

City on a Hill: A Reflection on Christian Ethic and Human Morality

Mayce Combs

Helms School of Government

Liberty University

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Abstract

In John Winthrop's sermon *A Model of Christian Charity* (1630), he advised his congregation that they were called to be a set apart nation, by being set apart people. With the creation of a new blended nation, the only way to be exceptional was to reflect the gospel in policy, action, and foremost thought. Philosophers from ancient times to today acknowledge that an individual is made up of the soul and their body. From the soul, comes thought, reason, empathy, and a connection to a divine being who deciphers what is morally unjust. The body is a sinful, self-seeking vessel that does not have the ability to regulate what justice is and how to obtain it. Through Christianity, an explanation is given on how to regulate the two forms and how obtain exceptionalism. Unfortunately, exceptionalism is unobtainable while in the bodily realm, as the divine has gifted free choice, but individuals who repent their flesh can still radiate glimpses of exceptionalism. This may be through assisting those in poverty, practicing divine morality, and becoming a haven for those escaping persecution. American politicians have used political philosophy and Winthrop's Christian message of becoming a 'City on a Hill' to change the definitions of what American exceptionalism and divine morality look like. With the divorce and misuse of these terms, has come the decline of true American exceptionalism.

When humanity was created, in the eyes of all Abrahamic religions, there was a deep personal connection to the Almighty being. God intended for humanity to be holy beings fit to worship him and have free choice. Humanity used this choice to fall from God's glory, resulting in the knowledge of sin and eventual death. Since the fall of man, God redeemed humanity through the sacrifice of his son, Jesus Christ, in order for humanity to be restored and guided by the Holy Spirit. Countries like America have tried to mirror Christ's teaching in order to redeem and present themselves as a pinnacle of God's house. John Winthrop was a Puritan leader who inspired many believers and politicians in his 1630 message titled *A Model of Christian Charity*. Within his message he states that his congregation should present themselves as a "City on a Hill," which emphasizes that individuals are a reflection of God. As America developed, the concept of being a "City on a Hill" became tied with the definition of American exceptionalism until a cultural revolution in the 1960s. The ethic of the American people changed from prioritizing Christian morality to the idealization of self. Through the dissection and comparison of American history and modern events, it is blatant that the sole reason for the decline in historic American exceptionalism comes from the fragmented morality, created under a worldview and cultural shift. American politicians today, deny that the definition of American exceptionalism has changed from John Winthrop's message in 1630, which was a call for Christian morality and community to prosper in America.

A Puritan Moral Foundation

America, since the late 1500s, became a place for empires like Great Britain, France, and Spain to colonize. A vast number of these settlers were Christian believers and some, like those in the New England colonies, traveled to America to escape religious persecution. In April of 1630, John Winthrop and a group of Puritans arrived in America. Upon their arrival Winthrop delivered a message titled *A Model of Christian Charity*, which explained to his fellow Puritans that establishing themselves in American was a chance to practice their faith freely and demonstrate superior citizenship. All Puritan messages were deeply rooted in scripture and in Winthrop's message, he uses strategic pieces of scripture to support his principles of citizenship. His primary message derives from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, which calls Christ followers to reflect godliness to the world and not to lose conviction by the Spirit. Matthew 5 is divided into nine sections: "The Beatitudes", "Salt and Light", "Christ Came to Fulfill the Law", "Anger", "Lust", "Divorce", "Oaths", "Retaliation", and "Love Your Enemies."¹ Each section is not only direction for obedient spiritual behavior, but a connection on how to be a good citizen. As the new governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and a religious leader, Winthrop understood this connection in Matthew 5. The world, especially their mother country Great Britain, was watching and waiting for their downfall. Settling in this new land would be a trial and a blessing. With this in mind, Winthrop warns that those who say they practice faith but do not reflect it in their works will suffer.² If a citizen is off balance spiritually, they will also be off balance in society. To become an illuminous 'City on a Hill' his constituents must guard against the temptations that have led to the corruption of other nations and to do this they must prioritize three objectives. First, they must emulate justice, practice mercy among themselves and with

¹ Matthew 5 (English Standard Version)

² John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity, 1630," Hanover Historical Text Collection, 1838, <https://history.hanover.edu/texts/winthmod.html>.

those outside their community, and submit all they have to the Lord.³ All three principles work cohesively to please God and institute peace.

