began contending with the positive symbol. The institution of slavery reinforced the negative image, as did a few minor wars and military engagements viewed by some as imperialistic. The critics included Thoreau, Twain and Howells, though they remained advocates of their country. In the 19th century, inspired by John Brown and the abolitionist movement in particular, then by government corruption and excesses of unregulated capitalism, a tradition of anarchism and socialism emerged--a contradictory coalition united by the intent to overthrow the capitalist economy and democratic culture of the United States.

The radicals were joined in the 20th century by “progressives,” militant Marxists and the International Communist Party. To the political left, America was the archetypal monster of Capitalism. Their view gained favor with some Americans after the economic crash of 1929 and during the Great Depression of the

1930s, then lost favor after Stalin signed a pact with Hitler, identifying Communists with fascists. Marxism has continued to be an influential force in Hollywood, New York, universities and the “politically correct” national culture to the present day.

The popularity of America in the world peaked in 1945, after Americans contributed so much to defeating fascist imperialism in Europe and Asia, and to the economic reconstruction of nations damaged by the war. America emerged from WWII the major superpower on earth, inevitably to be envied, resented and hated. Throughout the Cold War, enemies and pacifists used the nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union to characterize America as a doomsday monster about to destroy all life on earth. At the same time many saw and many continue to see the influence of American popular culture as imperialistic, subversive and corrupting. American tourists got stereotyped as “ugly Americans”: callow in their affluence, ignorant of other languages, insensitive to customs not their own, demanding and naive.

During the later 20th century, especially during the Vietnam War and the major civil rights movements, America was increasingly condemned as evil by other Americans. To antiwar radicals, Marxists in particular, America was the archetypal monster of Imperialism; to black activists after the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., America was the monster of white Racism; to Feminists, America was the monster of “Patriarchy.” These movements fractured the population into contending groups, contrary to the preaching of King and rejecting the early 20th century ideal of America as “a melting pot” of people from around the world: Being an American no longer transcended the particulars of identity.

The melting pot metaphor expressed faith in America and a belief in the traditional American quest for liberty and justice in a perfect union. That faith exploded in the 1960s. After the Vietnam War, the image of America as unjust prevailed in education, the mainstream media, Hollywood and throughout the national culture. Universities scorned traditional American literature and largely replaced it with didactic multiculturalism and socialist advocacy, undaunted by the spectacle of socialist Europeans going extinct. Population reduction is a goal of many in the Environmentalist movement, the religion of socialists who want to control the world through propaganda about its climate, seeing America as the greatest obstacle to their agenda. Meanwhile immigrants continue to see America as a land of opportunity due to its free enterprise, and to most Americans their country continues to represent the best hope for the survival of human liberty left in the world. Many go so far as to sacrifice their lives defending America against those who consider it decadent and attack it as a Great Satan.

Michael Hollister (2014)

QUOTATIONS

“The place they had thoughts on was some of those vast and unpeopled countries of America, which are fruitful and fit for habitation, being devoid of all civil inhabitants, where there are only savage and brutish men which range up and down, little otherwise than the wild beasts of the same.”

William Bradford
Of Plymouth Plantation 1620-1647

“For we must consider that we shall be a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are fastened upon us, so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword through the world.”

John Winthrop
from sermon delivered on board the *Arabella* (1630)

“O my America! my new-found land.”

John Donne
Elegy XIX (1631)

“My America, my new-found-world, I shall shortly run backe into one and twenty againe.”

James Shirley
School of Complement (1631)

“In the beginning, all the world was America.”

John Locke
Two Treatises on Civil Government (1690)

“Here we find a vast stock of proper materials for the art and ingenuity of man to work on,--treasures of immense worth, concealed from the poor, ignorant, aboriginal natives.... As the celestial light of the gospel was directed here by the finger of God, it will doubtless finally drive the long, long night of heathenish darkness from America.... So arts and sciences will change the face of nature in their tour from hence over the Appalachian Mountains to the Western Ocean.... O ye unborn inhabitants of America! should...these alphabetical letters remain legible when your eyes behold the sun after he has rolled the seasons round for two or three centuries more, you will know that in Anno Domini, 1758, we dreamed of your future.”

