

# American Exceptionalism in the 20th century

by Jeffrey Steinberg

By the time Franklin Delano Roosevelt was inaugurated President of the United States, in March 1933, America had gone through one-third of a century without a President in the tradition of John Quincy Adams or Abraham Lincoln. Yet, the founding principles of our Republic, the universal principles distilled from nearly 2,000 years of Western Christian civilization, were alive and well in the person of FDR, and he, in turn, was able to rekindle that spirit in a majority of Americans, whom he mobilized through the Great Depression and a world war.

Franklin Roosevelt was, in a sense, an unlikely candidate to revive the American System tradition for the twentieth century. He was born to a patrician New York family. His great-grandfather made his fortune in the Far East opium trade as a junior partner to the British East India Company. FDR attended Groton and Harvard. He became a rising star of the Democratic Party, serving as Undersecretary of the Navy in the Woodrow Wilson administration. At the time, he was hardly a critic of his cousin, Teddy Roosevelt, a leading figure in the national imperialist tradition of American foreign policy.

Yet, something profound happened to FDR that would transform him. In 1921, at the age of 39, Franklin Roosevelt was struck with polio. He removed himself totally from public life, to fight the disease. During this period of nearly six years, Roosevelt immersed himself in a study of American history, especially the Founding Fathers. He became an enthusiast of the economic policies of Alexander Hamilton. His battle with polio also opened FDR's heart to the plight of the less fortunate, a concern he carried with him for the rest of his life, in the form of a burning passion to bring an end to colonialism in all forms.

FDR, perhaps with a sense of irony, chose the pages of the New York Council on Foreign Relations' quarterly journal to relaunch his political career—on a very different track.

## A view of U.S. foreign policy

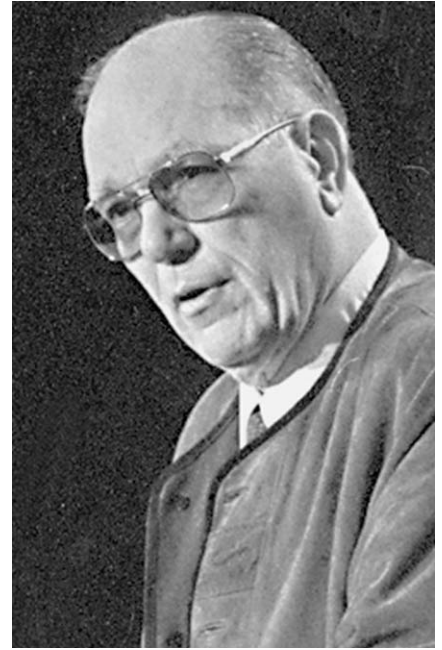
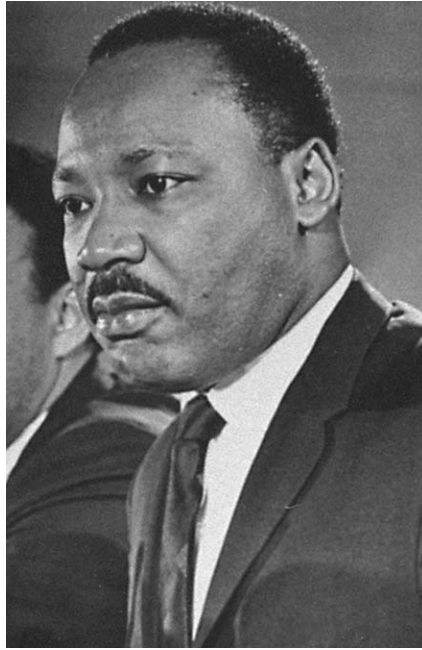
In the July 1928 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, FDR spelled out "A Democratic View" of "Our Foreign Policy." In that article, FDR unambiguously declared his commitment to revive the founding principles of the American Republic, particularly the guiding principles of American foreign policy associated with John Quincy Adams. Freely acknowledging the degradation of American diplomacy through decades of "dollar diplo-

macy" and "gunboat diplomacy," Roosevelt nevertheless optimistically asserted, "An analysis of our own history disproves the accusation that this selfish spirit is the real American spirit. In the debates during the war of the Revolution and in the long discussions immediately preceding the adoption of the Constitution it was plain that careful thought was being given to every conceivable form of government in the hope that what the United States finally adopted might serve as a pattern for other people, especially in regard to the spirit that should govern the relations of one state with another. The words of the Declaration of Independence itself invoke a 'decent respect to the opinions of mankind.'"

