

Power and Moral Purpose

The Rhetoric of American Exceptionalism in US Foreign Policy

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Abstract

The United States of America has viewed itself as exceptional since its inception. American exceptionalism encompasses the belief that the country is different from and inherently superior to all other nations. Presidential rhetoric, which draws on the idea of American exceptionalism continuously across time and partisanship, offers a glimpse into how the concept operates and interacts with external forces. By distinguishing between claims of material and moral superiority as two key themes of exceptionalist rhetoric and examining how US presidents utilize this idea during pivotal moments for America's role in the international system, this paper seeks to explore the interaction between power and moral purpose through the notion of American exceptionalism in US foreign policy. I examine presidential rhetoric around the ends of four major wars—World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War, and the Cold War. After victory in a major international conflict, where the previous international order is significantly transformed, the president offers visions of American exceptionalism to justify the nation's leading role in reorganizing that order. In cases with an American victory in the war, we see a higher proportion of American exceptionalist rhetoric with a material focus before the war ends. After the war ends, rhetoric with a moral emphasis increases significantly. The one defeat case study I examine does not produce the same findings. On this basis, I propose that there is a necessary interaction between power and moral purpose exemplified after victory. The increased employment of moral rhetoric is made possible by victory, which validates previous claims of material superiority. American exceptionalism harnesses power and moral purpose into one guiding idea in moments when a new international order is emerging, resulting in the concept's continuous use over time by US presidents.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The United States of America has viewed itself as exceptional since its inception. American exceptionalism encompasses the belief that the country is different from and inherently superior to all other nations. Claims of American exceptionalism often take the form of moral arguments, proposing that the nation has a special right to lead the rest of the world because of the values and principles it embodies and protects. However, many other claims of exceptionalism cite the country's material strength to argue for a position of international prominence. In response, many people have found this self-perception hypocritical, problematic, or even categorically untrue. Yet wherever you stand on the debate surrounding the validity of American exceptionalism, it is evident that the idea has significantly affected US national identity and foreign policy for centuries. We can observe the depth of the idea's prominence in how US presidents of all political parties, both past and present, have emphasized America's unique position in the international system in strikingly consistent ways. The continuous presence of American exceptionalism in presidential rhetoric also reveals subtle variability in what about the nation is emphasized as exceptional at different times and under various international conditions. By distinguishing between claims of material and moral superiority as two key themes of exceptionalist rhetoric and examining pivotal moments for America's role in the international system, this paper explores the interaction between power and moral purpose in international relations through the rhetoric of American exceptionalism in US foreign policy.

American exceptionalism has long been debated on the basis of its validity, origins, rhetorical use, and influence on foreign policy. This paper touches on all four of these debates to varying degrees. The least attention is paid to the first set of ongoing questions, which concern whether the United States of America is actually exceptional or not. While a large amount of scholarship has

been devoted to this question, it does not directly bear on how American exceptionalism is used rhetorically, including the variability of different themes of exceptionalist rhetoric and its implications on the interaction between power and moral purpose. The self-perception that America is exceptional has a substantial impact on US foreign policy, whether or not there is any actual corresponding normative hierarchy of states.

The second set of questions regarding the origins of American exceptionalism closely relates to the central arguments of this paper. The two most prominent sides of the debate focus on where the idea of American exceptionalism came from—one side believes it is a matter of geographical advantages and material resources, and the other thinks the special status is primarily a result of being “born modern” with liberal principles—track seamlessly to my proposed distinction between material-focused and moral-focused exceptionalist claims. Therefore, the variation and interaction between the two types of claims suggest there must be more nuance to the idea's origins than its relation to special material conditions or unique ideational groundings.

By proposing a new distinction within the idea of American exceptionalism between moral and material superiority, I differ from previous studies of how the concept influences foreign policy that distinguish between two types of exceptionalism: missionary and exemplary. Regarding the rhetorical use of the idea, I primarily worked from the existing scholarship studying presidential rhetoric and the rhetoric of American exceptionalism to guide my research. Ideas influence foreign policy, but they are challenging to study. Presidential rhetoric, which draws on the idea of American exceptionalism continuously, offers a glimpse into how the concept operates and interacts with certain external forces. Within the debate of how American exceptionalism influences foreign policy, the typical division between missionary and exemplary exceptionalism is not entirely equipped to examine moments when the existing international order transforms. These moments at the ends of major wars were filled with the rhetoric of American exceptionalism, yet almost all occurrences fall

to the missionary side. Instead, I propose a new distinction within claims of American exceptionalism between those with a material focus and those with a moral focus. Material-focused claims purport that America's economic or military strength surpasses all other nations. By contrast, moral-focused claims assert that America has superior ideas and values to the rest of the world. Presidents use both types of claims to argue for increased American involvement abroad, but they draw on slightly different conceptions of what makes America exceptional as justification. Material-focused claims identify exceptionalism with power, and moral-focused claims ground America's exceptional status on the nation's moral purpose.