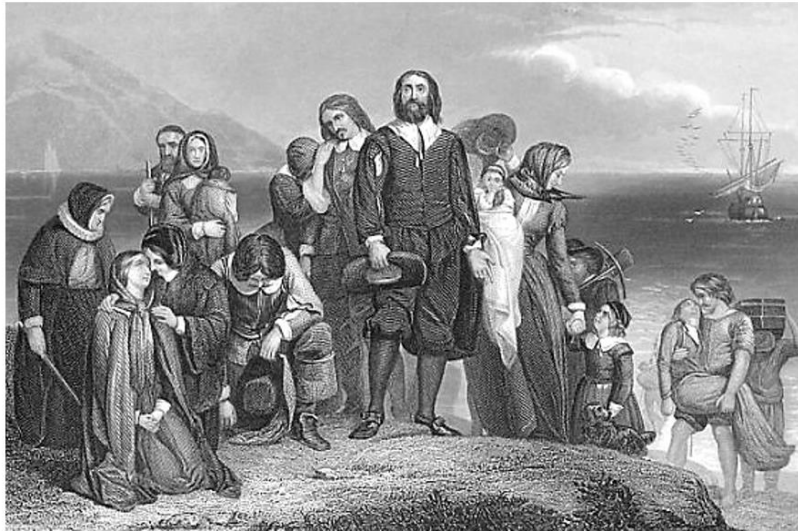


Figure 1 The White House Historical Association, "Landing of the Pilgrims by Charles Lucy," *World History Encyclopedia*, November 18, 2020, <https://www.worldhistory.org/image/13125/landing-of-the-pilgrims-by-charles-lucy/>.

Biblical Justice

Justice, in modern and ancient times, is rather hard to pin point, but Biblical justice is fundamentally simple. Christians are called to do several minuscule things in the temporal realm, but their primary objective is to love and worship the Lord. This objective can be sought after in many different ways like singing and praying, but all that is done in and for the Lord, must also be done in the person's heart. The individual must love the Lord and have the sole desire to be a servant to the Lord. St. Augustine of Hippo perceives that justice is love only for the purpose of God, because he is the only good.⁴ Subsequently, without justice there could be no mercy, and without mercy the humbleness of submitting to the Lord and receiving salvation would be impossible. All three objectives instructed by Winthrop coincide to create an internal harmony within the individual. If all citizens agree and practice these objectives, there would also be a communal harmony. Objectively, justice is good and since the Lord is good, justice is the will of the Lord. Whatever the Lord commands in turn will result in the community being good.

This Biblical view of justice in general theory or short-term application is perfect and clean, but humanity has too many unstable factors for justice to remain sedentary. The Lord has provided humanity with his spirit however to help provide discernment in areas where scripture is not explicit.⁵ The Puritans faced several social and legal issues within the first several years of

³ John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity, 1630," Hanover Historical Text Collection, 1838, <https://history.hanover.edu/texts/winthmod.html>.