He continued, "After the general peace of 1815, the newly won independence of the Central and South American nations provided frequent opportunities for reconquest and disturbance; our response was the Monroe Doctrine, a policy aimed not only at self-protection but, in the larger sense, at continental peace. Promulgated by a Democratic Administration, it was our counter-move against the desperate attempt of the Holy Alliance to curb the rise of liberalism by interfering in the internal affairs of government and by crushing revolting colonies desirous of setting up democracies. Here again the thought of America was not solely selfish, but was influenced by an ideal."

Roosevelt concluded his essay in the present tense: "The time has come when we must accept not only certain facts but many new principles of a higher law, a newer and better standard in international relations. We are exceedingly jealous of our own sovereignty and it is only right that we should respect a similar feeling among other nations. The peoples of the other Republics of this Western world are just as patriotic, just as proud of their sovereignty. Many of these nations are large, wealthy and highly civilized. The peace, the security, the integrity, the independence of every one of the American Republics is of interest to all the others, not to the United States alone. . . . Single-handed intervention by us in the internal affairs of other nations must end; with the cooperation of others we shall have more order in this hemisphere and less dislike. . . . The time is ripe to start another chapter. On that new page there is much that should be written in the spirit of our forebears. If the leadership is right—or, more truly, if the spirit behind it is great—the United States can regain the world's trust and friendship and become again of service. We can point the way once more to the reducing of armaments; we can cooperate officially and whole-heartedly with every agency that studies and works to relieve the common ills of mankind; and we can for all time renounce the practice of arbitrary intervention in the home affairs of our neighbors."

Four years later, Franklin Roosevelt was elected President of the United States. From the moment he took office, he dedicated himself to the revival of the "American Ideal" that he invoked in the 1928 essay. He had written to historian Claude Bowers on April 3, 1929: "I think it is time to claim Lincoln as one of our own. The Republican Party has certainly



*From left, President John F. Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Lyndon LaRouche, the modern-day heirs of “American Exceptionalism” who have sought to strengthen the republican nation-state, and who have based their work on the belief that, in the words of the Declaration of Independence, “All men have been endowed by their Creator” with the inalienable rights of “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”*

repudiated, first and last, everything that he stood for. That period from 1865-1876 should be known as America’s Dark Ages. I am not sure that we are not headed for the same type of era again.”

Again, Roosevelt showed a flair for the ironic. Not only was Bowers a one-time *New York Times* reporter and a leading State Department Anglophile, but he had written a history of the Civil War, shortly before FDR wrote to him, that was an unabashed apology for the Confederacy.

Roosevelt’s appreciation of Lincoln, nurtured during his intense study of the Founding Fathers and the American System while he was engaged in his long fight to overcome polio, was also something that flowed from his own generational experience. His father, James Roosevelt, had been born in 1828, and was a Union Democrat. His grandfather, Isaac Roosevelt, had been born in 1790, just three years after the Constitutional Convention.

### **A revival of American System diplomacy**

In the White House, confronted with the onset of a Great Depression at home, FDR, nevertheless, launched a revival of American System diplomacy in his first inaugural address, delivered on March 4, 1933: “In the field of world policy,” he announced, “I would dedicate this nation to the policy of the good neighbor—the neighbor who resolutely respects himself and because he does so, respects the rights of others—the neighbor who respects his obligations and respects the sanctity of agreements in and with a world of neighbors.”