In this paper, I examine the use of the rhetoric of American exceptionalism by US presidents at the ends of four major wars—World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War, and the Cold War. These wars represent pivotal moments where the existing international order is destroyed and reordered. The president in office at each time rhetorically offers visions of American exceptionalism to justify America's leading role in the order's reorganization. Besides the Vietnam War, which provides an illustrative counter-example, the other three wars end with an American victory. To explore the interaction between material and moral forces, I focus on the periods after victory because they are moments when presidents propose a new vision for America's role in international relations that has a strikingly moral foundation in their speeches but is ultimately based on the nation's power after gaining a hegemonic position. To examine how the proportion of material to moral-focused American exceptionalist rhetoric changes after the war as opposed to during, I constructed each case study by gathering speeches with a foreign policy focus delivered by the sitting president within two years before and two years after the end of the war.

The case studies support the argument that US presidents' use of moral-focused claims of American exceptionalism increases after victory in major wars. For all three victory cases, the percentage of claims with a moral focus—calculated by dividing the number of moral-focused

American exceptionalist claims by the total number of American exceptionalist claims—increased substantially after the war. The Vietnam War, an American defeat, did not have the same results. Instead, the percentage of exceptionalist claims with a moral focus decreased slightly in the period after the end of the war compared to during the war. On this basis, I propose that there is a necessary interaction between power and moral purpose. The increased use of moral rhetoric is made possible by victory, validating the previous claims of material superiority. The periods after victory are moments where visions of morality and power come together. The consistent pattern of variability across the victory case studies does not just suggest that there are these two distinct themes of American exceptionalism—moral and material—but that they interact with and necessitate one another. These findings have closely related implications for the existing debate about the origins and causes of American exceptionalism. The results implicate a longstanding tension between American exceptionalism’s grounding on power or ideas and values. However, what gives American exceptionalism its lasting power and continuous rhetorical use as an idea and a program is how it harnesses power and moral purpose into one guiding concept.

The structure of this paper is as follows. First, in Chapter 2, I further examine the ongoing debates regarding the origins and validity of American exceptionalism and its impact on foreign policy. I will also cover the existing literature on presidential rhetoric that informed my research. Chapter 3 presents my theory regarding the two themes of American exceptionalism, the strategic use of moral arguments, and how the moral and material themes interact around the conclusions of major wars. Chapter 4 covers my research method, including defining key terms, explaining the choice of case studies and data set construction, and outlining my research strategy. Chapters 5 through 8 go through each case study in depth, first situating the case in its context and then examining the results of my research to see how the rhetoric of American exceptionalism operated during and after each war. Chapter 9 discusses and compares the case studies, proposing three

significant implications, explaining the varying levels of success in using the rhetoric across the cases, asking whether American exceptionalism is a rhetorical strategy or an actual value, and finally offering insight into the origins of the idea. A brief conclusion follows in Chapter 10.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

American exceptionalism is the belief that the United States of America is different from and inherently superior to all other nations in the world. It often implies that this position authorizes the US to have a unique role in the international order. Therefore, American exceptionalism closely connects to US foreign policy. While this paper focuses on instances where US presidents invoked American exceptionalist rhetoric in the past century, the concept predates the country's founding. Puritan settler John Winthrop first described the new American colony in Massachusetts as a "city on a hill" in 1630 compared to the "Old World" of Europe. Nineteenth-century French diplomat and philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville was the first prominent figure to explicitly describe the United States as exceptional relative to other countries (McEvoy-Levi 2001). Since the beginning of the nation's history, many politicians, intellectuals, and public figures have found that the United States of America stands out amongst the rest of the world due to its unique history and the stability of its democracy (Lipset 1997).

While often dismissed because of its status as an ideational force without an objective justification, American exceptionalism holds outsized importance to American political life and foreign policy. Persisting throughout the last four centuries, scholars argue that the idea of American exceptionalism "forms one of the core elements of American national identity" (McCrisken 2002). Madsen (1998) remarks that American exceptionalism is "one of the most important concepts underlying modern theories of American cultural identity." To understand how the US came to understand the world and its place in it, American exceptionalism, above any other idea or element of national identity, has central importance (Stephanson 1995). One way to explore how American exceptionalism pervades American foreign policy is by examining the rhetoric of US presidents. According to McEvoy-Levi (2001, 23), American exceptionalism "underwrites much of American

foreign policy.” Through its use as a rhetorical strategy in American politics and foreign policy, American exceptionalism connects political leaders across time and political parties.

Debates Regarding the Origins and Validity of American Exceptionalism

Most of the prominent existing scholarship on American exceptionalism has sought to define the concept, identify its historical roots, and explain its origins (Neumann & Coe 2011). There is an open debate on the various explanations of where the idea came from. For example, some scholars argue that it is based on the “rights culture” of the US. At the same time, other arguments rely on “pluralist” explanations that rest on the instrumental calculation of social and political pressures within existing political institutions (Moravcsik 2005). The two most prominent sides of the debate about the origins of exceptionalism follow a material versus ideational or moral divide. The first primary explanation is that exceptionalism mainly results from certain material realities. The nation’s natural boundaries and endless resources make it exceptional. By contrast, the other side of the debate argues that exceptionalism primarily comes from the United States being “born modern” and liberal. The foundational liberal American values make the nation qualitatively different from the rest of the world. These dueling explanations for American exceptionalism allow the concept to adapt to many political outlooks and world views, explaining its lasting prominence throughout different eras in American foreign policy. The concept's ability to shift meanings slightly based on how you define its origins allows it to underscore both realist and idealist foreign policy theories (McEvoy-Levi 2001, 28).