⁴ Augustine, "Excerpts from Augustine's on the Morals of the Catholic Church," University of Idaho, accessed September 7, 2023, <https://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/jcanders/Ethics/excerptsaugonmorals.htm>.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 2:7-12 (English Standard Version)

establishment, most notably, witch trials. In Exodus 22:18 it states that “You shall not permit a sorceress to live” and the Puritans took this law earnestly.⁶ Most American citizens today only remember the over 200 puritans who were murdered for suspicion of witchcraft in the witch trials that took place in Salem Massachusetts from February 1692- May 1693.⁷ However, there were witch trials across the New England colonies. While serving as the Governor of Connecticut, John Winthrop spoke out against the quick condemnation that would come against those accused specifically in the Connecticut trials.⁸ His discernment resulted in only 12 guilty verdicts over a hundred years versus in Salem’s over 200 in 1 year.⁹ He understood that while it is Biblical just to eradicate witches, it is dangerous to the community to assume an accusation is guaranteed guilt. Justice requires mercy and grace, which is the next objective Winthrop advises to the Puritans.

Practicing Mercy and Submitting All to the Lord

Mercy and giving all your physically and emotionally items to the will of the Lord is a difficult act of humility. Both concepts are counter intuitive to a human’s nature, which strives for control and knowledge. Within Winthrop’s message in *A Model of Christian Charity*, he advises that mercy should be reflected in how individuals distribute their wealth.¹⁰ The Lord bestows different gifts to each individual. Some may be excellent with business and others may be excellent at farming. Whatever special the Lord has given an individual, they should use that gift to please the Lord and use humility to bestow the fruits of their labor to the Lord. If an individual has the gift of substantial financial accrument the Lord calls them to act mercifully by assisting those in need or easing debts. There are multiple stories within the Bible that explain how Christians are called to be merciful in all they do because the Lord is even more merciful.¹¹ The world and the political body call in opposition to this divine justice and mercy. Winthrop advocates that the Church and politic must be separate in order to protect individuals from confusing acts of earthly mercy as heavenly mercy. Winthrop’s message is a call to his congregation, and later the greater American body, that they must set themselves apart by being an example of heavenly justice, mercy, and community servitude. By doing this they are perceived as pleasing to God, but also exceptional among humanity for their principles.

⁶ Exodus 22:18 (English Standard Version)

⁷ Elizabeth Purdy, “Salem Witch Trials,” The Free Speech Center, August 4, 2023, <https://firstamendment.mtsu.edu/article/salem-witch-trials/>.

⁸ Tricia Ennis, “Righting the Wrongs of Connecticut’s Witch Trials,” Connecticut Inside Investigator, October 30, 2022, <https://insideinvestigator.org/inside-oddities-righting-the-wrongs-of-connecticuts-witch-trials/>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ John Winthrop, “A Modell of Christian Charity, 1630,” Hanover Historical Text Collection, 1838, <https://history.hanover.edu/texts/winthmod.html>.

¹¹ Luke 6:36 (English Standard Version)

Growing Recognition and Scrutiny

The exceptionalism of a country is completely subjective to the individual and their virtues. American exceptionalism was recognized originally by the French foreign affairs minister and aristocrat Alexis Charles Henri Clérel, comte de Tocqueville. His original intention for travel to the new American republic in 1831 and 1832, was to research the American penal system, but he quickly found something much more intriguing. Tocqueville had visited several other countries of prominence, but he labeled America as unique. He analyzed America from the governmental-macro view of federalism, down to the specific culture of the people in each community he visited, particularly Puritan communities. In 1835 and 1840, Tocqueville published his thoughts as a two-part book, *Democracy in America*, where he states America is exceptional because the people believe they are exceptional.¹² Through his complicated justification of this statement his philosophy resounds that Americans are only exceptional because they have the mentality that they are unique under the view of God and must demonstrate this to the world.

Democracies and Republics had existed for centuries prior the founding of America, but Tocqueville regarded America's system of democracy as superior, but still risky. Historically, democracies were created with the intention of equality and individualism. Unfortunately, the natural selfish nature of man however, had always led to corruption either through eventual dictatorship or destruction by the tyranny of majority. American individualism was encouraged not by political belief like other democracies, but through moral belief. All citizens, primarily in the New England colonies, were given a thorough education taught through religious tools like the Bible.¹³ This resulted in fundamental legal concepts like freedom and justice being based or influenced by scripture. Tocqueville also cites that John Winthrop indicated the necessity for individualism to be first based on a person's moral compass for them to be just political actor in a democracy.¹⁴ If all citizens operate under the 'morality before policy' mindset, the democracy is fueled by respect and a set of common moral rules that can then be politized to for a legal document.