To demonstrate that these were not empty phrases, Roosevelt convened a special session of the governing board of the Pan American Union in Washington, D.C. just a month later. On April 12, 1933, in an address which was broadcast all across the hemisphere in several languages, Roosevelt stated, “Common ideals and a community of interest, together with a spirit of cooperation, have led to the realization that the well-being of one Nation depends in large measure upon the well-being of its neighbors. . . . Friendship among Nations, as among individuals, calls for the constructive efforts to muster the forces of humanity in order that an atmosphere of close understanding and cooperation must be cultivated. . . . In this spirit, the people of every Republic on our continent are coming to a deep understanding of the fact that the Monroe Doctrine, of which so much has been written and spoken for more than a century, was and is directed at the maintenance of independence by the peoples of the continent. It was aimed and is aimed against the acquisition in any manner of the control of additional territory in this hemisphere by any non-American power. . . . Each one of us must grow by an advancement of civilization and social well-being, and not by the acquisition of territory at the expense of any neighbor.”

The following year, Roosevelt completed a personal mission that he had first launched in the 1920s. He pushed through Congress the Philippines Independence Act of 1934, which granted the Pacific nation full independence by 1946, to follow a period of intensive American investment in the improvement of living standards and education on the islands.

Roosevelt's action toward the Philippines would give him the moral high-ground for his future battle with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and the entire structure of British and continental European imperialism. Roosevelt's notion of a United Nations—in contrast to the One World Federalist views of the H.G. Wells and Bertrand Russell British camp—was as a collection of sovereign states, serving as trustees, overseeing the decolonization of the colonial world, and preparing those peoples, through similar investment in education and industrial development, for true sovereignty.

Roosevelt's efforts to revive the American Ideal in domestic and foreign policy were consciously steeped in the Platonic and New Testament principle of *agapē*. Consider these words, from his June 27, 1936 speech at the Democratic Party Convention, where he accepted his renomination as the party's candidate for President. "It has been brought home to us that the only effective guide for safety in this most worldly of worlds, the greatest guide of all is moral principle. We do not see faith, hope and charity as unattainable ideals, but we use them as stout supports of a Nation fighting the fight for freedom in modern civilization. . . . Faith—in the soundness of democracy in the midst of dictatorships. Hope—renewed because we know so well the progress we have made. Charity—in the true spirit of that grand old word. For charity literally translated means love, love that understands, that does not merely share the wealth of the giver, but in true sympathy and wisdom helps men to help themselves. We seek not merely to make Government a mechanical implement, but to give it a vibrant personal character that is very much the embodiment of human charity. . . . In the place of privilege we seek to build a temple out of faith, hope and charity. . . . Governments can err, Presidents make mistakes, but the immortal Dante tells us that divine justice weighs the sins of the cold-blooded and the sins of the warm-hearted on different scales."

### The battle over the postwar future

As war in Europe commenced, President Roosevelt was faced with a series of challenges: to mobilize the American industrial base, and the American people, as never before, to defeat the Nazis. And, to lay the basis, during the wartime alliance with Britain and the Soviet Union, for a postwar world free from the degradation of colonialism. For FDR, to have accomplished the first objective without the second would have been tantamount to defeat, as sure as if Hitler had conquered all of Europe.

We have the benefit of Roosevelt's intimate discussions with his son, Elliot, during some of the most crucial diplomatic conferences of the war: Argentia, Casablanca, Cairo, and Tehran. In 1946, Elliot Roosevelt was driven to publish his private discussions with his father in the form of a book, *As He Saw It*, for reasons he made clear in the opening pages. "The decision to write this book was taken recently, and impelled by urgent events. Winston Churchill's speech at Fulton, Missouri, had a hand in this decision. . . . All the signs of

growing disunity among the leading nations of the world, all the broken promises, all the renascent power politics of greedy and desperate imperialism were my spurs in this undertaking. . . . The unity that won the war should be, must be, a fact today, if we are to win the peace. . . . But more and more since V-E Day, and since the atom bomb first fell, this unity has disappeared. It is because I doubt that we have only *drifted* away from this unity, it is because I am convinced that we are being *shoved* away from it, by men who should know better . . . that I felt it important for me to write this book. . . . I am writing this, then, to you who agree with me that . . . Franklin Roosevelt's ideal and statesmanship would have been sufficient to keep that unity a vital entity during the postwar period, and who agree with me that the path he charted has been most grievously—and deliberately—forsaken." *As He Saw It* was dedicated "To all those who believed in my father."