Nathaniel Ames
Almanac (1758)

“I love the Americans because they love liberty, and I love them for the noble efforts they made in the last war.”

William Pitt, Earl of Chatham
Speech in the House of Lords (1770)

“Paradise anew / Shall flourish, by no second Adam lost.”

Hugh H. Brackenridge & Philip Freneau
A Poem, on the Rising Glory of America (1771)

“Where liberty dwells, there is my country.”

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)

“The Constitution only gives people the right to pursue happiness. You have to catch it yourself.”

Franklin

“Driven from every other corner of the earth, freedom of thought and the right of private judgment in matters of conscience direct their course to this happy country as their last asylum.”

Samuel Adams
Speech in Philadelphia (1776)

“O! receive the fugitive and prepare in time an asylum for mankind.”

Thomas Paine
Common Sense (1776)

“Not a place upon earth might be so happy as America. Her situation is remote from all the wrangling world, and she has nothing to do but to trade with them.”

Paine
The American Crisis, No. 1 (1776)

“Then join hand in hand, brave Americans all! By uniting we stand, by dividing we fall.”

John Dickinson (1732-1808)

“We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness...”

Thomas Jefferson
The Declaration of American Independence (1776)

“Timid men prefer the calm of despotism to the tempestuous sea of liberty.”

Jefferson

“The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure.”

Jefferson

“My God! How little do my countrymen know what precious blessings they are in possession of, and which no other people on earth enjoy.”

Jefferson

“The natural progress of things is for liberty to yield and government to gain ground.”

Jefferson

“If the freedom of speech is taken away then dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep to the slaughter.”

President George Washington (1732-1799)

“I always consider the settlement of America with reverence and wonder, as the opening of a grand scene and design in providence, for the illumination of the ignorant and the emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the earth.”

President John Adams (1735-1826)

“They [the Americans] are the hope of this world. They may become its model.”

Anne Robert Jacques Turgot
Baron de L’Aulne
Letter to Dr. Richard Price (1778)

“You viewed these provinces of North America in their true light: as the asylum of freedom, as the cradle of future nations and the refuge of distressed Europeans.”

J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur
Letters from an American Farmer (1782)

“We have no princes, for whom we toil, starve, and bleed: we are the most perfect society now existing in the world. Here man is free as he ought to be; nor is this pleasing equality so transitory as many others are.... Here individuals of all nations are *melted* into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world. Americans are the western pilgrims, who are carrying along with them that great mass of arts, sciences, vigour, and industry which began long since in the east; they will finish the great circle [Manifest Destiny].... Here the rewards of his industry follow with equal steps the progress of his labour; his labour is founded on the basis of nature, *self-interest*; can it want a stronger allurements? The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles.”

Crèvecoeur
Letters

“Young man, there is America, which at this day serves for little more than to amuse you with stories of savage men and uncouth manners.”

Edmund Burke (1729-1797)

“Columbia, Columbia, to glory rise,
The queen of the world, and child of the skies!
Thy genius commands thee; with rapture behold,
While ages on ages they splendors unfold.
Thy reign is the last, and the noblest of time,
Most fruitful thy soil, most inviting thy clime;
Let the crimes of the east ne'er encrimson thy name,
Be freedom, and science, and virtue, thy fame....”

Timothy Dwight
“Columbia, Columbia, to Glory Arise” (1793)

“Oh, say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?”

Francis Scott Key
“The Star-Spangled Banner” (1814)

“I would rather have a nod from an American, than a snuff-box from an emperor.”

Lord Byron (1788-1824)

“America is the land of the future, where, in the ages that lie before us, the burden of the World's History shall reveal itself.”

George W. Hegel (1770-1831)

“America, you have it better than our continent, the old one.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
Wendts Musen-Almanach (1831)

“America is a land of wonders, in which everything is in constant motion and every change seems an improvement. The idea of novelty is there indissolubly connected with the idea of amelioration. No material boundary seems to be set to the efforts of man; and in his eyes what is not yet done is only what he has not yet attempted to do.”

Alexis de Tocqueville
Democracy in America (1835)

“America is great because America is good, and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.”