Other nations, including Tocqueville's own country, France, were primarily Christian, but they lacked the American form of individualism. In America, morality on the basis of religion started within the individual and would build through the town, state, and eventual national government. Great Britain, France, and Spain all prioritized national religious beliefs that trickled down to individuals. This resulted in a detachment from personal conviction and political influence in the name of religion. Females within America were encouraged to learn how to read and ponder about ethic and responsibility.¹⁵ A majority of female aristocrats in Great Britain, France, and Spain were told what to believe and their primary goal in life was marriage and family succession. The few females in Great Britain, France, and Spain that did receive some education were not permitted to question the churches teaching, but rather accept what was being

¹² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835; repr., London England: Penguin Books, 2003).

¹³ Stephen Flick, "Christians Initiate American Public Schools," Christian Heritage Fellowship, Inc., August 6, 2023, <https://christianheritagefellowship.com/christians-initiate-american-public-schools/>.

¹⁴ Harvey C. Mansfield, *Tocqueville: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2010), <https://contemporarythinkers.org/harvey-mansfield/book/tocqueville-a-very-short-introduction/>.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

taught from the pulpit with blind faith. An American, according to Tocqueville, had a hunger to learn, question, and the culture encouraged such behavior. This made the American successful because they took pride in what they said and wanted to see their community thrive. Other democracies or similar forms of government lacked a citizen culture driven by this type of moral and societal ambition, which resulted in Tocqueville's coinage of American exceptionalism.

America's Thread of Exceptionalism

Once Tocqueville coined America as a unique and exceptional nation, the politization of the phrase and relating phrases became a calling card to the American people and world. Additionally, because of Tocqueville's reference to John Winthrop's proclamation for America to be a "City on a Hill," politicians use both statements synonymously and typically in times of social divide. For instance, President Abraham Lincoln addressed the New Jersey general assembly two months before the start of the Civil War on April 12th, 1861, and called America the Almighty's "almost chosen people."¹⁶ This was almost a direct reference to John Winthrop's 1630 message and America's coinage as exceptional by Tocqueville, but that America would not be able to keep this title if the internal struggle led to external division. The internal struggle was over the moral argument of legalized slavery. Northern states used Christian values to point that all humans were made in the image of God, therefore no human should be kept as a slave. Southern states countered that the Bible supports slavery because of verses like Ephesians 6:5-9 which states:

⁵ Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. ⁶ Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. ⁷ Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, ⁸ because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free. ⁹ And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.¹⁷

President Lincoln, a man who received a thorough religious education, immediately condemned this argument because it was counter intuitive to the entire context of the Bible.¹⁸ The South's self-righteous theology is the exact reason for President Lincoln's statement on America being the Almighty's "almost chosen people."¹⁹ Winthrop and Tocqueville recognized the American people for exceptional Christian moral belief, but Lincoln points out that Americans cannot be exceptional if there is a split belief in Christian morality. This eventual resulted in a bloody civil

¹⁶ Abraham Lincoln, "Abraham Lincoln's Addresses at the New Jersey Statehouse," Abraham Lincoln Online, February 21, 1861, <https://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/trenton1.htm>.

¹⁷ Ephesians 6:5-9 (New International Version)

¹⁸ Ian Hunt, "Abraham Lincoln on Using the Bible to Justify Slavery," Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, March 2, 2021, <https://presidentlincoln.illinois.gov/Blog/Posts/111/Abraham-Lincoln/2021/3/Abraham-Lincolns-arguments-against-using-the-Bible-to-justify-slavery/blog-post/>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

war, with the theologically accurate North winning and freeing thousands of enslaved African men and women. The enslavement of these men, women, and children will forever be a deep scar on the heart of America. One, in which, will always lead the American people to question if they were or could ever be exceptional.