Another substantial portion of the scholarship on American exceptionalism includes critiques of whether the US is still or ever was exceptional. Some scholars argue that the Vietnam War ended American exceptionalism (Bell 1975). Others find that the US was never significantly superior to other nations and has always been on par with the rest of the world (Hodgson, 2009).

While these debates are relevant, this paper's purpose is not to join the discussion as to whether the United States is exceptional. Putting the underlying validity of American exceptionalism aside, I seek to explore what the idea's use as a rhetorical strategy at the hands of US presidents reveals about US foreign policy over time and whether that use offers insights into the idea's origins. There need not be an actual normative hierarchy of states in order for the US's view of itself as exceptional to have a substantial effect on international politics. In other words, American exceptionalism still has significant implications regardless of whether America is exceptional. The idea has been used as the fundamental argument behind many of the last century's most impactful foreign policy decisions. It, therefore, raises important questions as a rhetorical strategy alone. However, the findings and analysis of case studies will still offer some insight into the validity of exceptionalism.

Debates Regarding Presidential Rhetoric and American Exceptionalism

This paper contributes to a newer side of the literature on American exceptionalism that starts from the existence of the idea in the rhetoric of US political leaders to then ask how they employ that rhetoric and what their use of it means. Whether or not the United States can be proven to be exceptional, presidents and other political leaders have used the idea continuously in their public discourse throughout American history. Studying how leaders use the rhetoric of American exceptionalism in relatively consistent ways over time contributes to both the broader study of the idea and the separate field of scholarship on presidential rhetoric. There has been an increased focus on looking at presidential rhetoric to understand political and foreign policy decisions. Windt (1990, 3) writes, "political rhetoric creates the arena of political reality within which political thought and action take place." Tulis (1987, 4), describing his theory of the "Rhetorical Presidency," writes: "Since the presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, popular or mass rhetoric has become a principal tool of presidential governance." While presidential rhetoric can impact several

different political agendas, I will focus on presidential rhetoric in the domain of foreign policy. Following Tulis' seminal argument, the case studies used in my research begin with the rhetoric of Woodrow Wilson and continue throughout the twentieth century and the era of the "Rhetorical Presidency."

Although less attention has been paid to how presidents rhetorically employ the idea of American exceptionalism, a handful of existing papers and books have successfully looked into the topic. McEvoy-Levy (2001) takes a rhetoric-based approach to examine how political and communications elites employed the idea of American exceptionalism at the end of the Cold War for the purposes of domestic community building. McCrisken (2003) studies American exceptionalism in presidential rhetoric after the Vietnam War, examining two forms of exceptionalism: exemplary and missionary. Edwards (2008) uses the same distinction between exemplary and missionary exceptionalism to analyze the exceptionalist rhetoric of Bill Clinton in the post-Cold War era. Rojecki (2008) focuses on the foreign policy-related elements of American exceptionalism, examining the rhetoric of George W. Bush around the Iraq war. Neumann & Co (2011) embark on a quantitative assessment of US presidents' exceptionalist rhetoric in State of the Union addresses from Franklin D. Roosevelt to George W. Bush. Lastly, Gilmore (2014) compares how US presidents invoke the idea of American exceptionalism differently for domestic and international audiences. These studies reveal a glimpse at the many questions related to the rhetoric of American exceptionalism.

Debates Regarding Foreign Policy and American Exceptionalism

Returning to the debate regarding the relationship between foreign policy and American exceptionalism, most existing literature explains the influence of American exceptionalism on foreign policy through two different versions of exceptionalism: exemplary and missionary (Tuveson

1968; Stephanson 1995; Dueck 2006; Restad 2012). Exemplary exceptionalism sees the US as fundamentally different from the rest of the world, providing an exemplar to other countries while remaining disengaged from them. Missionary exceptionalism involves guiding the rest of the world in an active, hands-on way—like a religious missionary. These two ways of explaining American exceptionalism's impact track with two major trends in attitudes toward US foreign policy: isolationism and internationalism (Lippman 1943; Mead 1999; Nau 2002; Nau 2013; Kupchan 2020; Wertheim 2022). However, Restad (2012 & 2015) rejects this distinction and argues that “the dichotomous view of American exceptionalism and US foreign policy does not comport with reality. The United States has always sought to expand, model, lead the way, and meddle.” My thesis will also collapse that dichotomy, but for different reasons. In each of the case studies I examine, which specifically focus on the ends of major wars, presidents use the rhetoric of American exceptionalism almost entirely in the missionary sense as a justification for international involvement.