Tocqueville, *Democracy*

“We are not without the hope that those who read what we have written, will see in the past, with all its vicissitudes, the promise of a prosperous and honorable future, of concord at home, and peace and respect abroad; and that the same cheerful piety which leads the good man to put his personal trust in a kind Providence, will prompt the good citizen to cherish an equal confidence in regard to the destiny reserved for our beloved country.”

William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878)

“The very aim and end of our institutions is just this: that we may think what we like and say what we think.”

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. (1809-1894)

“For what avail the plough or sail, or land or life, if freedom fail?... America is another name for opportunity. Our whole history appears like a last effort of divine providence on behalf of the human race.... We rail at trade, but the historian of the world will see that it was the principle of liberty; that it settled America, and destroyed feudalism, and made peace and keeps peace; that it will abolish slavery....[1843] We will not again disparage America, now that we have seen what men it will bear....[1862] America makes its own precedents....[1864] It is becoming to the Americans to dare in religion to be simple, as they have in government, in trade, in social life; and they have rightly pronounced Toleration--that no religious test shall be put. They are to abolish laws against atheism...[1865] The office of America is to liberate, to abolish kingcraft, priestcraft, caste, monopoly, to pull down the gallows, to burn up the bloody statue book, to take in the immigrant, to open the doors of the sea and the fields of the earth--to extemporize government in Texas, in California, in Oregon--to make provisional law where statue law is not ready. This liberation appears in the power of invention, the freedom of thinking, in readiness for reforms....[1867]”

Ralph Waldo Emerson
Journals and Essays (1843-67)

“The character inherent in the American people has done all that has been accomplished; and it would have done somewhat more, if the government had not sometimes got in its way.”

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)

“The only true America is that country where you are at liberty to pursue such a mode of life as many enable you do without [inessentials], and where the state does not endeavor to compel you to sustain the slavery and war and other superfluous expenses.”

Thoreau, *Walden* (1854)

“The genius of the United States is...always most in the common people.”

Walt Whitman (1819-1892)

“And there is a Catskill eagle in some souls that can alike dive down into the blackest gorges, and soar out of them again and become invisible in the sunny spaces. And even if he for ever flies within the gorge, that gorge is in the mountains; so that even in his lowest swoop the mountain eagle is still higher than other birds upon the plain, even though they soar.”

Herman Melville
Moby-Dick, “The Try-Works” (1851)

“You cannot spill a drop of American blood without spilling the blood of the whole world.... We are not a nation, so much as a world.”

Melville

“This *is* a beautiful country.”

John Brown, Abolitionist
from his last speech to the Court
before he was hanged for treason (1859)

“Yes, we’ll rally round the flag, boys,
we’ll rally once again,
Shouting the battle cry of Freedom,
We will rally from the hillside, we’ll
gather from the plain,
Shouting the battle cry of Freedom.”

George Frederick Root
“The Battle Cry of Freedom” (1863)

“My Country is Truth.... It is a very free Democracy.”

Emily Dickinson
quoted in Richard B. Sewall, *The Lyman Letters:
New Light on Emily Dickinson and Her Family*
(U Massachusetts, 1965) 71

“Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”

President Abraham Lincoln
“Address at Gettysburg” (November 19, 1863)

“Freedom is the last, best hope of earth.”

President Lincoln

“Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves.”

President Lincoln

“America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter, and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves.”

President Lincoln

“Let us have done with British-Americans and Irish-Americans, and so on, and all be Americans.... If a man is going to be an American at all let him be so without any qualifying adjectives; and if he is going to be something else, let him drop the word American from his personal description.”

Henry Cabot Lodge
Address, New England Society of Brooklyn (1888)

“We are called a nation of inventors. And we are. We could still claim that title and wear its loftiest honors if we had stopped with the first thing we ever invented, which was human liberty.”

Mark Twain
“Foreign Critics” speech (1890)

“Perhaps, after all, America never has been discovered. I myself would say that it had merely been detected.”

Oscar Wilde
The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891)

“The youth of America is their oldest tradition. It has been going on now for three hundred years.”

Wilde

“I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and of the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

Francis Bellamy
The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag (1892)

“O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!
America! America!
God shed his grace on thee
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!”