Less than a century after the civil war, Perry Miller, an American historian, and literature analyst seconded the notion of American exceptionalism through moral philosophy. For America to be a set a part nation, referring to the Puritans, Americans had to achieve a collective state of mind.²⁰ Tocqueville had discovered the uniqueness found particularly within the Puritan community, but Miller expounded on lasting effects of the dying denomination. The Puritans were community driven because of the moral duties laid out within the Bible. Other denominations like Baptists or Anglicans also adhere to Biblical moral duties, but Miller noted that as the nation grew, individual faith began to weaken, which in turn weakened communal moral belief. Tocqueville warned in *Democracy in America*, that if individualism lost its foundation in religion, then exceptionalism would slowly dwindle as policy became the ruler of an Americans philosophy.

This warning was further affirmed in the 1900s as exceptionalism grew into more nationalistic terms like “America first,” specifically through a group of students at Yale who formed the America First Committee (AFC)²¹. This group, whom a notable member was President Gerald Ford, advocated for America to sustain an isolationist mentality. This was one of the first definitive moments marking the transition of morality based American exceptionalism to policy focused exceptionalism. Later, President George W. Bush, after the terrorist attack on September 11th, 2001, used the terminology related to American exceptionalism to advocate for America to be more involved in international affairs. America was termed the greatest by Bush, in order to capitalize on the culture of fear from the attack to bring the nation together and raise moral. In 2016, President Donald J. Trump made his campaign slogan ‘Make America Great Again’ (MAGA) to emphasize a decline in American moral, but also bring hope that America will return to a standard of exceptionalism. Throughout the progression of the American exceptionalism narrative, there has never been a firm definition, only a reflection on what could be better accompanied by hope.

The Divorce of ‘City on a Hill’ and America Exceptionalism

The concepts of being a ‘City on a Hill’ and American exceptionalism have been intertwined since John Winthrop’s message in 1630, although they do not necessarily represent the same values. To be a part of a ‘City on a Hill’ is a Christian ethical perspective, that requires individuals to practice biblical justice, give mercy to others in and outside their community, and submit all they have to the Lord. The type of individual who emulates these objectives is exceptional and if everyone within a community has the same mindset the community in turn will present behaviors that are superior to other nations. American exceptionalism should only be represented by the ‘City on a Hill’ narrative, because without a strong common morality the statistical support of being superior compared to other nations dissipates.

²⁰ Abram C. Van Engen, *City on a Hill: A History of American Exceptionalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020).

²¹ George Rosie, “America First Was Not a Pro-Nazi Organization,” *The Guardian*, March 5, 2017, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/05/america-first-was-not-a-pro-nazi-organisation>.

Perry Miller deeply analyzed the connection between the two concepts and found that the Puritans, in order to achieve being a ‘City on a Hill’, developed a particular state of mind. The life of a Puritan involved diligent biblical and academic study, contributing to the household and greater community, and reflecting godliness. Their community operated on the mentality of helping one another to be a demonstration of God’s goodness. American exceptionalism must be similar in that it is also based on the community, however the community’s definition of what is exceptional changes when the community changes its virtues.

The Puritans established their first settlement with a specific culture that resounded throughout the New England region for the next 200 years. Historically, most individuals from the 1600s-1900s in that area were raised in a Christian faith and taught to work hard. This also meant study multiple subjects including religion, philosophy, science, math, and grammar with verve. Children and young adults in New England during these time periods, had intensely packed days with learning, chores, and skill building. This led to them being categorized as exceptional because they not only did, they believe that they were, their actions were superior compared to those in other colonies and nations. New England in 2023 is home to more than 250 higher education institutions, some being among the oldest in the nation.²² Other regions followed in similar sentiment by establishing educational institutions, placing value in being a community, and active in faith.