Any theory of international relations that does not account for the role of ideas in foreign policy cannot fully explain the impact of the continuous ideational trend of American exceptionalism in US foreign policy. While psychological approaches, such as Jervis (1976), include ideas by focusing on the role of individual leader mentalities, these approaches do not directly address the effects of widely held beliefs like American exceptionalism that span across multiple different leaders at different points of time. Constructivist approaches to international relations deal most directly with ideas (Wendt 1992, 1994, 1995). According to Adler (1997, 322), “Constructivism is the view that the manner in which the material world shapes and is shaped by human action and interaction depends on dynamic normative and epistemic interpretations of the material world.” Other major theories ignore the interaction of national identity as an epistemic function and material interests in international affairs (Wendt 1992). However, physical factors need not be wholly disregarded in favor of ideas. Ideas fundamentally interact with material realities to shape foreign

policy decisions (Legro 2005; Beland 2009). For example, the end of the Cold War became a famous case study for how ideas interact with material incentives to influence policy (Risse-Kappen 1994; Brooks & Wohlforth 2000).

My thesis will build on the existing research into the role of ideas in foreign policy and how those ideas interact with material factors, looking specifically at the pervasive notion of American exceptionalism. It will also build on existing research into American exceptionalism, contributing to the recent studies exploring the employment of American exceptionalism rhetoric in presidential speeches and other scholarship examining how the idea impacts US foreign policy. My study supports the views that US leaders continuously employed the concept of American exceptionalism throughout the twentieth century and that there is a close relationship between American exceptionalism and US foreign policy.

However, I differ from past scholarship on this topic to argue for a new distinction within the idea of American exceptionalism. While previous studies looking at the relationship between US foreign policy and American exceptionalism often employed the distinction between exemplary and missionary exceptionalism, I propose a new distinction that more closely pinpoints a shift in how US presidents employ American exceptionalist rhetoric when the existing international order is in flux. The more helpful distinction to draw contrasts rhetoric that focuses on how the US is superior to the rest of the world in material capabilities with rhetoric that makes claims of moral superiority. Presidents strategically use moral rhetoric as a tool to enhance their constitutional position (Shogan, 2007), so its use in the context of American exceptionalism is relevant to existing scholarship on the politically strategic use of moral arguments. While most existing scholarship on American exceptionalism ignores this distinction between moral and material exceptionalist claims, in the following section, I will argue in favor of its explanatory power to examine how presidents use exceptionalist rhetoric strategically to advance their foreign policy agendas. Additionally, my study

differs from past scholarship in looking specifically at exceptionalist rhetoric during periods at the end of major international conflicts. This distinction will also shed light on the important questions of the origins and causes of American exceptionalism.

Chapter 3

Theories Regarding American Exceptionalism

I argue that any claim of American exceptionalism can be further categorized as having a material or moral focus. Certain geopolitical conditions promote the use of one dimension of American exceptionalist rhetoric over the other. Specifically, after victory in major wars, when the previous international order is rearranged, American exceptionalism's material and moral dimensions interact in presidential rhetoric as the proven material capabilities from victory enable the use of moral arguments. I present a theory that US presidents are more likely to favor the moral theme of American exceptionalism over the material theme in their rhetoric after a victory in a major international war. Several concepts underlie this theory, and there are related hypotheses having to do with the percentage of material-focused claims of American exceptionalist rhetoric during wars and what this means for a case where the United States loses a war. Additionally, by exploring the specific ways US presidents use the rhetoric of American exceptionalism, the prevalence of particular patterns contributes to the ongoing debates about the causes of exceptionalism.

Two Themes of American Exceptionalism: Material and Moral

The rhetoric of American exceptionalism claims that the United States is superior to the rest of the world and that this superiority entails that the country has a right to play a unique role in global politics. McEvoy-Levi (2001) argues that the idea of American exceptionalism has been strategically called upon to account for and to enable US leaders to push forward new foreign policy strategies during important points of geopolitical transition since the late nineteenth century. If we consider the broad idea of American exceptionalism as a rhetorical device relied on to rally public support behind taking international action, it is especially important to pay attention to how and when presidents employ this type of rhetoric.

In invoking the idea of America's exceptional status compared to other countries, US presidents tend to draw the nation's attention towards two different means of superiority. The first category of American exceptionalist claims concerns US material power. In this sense of exceptionalism, the nation's superiority comes from economic and military strength. Claims of this type purport that as the wealthiest country in the world with the strongest military and most advanced weapons, the US stands out from all other nations. While these claims focusing on material strength may not align with the quintessential "City on a hill" brand of American exceptionalism, they are still explicit invocations of America's superiority to the rest of the world and remain explicit claims of American exceptionalism. This first sense closely aligns with the side of the debate on the origins of American exceptionalism that points to America's unique material circumstances and resources. The second type of exceptionalist claim involves moral authority over the rest of the world. In this sense, America's exceptional status arises from the special righteousness of the nation's ideas and values. By contrast to the material dimension, this second sense tracks with the explanation of the concept's origin that exceptionalism is primarily a result of the United States being "born modern" and liberal. The liberal ideas and values at the heart of the nation make America exceptional, and the exceptionalist rhetoric that sights moral superiority supports this side of the debate on the origins of exceptionalism.