Katherine Lee Bates
America the Beautiful (1893)

“The black rank and file volunteered when disaster clouded the Union cause, served without pay for eighteen months till given that of white troops, faced threatened enslavement if captured, were brave in action, patient under heavy and dangerous labors, and cheerful amid hardships and privations. Together they gave to the nation and the world undying proof that Americans of African descent possess the pride, courage, and devotion of the patriot soldier. One hundred and eighty thousand such Americans enlisted under the Union flag in 1863-1865.”

Inscription on Robert Gould Shaw Monument
Boston Common (1897)

“The real democratic American idea is, not that every man shall be on the same level with every other man, but that every man shall have liberty to be what God made him, without hindrance.”

Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887)

“America is the most grandiose experiment the world has seen, but, I am afraid, it is not going to be a success.”

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)

“It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others.... One feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”

W. E. B. DuBois

The Souls of Black Folk (1903)

“America is God's crucible, the great melting pot where all the races of Europe are melting and re-forming!”

Israel Zangwill
The Melting Pot, Act I (1908)

“The real American has not yet arrived. He is only in the Crucible, I tell you -- he will be the fusion of all races, perhaps the coming superman.”

Zangwill

“So at last I was going to America! Really, really going, at last! The boundaries burst. The arch of heaven soared. A million suns shone out for every star. The winds rushed in from outer space, roaring in my ears, ‘America! America!’”

Mary Astin
The Promised Land (1912)

“Sometimes people call me an idealist. Well, that is the way I know I am an American. America is the only idealistic nation in the world.”

President Woodrow Wilson
Address at Sioux Falls (1919)

“America lives in the heart of every man everywhere who wishes to find a region where he will be free to work out his destiny as he chooses.”

President Wilson

“The business of America is business and the chief ideal of the American people is idealism.”

President Calvin Coolidge

“Patriotism is easy to understand in America--it means looking out for yourself by looking out for your country.”

President Coolidge

“Thou sawest thy America, thy lifetask, and didst charge to cover like the transpentine bison.”

James Joyce
Ulysses (1922) II, 402

“Although she feeds me bread of bitterness,
And sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth,
Stealing my breath of life, I will confess
I love this cultured hell that tests my youth!
Her vigor flows like tides into my blood,
Giving me strength erect against her hate.
Her bigness sweeps my being like a flood.
Yet as a rebel fronts a king in state,
I stand within her walls with not a shred
Of terror, malice, not a word of jeer.”

Claude McKay
“America” (1922)

“I think this wild and noble America is the thing that I have pined for most ever since I read Fenimore Cooper, as a boy.”

D. H. Lawrence
Studies in Classic American Literature (1922)

“And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors’ eyes--a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby’s house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams, for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an esthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.”

F. Scott Fitzgerald
The Great Gatsby (1925)

“It has always seemed to me a rare privilege, this, of being an American, a real American, one whose tradition it has taken scarcely sixty years to create.” [Since the Emancipation Proclamation]

Gertrude Stein
The Making of Americans (1925)

“I look out at it--and I think it is the most beautiful history in the world. It is the history of me and of my people. And if I came here yesterday...I should still think so. It is the history of all aspiration--not just the American dream but the human dream and if I came at the end of it that too is a place in the line of the pioneers.”

Fitzgerald
Letter to daughter Scottie (1940)

“next to of course god america i
love you land of the pilgrims and so forth oh”

e.e. cummings
“next to of course god america i” (1926)

“America is rather like life. You can usually find in it what you look for. It will probably be interesting, and it is sure to be large.”

E. M. Forster (1879-1970)

“Blessed are the young, for they shall inherit the national debt.”

President Herbert Hoover (1874-1964)

“In the United States there is more space where nobody is than where anybody is. That is what makes America what it is.”

Gertrude Stein
The Geographical History of America (1936)

“We, and all others who believe in freedom as deeply as we do, would rather die on our feet than live on our knees.”

President Franklin D. Roosevelt

“I see America in the crimson light of a rising sun fresh from the burning, creative hand of God. I see great days ahead, great days possible to men and women of will and vision.”

Carl Sandburg (1878-1967)

“There are those, I know, who will say that the liberation of humanity, the freedom of man and mind, is nothing but a dream. They are right. It is the American dream.”