Education is recognized today as one of the most important defining factors on a country’s economic success and freedom. America according to several different census sources is the number one country for education, but when education is broken down by subject it disproves this standard.²³ Historically the American education system was private or taught by

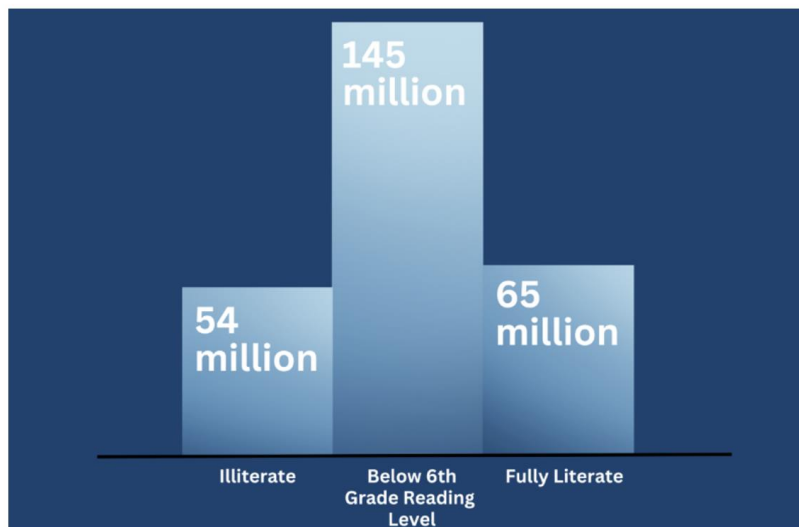


Figure 1 Charlotte Bolay, “The Silent Epidemic of Falling Literacy Rates,” *The Epic*, November 6, 2023, <https://theepic.com/45513/in-depth/the-silent-epidemic-of-falling-literacy-rates/>.

the family. When public school became widely available a myriad of issues relating to funding, safety, and policy weakened the subjects that were taught. America ranks “11th out of 79 countries in science” and math testing score have relatively stayed the same in the past 20 years.²⁴ Additionally, a majority of American citizens, particularly those in the South, read below a 6th grade reading

²² Regis College, “Top Reasons to Go to College in New England,” www.regiscollege.edu, November 23, 2020, <https://www.regiscollege.edu/blog/college-advice/top-reasons-go-college-new-england#:~:text=According%20to%20a%20report%20by>.

²³ Kimberly Amadeo, “U.S. Education Rankings Are Falling behind Those of the Rest of the World.,” *The Balance*, April 13, 2022, <https://www.thebalancemoney.com/the-u-s-is-losing-its-competitive-advantage-3306225>.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

level or are illiterate.²⁵ As illiteracy rises, it signals that American society does not value knowledge or use critical thinking skills to expand reasoning ability. This is incredibly important because individuals must value in reasoning skills to investigate morality like philosophy or religion. However, even with the lack of literacy a vast number of Americans still identify as Christian or with another religion.

In 2023, the American South has long been known as the nation's Bible belt, based on the number of churches and those that claim to practice Christianity.²⁶ The name 'Bible belt' is losing its backing as the number of Christian churches closing and those abandoning Christianity have dwindled exponentially since 2009.²⁷ Americans today are abandoning the moral objectives of Christianity and other similar religions because of social constraints of religion. Young citizens in particular are deconstructing religion and opting for the perspective of personal truth and self happiness. This concept is not foreign, but the once synonymous morally exceptional and statistically exceptional America have not existed since the early 1900s.