The Strategic Use of Moral Arguments

The distinction between American exceptionalist rhetoric's moral and material themes reveals how presidents strategically use certain moral arguments under particular conditions. Any consistent patterns connected to the general idea of American exceptionalism being emphasized along material and moral dimensions by the same president (or different presidents with similar foreign policy positions) at different moments suggest that these two dimensions are stressed

strategically. Shogan (2007) writes that “the political utility of moral rhetoric depends upon the presence of supporting circumstances that recommend its use.” If, when examining the use of the broader concept of American exceptionalism, US presidents consistently focus on one of the two dimensions more or less under specific conditions, then they are using the rhetoric strategically. The following study analyzes the conditions surrounding US involvement in major wars to see whether presidents strategically utilize different types of American exceptionalist rhetoric to advance certain foreign policy positions before and after wars.

Claims of material superiority and claims of moral superiority are both means of expressing the idea of American exceptionalism; however, the political utility for presidents to use these two types of claims varies across different international conditions. Objective empirical measurements, including economic measures like GDP and militaristic measures like projections of military strength and levels of military equipment, can back up claims of material exceptionalism. However, claims of moral superiority have no apparent objective counterpart. The moral righteousness of a nation cannot be measured in any widely agreed-upon way. Yet presidents throughout American history have depended on the perceived ethical dimensions of their individual leadership and the nation’s place in the international order to secure political control and legitimize their decisions.

Both dimensions of American exceptionalism—material exceptionalism and moral exceptionalism—are present in the rhetoric of presidents to establish credibility and legitimate their authority. In both cases, the ideas demonstrate that America is superior to other nations, granting the US a unique role in international politics. This framework allows the United States to present itself as a leader of the world—a position backed up by realist calculations of strength and idealist theories about the power of American ideas and moral leadership. American exceptionalism has maintained its prominence throughout different periods of American history because of its ability to shift meaning and applications slightly to fit different perceptions of the nation’s role internationally.

The Interaction of Material and Moral Themes at the End of Wars

The moral and material themes of American exceptionalism interact because of the strategic ways political leaders invoke them. This interaction can be seen most poignantly after victories in major international wars. US presidents employ the idea of American exceptionalism in their rhetoric to advance political agendas and justify foreign policy decisions. During a war, exceptionalist rhetoric that draws the public's attention to material superiority explains aggressive military responses and increased economic and military involvement abroad. In turn, a victory in the war proves, to the American public, that these claims of material superiority were, in fact, valid. After winning a hegemonic struggle for global power, America's exceptional status is proven in one dimension: the material theme most closely tied to objective measures like military strength. That moment of proven exceptionalism on one dimension sets the necessary foundation for the move to make less objectively evidenced arguments in favor of US moral superiority.

The political utility of moral arguments comes from their ability to establish credibility for policies. But moral arguments are not always strategically compelling; otherwise, we would see their consistent use across time in presidential rhetoric. Major victory on the international stage and the following legitimized assertion of material superiority set the stage for claims of moral authority. America proved its material superiority to the rest of the world by winning the war. Because of that, it now has a unique role to play in shaping the new postwar international order. That special postwar role has an inherently moralistic flavor. Periods after major victories represent pivotal moments where moral rhetoric is politically advantageous. Following a global war, where a new world order forms in the wake of the war's destruction, America's actions towards the rest of the world are no longer justified based on calculations of power that war-time conditions necessitated. Instead, moral arguments can strategically guide future international action and involvement. This specific type of

moral-focused claim of American exceptionalism grants the United States the moral authority to direct the future world order.

The pivotal moments that reveal patterns of moral versus material-focused rhetoric of American exceptionalism are precisely at the ends of major international wars resulting in an American victory. These are significant moments where American leaders have the chance to implement a vision for America's role in international relations that has a moral foundation but is also based on America's unique position of power after victory in a hegemonic struggle for domination of the international system. The ends of major global wars are full of uncertainty about future international power structures and provide openings for rethinking the organization of the international system. These are moments where ideas about the structure of the international system and the US's place within that system are salient. The leading US idea about its place in the world, American exceptionalism, permeates presidential rhetoric during these moments. Focusing on the difference between how the rhetoric of American exceptionalism is used before and after the end of war gives insight into whether and how presidents employ moral rhetoric strategically. I hypothesize that moral arguments can strategically legitimize, to the American public, the United States' role in this changing world order following the conflict when there is less of a strategic military necessity for US international involvement than during the war.

The Strategic Use of the Rhetoric of American Exceptionalism After Victory

I theorize that within the use of rhetoric about American exceptionalism, there is a shift in emphasis from the material dimension of superiority to the moral theme following victory in a major international war. If this shift occurs, it suggests that US presidents are likely to strategically employ the idea of American exceptionalism in different ways under different international conditions.