Months before the United States formally entered the war, following the attack on Pearl Harbor, FDR met with Churchill at Argentia, in Newfoundland, Canada. It was August 1941. Roosevelt was clear as to the stark differences between the United States and Britain. He told Elliot, "I think I speak as America's President when I say that America won't help England in this war simply so that she will be able to continue to ride roughshod over colonial peoples." The next day, meeting with Churchill, Roosevelt was equally blunt: "I am firmly of the belief that if we are to arrive at a stable peace it must involve the development of backward countries. Backward peoples. How can this be done? It can't be done, obviously, by eighteenth-century methods."

Churchill, his neck beet-red, interrupted, "Who's talking eighteenth-century methods?"

Roosevelt: "Whichever of your ministers recommends a policy which takes wealth in raw materials out of a colonial country, but which returns nothing to the people of that country in consideration. Twentieth-century methods involve bringing industry to these colonies. Twentieth-century methods include increasing the wealth of a people by increasing their standard of living, by educating them, by bringing sanitation—by making sure that they get a return for the raw wealth of their community."

Elliot Roosevelt observed, "The P.M. himself was beginning to look apoplectic. 'You mentioned India,' he growled."

FDR: "Yes. I can't believe that we can fight a war against fascist slavery, and at the same time not work to free people all over the world from a backward colonial policy."

At Argentia, Roosevelt prevailed, forcing Churchill to sign the Atlantic Charter, a document that spelled out the principles of universal freedom from the colonial yoke, for the postwar world.

### The 'Four Freedoms'

Even before his first face-to-face confrontation with Churchill, Roosevelt had spelled out the principles for which America was prepared to fight. In his State of the Union message, on Jan. 6, 1941, FDR told the American people, "In

future days, which we seek to secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms”:

The first is freedom of speech and expression—everywhere in the world.

The second freedom is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way—everywhere in the world.

The third is freedom from want—which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants—everywhere in the world.

The fourth is freedom from fear—which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor—anywhere in the world. . . .

Since the beginning of our American history we have been engaged in change—in a perpetual peaceful revolution—a revolution which goes on steadily, quietly adjusting itself to changing conditions—without the concentration camp or the quick-lime in the ditch. The world order which we seek is the cooperation of free countries, working together in a friendly, civilized society.

This Nation has placed its destiny in the hands and heads of its millions of free men and women; and its faith in freedom under the guidance of God. Freedom means the supremacy of human rights everywhere. Our support goes to those who struggle to gain those rights or keep them. Our strength is in our unity of purpose. To that high concept there can be no end save victory.

Like another American statesman, Lyndon LaRouche, Roosevelt relished the opportunity to travel around the world, to discover first-hand the history of other nations. Invariably, the discussion would turn to concrete plans for the postwar liberation and economic development of areas under the British, Dutch, Belgian, French, and Portuguese colonial yoke. During the Tehran conference, where the President met for the first time with Josef Stalin, FDR held just such a discussion with Mohammed Reza Pahlevi, the young Shah of Persia. Elliot Roosevelt described the discussion:

“As ever, Father was interested in finding out more about the country, and in probing around for ideas that would help to solve its problems. He and the Iranian officials discussed the barren desert which made up such a great part of the country; they told him how, in centuries past, their land had been heavily wooded, and told of how it had become a dust bowl. This was a familiar subject to Father; warming up, he raised the question of a gigantic reforestation program; shifted from there to the plight of the majority of the Shah’s subjects; tied the two things together; and was at length drawn by his visitors to a consideration of the economic grip which Britain had on Iran’s oil wells and mineral deposits. Father nodded

sympathetically, and agreed that steps should be taken to safeguard Iran’s natural wealth.”

Moments after the meeting broke up, FDR instructed Elliot, “Go find Pat Hurley, and tell him to get to work drawing up a draft memorandum guaranteeing Iran’s independence and her self-determination of her economic interests. . . . An agreement from the Russians and the British guaranteeing Iranian sovereignty and political independence. . . . It should be a good example of what we’ll be able to accomplish, later on.”

Within days, Hurley had accomplished the task. Stalin enthusiastically backed FDR’s plan, Churchill did all he could to squirm out of it, but, ultimately, was boxed in and added his signature.

The Iran memorandum provoked another revealing discussion between FDR and his son. Roosevelt was painfully aware that his policies were not universally adored by London and by the permanent bureaucracy in Washington.