In the 1960s, movements like the sexual revolution began to shift what the common American found virtuous, which resulted in the separation of the 'City on a Hill' way of life and an exceptional American view. The culture shift specifically targeted and disrupted the nuclear family and changed individuals' focus on others to focusing on themselves. Under the Christian ethic of being a 'City on a Hill', individuals must prioritize others over themselves because that is what God says is good and whatever is good is just. Women were encouraged to

The rise of religious 'nones' looks similar in data from Pew Research Center and the General Social Survey

General Social Survey (darker) and Pew Research Center (lighter) estimates of U.S. religious composition, among U.S. adults

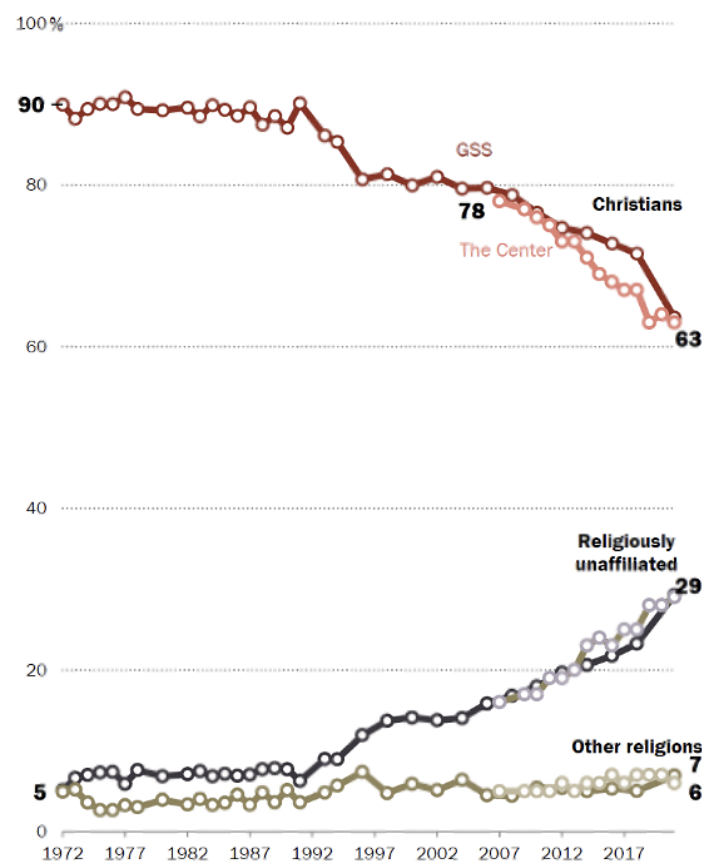


Figure 1 Pew Research Center, "How U.S. Religious Composition Has Changed in Recent Decades," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project (Pew Research Center, September 13, 2022), <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/09/13/how-u-s-religious-composition-has-changed-in-recent-decades/>.

²⁵ Charlotte Bolay, "The Silent Epidemic of Falling Literacy Rates," The Epic, November 6, 2023, <https://lhsepic.com/45513/in-depth/the-silent-epidemic-of-falling-literacy-rates/>.

²⁶ Mark Abadi Lee Shyanne Gal, Lloyd, "MAP: From the Bible Belt to the Rust Belt, the United States Has 13 Distinct 'Belts,'" Business Insider, February 20, 2023, <https://www.businessinsider.com/regions-america-bible-belt-rust-belt-2018-4#bible-belt-1>.

²⁷ Pew Research Center, "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project (Pew Research Center, October 17, 2019), <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.

abandon the role of homemaker and men were encouraged to abandon their roles as fathers. Since the sexual revolution, there has been a decline in happiness, an increase of mental health issues, and an increase of physical disease related to sexual relations.²⁸ American culture, which identifies a societies virtue, has shifted to praise self-serving and uneducated individualism, which obsess over the consumption worldly desires. This is a false sense of greatness because it reflects what humanity or sin teaches is virtuous, versus what Christianity proves is God’s good and just will. In Ephesians, Paul writes that though the world may be divided in what they think is good, God is the only one to declare it. Americans prior to the 1960s still acknowledge Paul’s words that though humanity are “foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope” through acting in the humbleness and sacrifice of God, peace and approval are achievable.²⁹