While the country is engaged in a major international conflict, presidents are more likely to rely on

claims about material strength and superiority when invoking the idea of American exceptionalism. After victory in the conflict, presidents are more likely to shift the focus of their rhetoric towards using moral arguments that establish American exceptionalism and justify further international action in terms of moral superiority to the rest of the world. If this pattern of shifting the focus of American exceptionalist rhetoric from material to moral superiority occurs, then it reveals a condition under which the employment of moral rhetoric is particularly effective for political leaders. Arguments about US moral superiority are relied upon to justify policies of increased or maintained international involvement to the American public following the end of major wars. However, these results depend upon the material superiority established by a US victory in the war. I suspect that this pattern will not occur after a defeat in a major international conflict, and the use of moral arguments will not increase. To illustrate this argument, I present three complementary hypotheses:

H1: US presidents are more likely to favor the moral theme of American exceptionalism over the material theme in their rhetoric after a victory in a major international war.

H2: US presidents are more likely to favor the material theme of American exceptionalism over the moral theme in their rhetoric during a major international war.

H3: US presidents are less likely to favor the moral theme of American exceptionalism over the material theme in their rhetoric after a defeat in a major international war.

The following section explains how I test these hypotheses using four case studies. After illustrating the method for my research, the following chapters will explain each case study in depth, discussing whether there was an increase in moral to material-focused rhetoric and giving historical context to the conflicts, presidents, and their use of American exceptionalist rhetoric. I will then compare the results across the case studies and offer a more detailed explanation of the results' significance.

Chapter 4

Research Design

To examine my theoretical argument, I analyzed claims of American exceptionalism in US presidential speeches with a foreign policy focus given (a) during and (b) after the ends of major international wars in the twentieth century that the US was directly involved in. To test variation in moral to material-focused rhetoric across different periods and multiple US presidents, I built a dataset of all presidential speeches with a foreign policy focus given within two years on either side of the end of each conflict. My study includes four case studies: World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War, and the Cold War. I use speeches archived at the American Presidency Project (Woolley and Peters 2010), a comprehensive collection of U.S. presidential speeches and documents, to acquire this data.

Definition of Key Terms

Various terms must be defined to understand my research method fully. First, a claim or invocation of American exceptionalism refers to an emphasis on an exceptionalist theme at any point in a speech. A single speech can contain multiple exceptionalist claims. A claim can be a few words or multiple sentences. What matters is that it expresses one single idea about something that makes the United States exceptional. For example, the phrase: “America is the strongest nation in the world” would be coded as a single claim of American exceptionalism. A sentence could contain multiple claims if it refers to numerous things that make the country exceptional. For example, a sentence such as, “We have the strongest economy on earth, and our ideas lead all other nations,” would be coded as containing two claims—one about the superiority of the American economy and the other about the superiority of American ideas. I define a major international war as a protracted struggle among great powers with significant consequences on international politics (Mandelbaum,

1998). For my study, the war must involve the United States. I use four case studies: World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War, and the Cold War. I define foreign policy content in a speech as rhetoric referring to US involvement and interaction with the rest of the world. This content includes all descriptions of diplomatic, military, and other interactions and relationships with other countries. The relevant speeches included in my dataset are those with a foreign policy focus. This consists of any speech with foreign policy content. Some speeches, such as Inaugural and State of the Union addresses, will have both domestic and foreign policy content. These speeches are still included even though they are not entirely focused on foreign policy issues.

Case Studies and Data Set Construction

My study includes four case studies of wars in the twentieth century. Three resulted in a victory for the United States, and the fourth resulted in a defeat. Despite their chronology, I will examine the three victory case studies first and then the defeat case study separately. For each case study, I examined two groups of speeches. The first selection includes speeches delivered by the president in power within two years before the end of the war. The second selection contains speeches delivered by the sitting president within two years after the end of the war. In cases where the US was not involved in the war for two full years before it ended, I only included speeches delivered from the start of US involvement to the end of the war. While WWI had the same president in office across the entire four-year period, the other three case studies include multiple presidencies due to elections (or, in the case of Richard Nixon, a resignation) during the four years around the end of the war. However, for each case study, the political party of the presidents in office remained constant. Moreover, in each case that includes multiple presidencies over one war, the second president had served as vice president immediately before taking office. Additionally, each sample contains a different number of speeches due to variations in how many foreign policy-

focused speeches each president gave during the relevant period. In total, I analyzed 207 speeches across four wars and seven presidencies.

The first case study is World War I. All of the presidential speeches within this case study ($n=60$) were given by Woodrow Wilson, who was in office from 1913 to 1921. Since the US entered the war in April 1917 and it ended in November 1918, the sample of wartime speeches ($n=14$) span from April 1917 to November 1918. The point marking the war's end was Germany's surrender on November 11, 1918. The set of postwar speeches included in the sample ($n=46$) were delivered by Wilson between November 1918 and November 1920.

The second case study is World War II. The data ($n=46$) extends over the presidencies of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman. Roosevelt was in office from 1933 until his death on April 12, 1945, and Truman's presidency lasted from then until 1953. The sample of speeches given before the end of the war ($n=22$) spanned from September 1943 to September 1945. The first eighteen speeches were delivered by Roosevelt, and the final four by Truman. I consider the point in time marking the end of the war to be Japan's surrender on September 2, 1945. Although World War II in Europe officially ended on May 8, 1945, the United States was still engaged in the war in the Pacific, so from an American standpoint, the war did not end until September of that year. The sample of speeches given after the end of the war ($n=24$) were all delivered by Truman between September 1945 and September 1947.