“You know, Elliot,” FDR began, “men like Pat Hurley are invaluable. Why? Because they’re loyal. I can give him assignments that I’d never give a man in the State Department, because I can depend on him. You know what I mean? You know, any number of times the men in the State Department have tried to conceal messages to me, delay them, hold them up somehow, just because some of those career diplomats aren’t in accord with what they know I think. They should be working for Winston. As a matter of fact, a lot of the time they are. Stop to think of ’em: any number of ’em are convinced that the way for America to conduct its foreign policy is to find out what the British are doing, and then copy that. It isn’t a question of whether they’re Democrats or Republicans. As far as I know, Pat Hurley and a half-dozen others who work for me are dyed-in-the-wool Republicans. But they know their country’s at war, and they’re anxious to do what they can for their country. So they do it. I was told six years ago to clean out that State Department. It’s like the British Foreign Office. They have a man there, his title is Permanent Under-Secretary. He’s Permanent Under-Secretary if the Government is Tory, or if it’s Labor, or if it’s Liberal. Makes no difference. There he is: Permanent. That’s our State Department.”

### **Plans for postwar recovery**

As “unconditional victory” came nearer, President Roosevelt directed more of his attention to the details of a postwar recovery plan. In his brief, fourth inaugural address, which he delivered on Jan. 20, 1945 at the front of the White House, FDR prayed, “The Almighty God has blessed our land in many ways. He has given to our people stout hearts and strong arms with which to strike mighty blows for freedom and truth. He has given our country a faith which has become the hope of all peoples in an anguished world. So we pray to Him now for the vision to see our way clearly—to see the way that leads to a better life for ourselves and for all our fellow men—and to the achievement of His will to bring peace on earth.”

Earlier in the month, in his annual budget message to Congress, FDR had spelled out detailed plans for a \$100 billion postwar infrastructure program, to transform and expand the war industry into postwar civilian industry, and to make education, quality health care, and affordable housing available to all Americans, beginning with the returning GIs. In the budget message, he spelled out his idea of a World Bank, devoted to providing cheap, long-term credits for reconstruction to nations ravaged by war and colonial looting. The World Bank credits should be secured by loan guarantees from economically stronger nations, led by the United States. He called for Congress to vastly expand the Export-Import Bank toward the same end, and called for investment tax credits for U.S. industries committed to the worldwide reconstruction effort.

On Feb. 12, 1945, Roosevelt delivered another message to Congress, urging the ratification of the Bretton Woods Accords. "We all know," he began, "that a prosperous world economy must be built on more than foreign investment. Exchange rates must be stabilized and the channels of trade opened up through the world. A large foreign trade after victory will generate production, and therefore wealth. It will make possible the servicing of foreign investments. . . . Almost no one in the modern world produces what he eats and wears and lives in. It is only by the division of labor among people and geographic areas with all their varied resources

and by the increased all-around production which specialization makes possible, that any modern country can sustain its present population. It is through exchange and trade that efficient production in large units becomes possible. To expand the trading circle, to make it richer, more competitive, more varied, is a fundamental contribution to everybody's wealth and welfare." FDR emphasized that such postwar trade ties and economic expansion was the work of sovereign nation-states, working in collaboration, not the task of a "super-government."

On April 12, 1945, FDR died, at the age of 63. From the moment that Harry Truman was sworn in as President, at 7:07 p.m., the United States and the world were plunged into another 15 years in which U.S. Presidential leadership was found wanting. Others, like Elliot Roosevelt, carried the policy banner of FDR, but never captured the ear of either Truman or Eisenhower.

Historian Samuel Flagg Bemis, who had served as an adviser to the wartime Roosevelt government, wrote a two-volume popular biography of John Quincy Adams, which won the 1949 Pulitzer Prize. In a very real sense, the book was an outgrowth of the effort by a group of scholars, diplomats, and wartime soldiers, to pass on the American System legacy, particularly the legacy of John Quincy Adams, the father of American diplomacy, to a whole generation of Americans. With the same general purpose in mind, A. Whit-

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ney Griswold had already written a history of *The Far East Policy of the United States*, while at Yale with Bemis, and another American diplomatic historian, Nicholas J. Spykman. Arthur Whitaker, a veteran of the Policy Planning Staff at the wartime State Department who did not fit the mold of the “pin-striped suit” permanent bureaucrat loathed by FDR, contributed a series of essays, *The Western Hemisphere Idea*, which further advanced the effort to keep the FDR vision of a postwar “American Century” alive.