Archibald MacLeish (1892-1982)

“O, let America be America again--
The land that never has been yet--
And yet must be.”

Langston Hughes

“Let America Be America Again” (1938)

“The land was ours before we were the land’s.
She was our land more than a hundred years
Before we were her people. She was ours
In Massachusetts, in Virginia,
But we were England’s, still colonials,
Possessing what we still were unpossessed by,
Something we were withholding made us weak
Until we found out that it was ourselves
We were withholding from our land of living,
And forthwith found salvation in surrender.
Such as we were we gave ourselves outright
(The deed of gift was many deeds of war)
To the land vaguely realizing westward,
But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced,
Such as she was, such as she would become.”

Robert Frost

“The Gift Outright” (1942)

read at inaugural of President John F. Kennedy (1961)

“America has never forgotten--and will never forget--the nobler things that brought her into being and that light her path--the path that was entered upon only one hundred and fifty years ago.”

Bernard Baruch

Address (1944)

“We want to find and will spend our lives in finding:
The landfall of our broken voyages
Is still our America of contradictions.”

Muriel Rukeyser

“Ninth Elegy” (1944)

“American liberty is a religion. It is a thing of the spirit. It is an aspiration on the part of the people for not only a free life but a better life.”

Wendell Willkie

Speech (1941)

“I believe in America because in it we are free--free to choose our government, to speak our minds, to observe our different religions. Because we are generous with our freedom, we share our rights with those who disagree with us. Because we hate no people and covet no people's lands. Because we are blessed with a natural and varied abundance. Because we have great dreams and because we have the opportunity to make those dreams come true.”

W. Willkie

his creed inscribed by his grave (1944)

“America is a passionate idea or it is nothing. America is a human brotherhood or it is chaos.”

Max Lerner

Actions and Passions (1949)

“Those who won our independence believed liberty to be the secret of happiness and courage to be the secret of liberty.”

Louis D. Brandeis (1856-1941)

“To us Americans much has been given; of us much is required. With all our faults and mistakes, it is our strength in support of the freedom our forefathers loved which has saved mankind from subjugation to totalitarian power.”

Norman Thomas, Socialist politician (1884-1968)

“We move toward a lofty ideal. On some great and glorious day the plain folks of the land will reach their heart’s desire at last, and the White House will be adorned by a downright moron.”

H. L. Mencken (1880-1956)

“The American people will never knowingly adopt socialism. But, under the name of ‘liberalism,’ they will adopt every fragment of the socialist program, until one day America will be a socialist nation, without knowing how it happened.”

Norman Thomas

“The United States has never lost a war or won a conference.”

Will Rogers (1879-1935)

“There is nothing wrong with America that the faith, love of freedom, intelligence and energy of her citizens cannot cure.”

President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890-1969)

“The American lives even more for his goals, for the future, than the European. Life for him is always becoming, never being.”

Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

“This monster of a land, this mightiest of nations, this spawn of the future, turns out to be the macrocosm of the microcosm of me.”

John Steinbeck (1902-1968)

“There is a New America every morning when we wake up. It is upon us whether we will it or not.”

Adlai E. Stevenson (1900-1965)

“It is possible for the human spirit to win after all.”

Jack Kerouac
On the Road (1958)

“America is a large, friendly dog in a very small room. Every time it wags its tail, it knocks over a chair.”

Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975)

“And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world, ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man....”

President John F. Kennedy
Inaugural Address (1961)

“I look forward to a great future for America, a future in which our country will match its military strength with our moral restraint, its wealth with our wisdom, its power with our purpose... I look forward to an America which commands respect throughout the world not only for its strength but for its civilization as well.”

President Kennedy
Address at Amherst College (1963)

“The cost of freedom is always high, but Americans have always paid it.... My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.”

President Kennedy

“I accept this award with an abiding faith in America and an audacious faith in the future of mankind.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.
Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech (1964)

“America is woven of many strands.... Our fate is to become one, and yet many.”

Ralph Ellison (1914-1994)

“What the people want is very simple--they want an America as good as its promise.”

Barbara Jordan (1936-1996)

“Building a better you is the first step to building a better America.”

Zig Zigler (1926-2012)

“For other nations, Utopia is a blessed past never to be recovered; for Americans it is just beyond the horizon.”