The third case study is the Cold War. The data ($n=64$) covers the presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. The sample of speeches given before the end of the war ($n=45$) covers the period from November 1987 to November 1989, with Bush taking office on January 20, 1989. Since the Cold War did not end in surrender or an armistice, selecting an end date for this case study is less straightforward than the others. I chose the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, to symbolize the end of the Cold War. While this choice could be debated, this date seemed

the most appropriate to mark the end of American involvement in the war after examining relevant scholarship on the topic (Segal 1990; Laurent 1990; Hogan 1992). The sample of speeches given after the end of the Cold War ($n=19$) were all delivered by Bush from November 1989 to November 1991.

The fourth and final case study is the Vietnam War. Unlike the other three wars, this case study covers an American defeat. Therefore, the Vietnam War serves as a negative case study to further verify my primary hypotheses of how victory affects the strategic use of American exceptionalist rhetoric. The data for this case study ($n=37$) includes speeches delivered by Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. The date I use to mark the end of the Vietnam War was Nixon's signing of the Paris Peace Accords on January 27, 1973. All of the speeches in the sample before the end of the war ($n=24$) were delivered by Nixon between January 1971 and January 27, 1973. Nixon resigned from the presidency on August 9, 1974, so the speeches in the sample for after the end of the war ($n=13$), lasting from January 28, 1973, to January 1975, were given by Nixon and Ford.

Within each speech, only small portions of text that included claims of American exceptionalism were relevant to my research. I limited my search to moments in speeches where claims of American exceptionalism were made in the context of US foreign policy. Therefore, many presidential speeches where most of the content was irrelevant to the purposes of this study. For instance, each case study includes multiple State of the Union Addresses. These are included because they are annual presidential addresses that typically have a portion dedicated to foreign policy. However, a majority of the content in a State of the Union address focuses on domestic issues. Any part of a speech not relevant to foreign policy was cut. Additionally, any part of the speech relevant to foreign policy that did not contain any claim of American exceptionalism after close analysis was also excluded.

Research Strategy

Within the four case studies and their separate samples of wartime and postwar speeches, I employed the same research framework to analyze each speech for claims of American exceptionalism. To measure the presence and volume of American exceptionalist rhetoric generally, I searched each speech for keywords related to the idea before considering whether it could be categorized as belonging to the material or moral theme. The presence of American exceptionalist claims were instances in the speeches where a president said that America, its people, government, military, economy, ideas, or values differed qualitatively from other nations or the rest of the world. To locate the keywords that indicated an exceptionalist claim, I searched for occasions where two distinct types of words were found together. The first type denotes a claim about the United States. Self-referential keywords of this type were *America, the United States, our country, our nation, our purpose, us*, etc. The second group of words required alongside the reference to the United States to signify a claim of American exceptionalism were words and phrases such as *superiority, excellence, exceptional, great, purpose, special, success, victory, magnificent, no... other countries/nation, best/greatest/most...in the history of the world, saved/savior (of) the world, leader of the world*, etc. The combination of keywords referencing the US with keywords referencing its qualitative difference from the rest of the world indicates a claim of American exceptionalism. Appendix B explains the coding rules in detail.

Once I identified a claim, I examined the context of each appearance of keywords together to evaluate whether it related to the moral or material themes of American exceptionalism. This step also provided a further evaluation of whether the appearance of keywords was actually a claim about American exceptionalism to begin with. I coded a claim as referring to moral superiority when the context referenced American ideas, morals, obligations, principals, and values as what was qualitatively different about the US in comparison to others. For example, I coded the phrase, “America, not just the nation but an idea, alive in the minds of people everywhere. As this new

world takes shape, America stands at the center of a widening circle of freedom” as an American exceptionalist claim that falls within the moral dimension of the idea (Bush, Jan 31, 1990). I coded a claim as referring to material superiority when the context referred to American military or economic strength. For example, I coded the phrase “Your fellow Americans have given a magnificent account of themselves—on the battlefields and on the oceans and in the skies all over the world” as a material invocation of American exceptionalism (FDR, Sep 8, 1943).

A few cases across the four case studies had a single phrase or sentence that included claims about both material and moral superiority. For example, I coded the phrase: “the second duty, that goes in hand with it, is to win it greatly and worthily, showing the real quality of our power not only, but the real quality of our purpose and of ourselves” as including two claims, one moral and one material (Wilson, May 18, 1918). For each speech, I then tallied the total number of claims about American exceptionalism generally and whether each had a moral or material context. The percentage of moral vs. material rhetoric is calculated by dividing the number of claims with a moral focus by the total number of American exceptionalist claims. I then compared the percentage of moral to material-focused content in the speeches given before and after the end of the war for each case study to test the hypotheses. The following figure demonstrates three examples of the coding process.