But, it would take the 1960 Presidential elections to restore elements of the FDR vision to the Office of the Presidency. In both image and content, John F. Kennedy sought to revive the American Century ideals embodied in FDR’s Four Freedoms.

The optimism of the FDR-led World War II generation had fuelled a domestic civil rights movement in America, which embodied the same vision of a more perfect world—including for all Americans, regardless of race or color. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. best expressed those aspirations in his famous speech before 250,000 civil rights activists at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963. President Clinton, just last month, commemorated the 35th anniversary of that March on Washington, and reflected on the profound impact that King’s words that day had had upon him.

In the span of less than five years, both John Kennedy and Martin Luther King were taken from us, the victims of assassins dispatched by the same London-centered imperial cabal that had earlier assassinated Presidents Abraham Lincoln and William McKinley.

JFK was the first American President born in the twentieth century. His violent death, and the cover-up that followed, caused a mass shock trauma, that drove many young Americans into the British trap known as the counterculture. For the past 30 years, with the brief exception of President Ronald Reagan’s bold Strategic Defense Initiative, an effort launched by Lyndon LaRouche, the nation has drifted far afield from the America of Franklin, Adams, and FDR.

Yet, when President Clinton, the first American President born *after* the death of Roosevelt, showed even a glimmer of the FDR aversion to British imperial manipulations, first in the Balkans, later in Northern Ireland and the Middle East, all Hell broke loose against him. The institution of the Presidency, for reasons that are, hopefully, clear to all of you, is under the greatest attack in history, an attack being led, literally, by the heirs of Churchill. Their ever-present fear is that, under proper leadership, the American commitment to a better world, for all the peoples of all the nations of the globe, can be quickly rekindled.

With FDR and, to a lesser extent, with JFK, that leadership flowed from the Oval Office, America’s great republican bully pulpit. Today, the highest expression of American leadership and the clearest voice of “American Exceptionalism” exists in the person of Lyndon LaRouche, and us, gathered here as LaRouche Democrats.

# John Quincy Adams and universal America

by Anton Chaitkin

Let us:

- look at the development of the independent United States of America as a great power, through the life of John Quincy Adams;
- understand the universal *mission* of the country as this classically educated man came to express and carry out that mission;
- see why America insisted on national sovereignty, against any foreign control, and how we applied our sovereign powers to industrialize, and to create a unified, continent-wide nation;
- recognize how we spread our mission of nation-building, and resistance to British imperial tyranny, from here to other continents;
- and see how John Quincy Adams’s accomplishments prepared the way for Abraham Lincoln’s victories, and the triumph of the American System.

And, let us come to understand better how Lyndon LaRouche, *uniquely* among today’s leaders, represents the economics of the founders, and builders, of the United States. LaRouche is the consummate American.

John Quincy Adams was born in 1767 south of Boston, Massachusetts. His childhood was filled with the events of the Revolution. When he was seven years old, he went with his mother to watch the battle at Bunker Hill, early in the Revolution.

In 1778, and then again in 1780, as a young boy, he went with his father, John Adams, to Europe—his father was a leader of our Revolutionary fundraising and diplomacy.

John Quincy Adams’s mother, Abigail Adams, wrote to him that he should go ahead with his father to Europe and not worry about missing some school; because, she said, “This is a time in which a genius would wish to live.” And, he lived his whole life with this revolutionary sense of excitement and determination, hour to hour, minute to minute.

In Europe, he studied French, and some Dutch, and a whole array of Classical studies.

In 1781, at age 14, in the middle of the American Revolution, in Europe on this mission with his father, he went to Russia as a private secretary and French interpreter for the U.S. minister to the Russian court, who was over there to try to convince the Tsarina to take America’s side, or at least to stay neutral.

In 1782, he returned to Paris, as a secretary to the commis-