American exceptionalism in the 1960s argued that humanity was perfect through individual independence and self-entitlement. This virtue short coming from the sexual revolution has not changed in 2023 America. To be an example of a shining city for Christian Americans, is to be humble and obedient to God letting him shine through them. American exceptionalism since the 1960s is the by-product of the Kantianism philosophy of humanity being a man-god, where human thought is supreme in deciding community ethic. In 2023 America, individuals believe that their ‘truth’ is the supreme law and others must follow it. An example of this is California bill AB-957 which would require parents to affirm their minor children’s gender identities or face the penalty of relinquishing custody to the state.³⁰ The Californian people believe that affirming falsehoods is more important than strengthening predesigned communities.

Today’s Fight for a Moral Citizen

The foundation of an exceptional America was built on the individualism fueled by morality, can todays faithless America even compare? Politicians have claimed the two terms still align, but history argues differently. President Ronald Reagan in his farewell speech claims that he saw America as a shining city from the beginning and still viewed it as one when he left office. This city was well built, community focused, peaceful, and strong.³¹ He viewed America as great because it aligned with what a ‘City on a Hill’ was under Gods view. The sentiment behind this is valuable because while Reagan was a Christian and viewed America as Christian, sin and depravity ran rampant through America. Homelessness prevailed, sexual immorality gained more cultural traction, and individuals worried more about themselves than what would make America a better place. The two terms aligned only for those who believed in a pre-ordained blessed culture. Those who did not believe this, invented their own view of

²⁸ Steven Willing, “Victims of the Sexual Revolution, Part 2: The Decline of Happiness, and the Plight of the Young Liberal Woman,” Christian Medical & Dental Associations® (CMDA), August 17, 2023, <https://cmda.org/victims-of-the-sexual-revolution-part-2-the-decline-of-happiness-and-the-plight-of-the-young-liberal-woman/>.

²⁹ Ephesians 2:12-22 (New International Version)

³⁰ Angelo Fichera, “Critics Twist California Bill That Would Weigh Gender-Identity Support in Custody Cases,” AP News, September 12, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/misinformation-lgbtq-transgender-california-custody-3cc6d2b5282d6b0e8ba9d1ffc55edeb7>.

³¹ Ronald Reagan, “Farewell Address to the Nation,” The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute, January 11, 1989, <https://www.reaganfoundation.org/media/128652/farewell.pdf>.

exceptionalism, which resulted in a stronger rebellion against peace. President Donald J. Trump attempted to accomplish the same narrative as Reagan in his inaugural speech when he said that “we will shine for everyone to follow.”³² During his presidency the American community was incredibly unpeaceful and bore no resemblance to what a John Winthrop aspired to when he wrote about being a “City on a Hill”. Nevertheless, the American people and leaders should continue to strive for moral greatness.

In conclusion, when John Winthrop instructed the first settlers of America to be set apart, this was a collective call to create a spiritually virtuous society, but American history has proven that humanity will choose what it finds valuable and work to achieve only that. America in the 1960s, and subsequently American exceptionalism, shifted from valuing community to valuing self-truth. The term “City on a Hill” never changed its definition of representing godliness through obedience and humbleness, but America changed its cultural values to negate these characteristics when defining American exceptionalism. Politicians have continuously tried to reunite these terms, but their attempts are futile if the American people do not change their culture to represent exceptionalism through God’s will. This challenge may be hard, but it is not without hope because as Perry Miller concluded the two terms marry under the collective’s state of mind. The American people can come back to valuing a peace-loving humble community driven culture, but only if they give up selfish glorification.

³² Aaron Blake, “Donald Trump’s Full Inauguration Speech Transcript, Annotated,” The Washington Post, January 20, 2017, https://ssu.elearning.unipd.it/pluginfile.php/192247/mod_resource/content/1/Donald%20Trump%e2%80%99s%20full%20inauguration%20speech%20transcript,%20annotated%20-%20The%20Washington%20P.pdf.

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