Henry Kissinger (1923-)

“Of all the nations in the world, the United States was built in nobody's image. It was the land of the unexpected, of unbounded hope, of ideals, of the quest for an unknown perfection.”

Daniel J. Boorstin (1914-2004)

“Because Europe has always dreamed westward, America, once realized, touches men's minds like fulfilled prophecy.... Beyond question, before it is half known, it will breed utopias and noble savages, fantasies of Perfection, New Jerusalems.... It is not unrelated to the Hereafter.”

Wallace Stegner (1909-1993)

“As a Russian friend once remarked to me, ‘America is the only place left that can afford Marxism’.”

Charles Newman (1938-2006)

“Double, no triple, our troubles and we'd still be better off than any other people on earth. It is time we recognized that ours was, in truth, a noble cause.”

President Ronald Reagan (1911-2004)

“Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it on to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same.”

President Reagan

“Concentrated power has always been the enemy of liberty.”

President Reagan

“Europe was created by history. America was created by philosophy.”

Margaret Thatcher (1925-2013)

“There is nothing wrong with America that cannot be cured by what is right with America.”

President William J. Clinton (1946-)

“America has never been an empire. We may be the only great power in history that had the chance, and refused--preferring greatness to power and justice to glory.”

President George W. Bush
Speech (19 November 1999)

“America has never been united by blood or birth or soil. We are bound by ideals that move us beyond our backgrounds, lift us above our interests and teach us what it means to be citizens.”

President Bush

“If anyone tells you that America’s best days are behind her, they’re looking the wrong way.”

President Bush

“And I’m proud to be an American, where at least I know I’m free.
And I won’t forget the men who died, who gave that right to me.”

Lee Greenwood (1942-)

“Ours is the only country deliberately founded on a good idea.”

John Gunther (1901-1970)

“America is the greatest, freest and most decent society in existence. It is an oasis of goodness in a desert of cynicism and barbarism. This country, once an experiment unique in the world, is now the last best hope for the world.”

Dinesh D’Souza (1961-)

“There is a tendency for the world to say to America, ‘the big problems of the world are yours, you go and sort them out,’ and then to worry when America wants to sort them out.”

British Prime Minister Tony Blair (1953-)

“America is the world’s living myth. There’s no sense of wrong when you kill an American or blame America for some local disaster. That is our function, to be character types, to embody recurring themes that people can use to comfort themselves, justify themselves and so on. We’re here to accommodate. Whatever people need, we provide. A myth is a useful thing.”

Don DeLillo (1936-)

“Everybody has their own America, and then they have the pieces of a fantasy America that they think is out there but they can’t see.”

Andy Warhol (1928-1987)

“America is more than just a country, it’s an idea. An idea that’s supposed to be contagious.”

Bono
Oprah Winfrey Show (2002)

“America is the opiate of the people.”

Philip Roth (1933-)

“America is a vast conspiracy to make you happy.”

John Updike (1932-2009)

“The thing that impresses me the most about America is the way parents obey their children.”

King Edward VIII (1894-1972)

“It is capitalist America that produced the modern independent woman. Never in history have women had more freedom of choice in regard to dress, behavior, career, and sexual orientation.”

Camille Paglia (1947-)

“The point is that when we look at Western civilization critically, we don’t have all that much to be proud of. It’s essentially a long history of murder.”

Professor Rodger Kamenetz
English Department, Louisiana State University
quoted in *Heterodoxy* (September 1992)

“We are now feared and hated all over the world as the Nazis once were. And with good reason.... There’s not a chance in hell of America becoming humane and reasonable.”

Kurt Vonnegut (1922-2007)

“An overwhelming proportion of our courses are taught by people who really hate the system.”

Professor David Littlejohn
Graduate School of Literature, UC Berkeley

“I cannot swallow whole the view of Lincoln as the Great Emancipator.”

President Barack Obama

“I think when you spread the wealth around it’s good for everybody.”

President Obama

“America is like an unfaithful love who promises us more than we got.”

Charlotte Bunch (1944-)

“Let’s *roll!*”

Todd Beamer (1968-2001)
Flight 93 (9/11)

Michael Hollister (2014)