Figure 1. Coding Process Examples

Text	Code 1: AE	Code 2: Moral or Material	Theme
“We have seen our civilization in deadly peril. Successfully we have met the challenge, due to the steadfastness of our allies, to the aid we were able to give to our allies, and to the unprecedented outpouring of American manpower, American productivity, and American ingenuity—and to the magnificent courage and enterprise of	<p>“our” “American” <i>and</i> “Successfully” “unprecedented” “magnificent”</p>	<p>“manpower” “productivity” “fighting men” “military”</p>	Material

our fighting men and our military leadership.”			
“The spirit of the American people can set the course of world history. If we maintain and strengthen our cherished ideals, and if we share our great bounty with war-stricken people over the world, then the faith of our citizens in freedom and democracy will be spread over the whole earth and free men everywhere will share our devotion to those ideals.”	“our” “American” <i>and</i> “Can set the course of world history”	“spirit” “ideals” “freedom and democracy”	Moral
“The need for the United States of America to maintain its strength its military strength, its economic strength, and above all its moral and spiritual strength, its faith in this country, its belief in America--has never been greater.”	“the United States of America” <i>and</i> “strength” “has never been greater”	“military strength” “economic strength” <i>and</i> “moral and spiritual strength”	Both

Intercoder Reliability

Another coder was trained with the same content analysis codebook to check for intercoder reliability. Then, they analyzed a random sample of 10% of the total speeches across all four case studies. There was a high level of agreement between the second coder and myself. The second coder agreed with 93% of the moral-focused claims and 96% of the material-focused claims that the initial round of coding had found.

Chapter 5

World War I

World War I ended with an American victory and an unprecedented reordering of the international system. To analyze this case study, I first discuss the context at the end of the war, including a brief analysis of President Woodrow Wilson's background and rhetorical style and a broad overview of the international conditions at the time. Next, I report the results of examining Wilson's rhetoric of American exceptionalism during and after the end of World War I and then analyze those results alongside the historical record.

The End of World War I

Extensive public debate about America's role in the international system followed the end of the First World War. To the greatest extent in history, up until that point, the United States pledged substantial military and economic commitments abroad to help defend its European allies against Germany and the Central powers during the war (Dueck 2006, 44). In response to Germany's declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare, Woodrow Wilson led the country into war, abandoning his previous position of armed neutrality to ask Congress for a declaration of war on April 2, 1917 (Wilson 1917a, April 2). The following year and a half witnessed the largest mobilization of American resources and manpower abroad in American history and the most destructive war in human history to that point. After a German surrender marked the conflict's conclusion on November 11, 1918, an opportunity Wilson had waited for since the start of his presidency presented itself. In the wake of the conflict, with the previous international order dislocated, Wilson could present his program for global liberal peace and propose creating an international league of nations (Link 1979, 87-8).

Wilson became president of the United States in 1912 and, over the next eight years, led the nation through some of the most consequential moments of the modern era as both a wartime president and, notably, a thought leader guided by strong moral principles. Compared to most US presidents, Wilson came into office with extensive knowledge of foreign affairs, having studied and taught political science and history (Link 1979, 1-3). He was a remarkably moralistic leader, and from the start of his presidency, he aimed to base his foreign policy on moral principles rather than selfish materialism or isolationism. He embodied the idea of American exceptionalism as an individual (Nye 2020). Personally, he believed that the nation had a special role to play in the international order because of its unique stature ([Ambar](#)). In describing Wilson's legacy after his failure to ratify the treaty of Versailles, Henry Kissinger writes, "Woodrow Wilson's ultimate greatness must be measured by the degree to which he rallied the tradition of American Exceptionalism behind a vision that outlasted these shortcomings. He has been revered as a prophet toward whose vision America has judged itself obliged to aspire" (Kissinger 2014, 268). Wilson's liberal internationalist project, through which he distilled the ideas of greatness Kissinger refers to, had two main dimensions. First, he aimed to curb international anarchy through binding international organizations led by the US. Second, he believed democracy was the most effective and humanitarian method of governance (Deudney and Meiser 2008, 34). Notably, Wilson promoted these ideas privately and publicly since he first took office. Therefore, the invention of the League of Nations following the end of World War I was not entirely a reaction to the war but an opportunity for Wilson to promote his longstanding values and ideas.

Although Wilson primarily based his foreign policy goals on moral principles, during the war, the immediate national priority of material strength necessary for military victory overshadowed any debate about the ethical dimensions of US foreign policy and grand strategy. Wilson expressed the subordination of everything else to the war effort in a May 1918 speech, saying, "The

consideration that dominates every other now, and makes every other seem trivial and negligible, is the winning of the war” (Wilson May 27, 1918). Before the war, the rest of the world did not perceive the US as a significant economic or military actor. However, the course of the conflict revealed the extent of US capabilities, cementing the nation as a great power with the ability to considerably alter the affairs of other countries (Dueck 2006, 46). After the war, this newfound recognition of power put America in the hegemonic position to offer a vision for the future international order. Wilson stepped up to the task, proposing an ambitious proposal to bind democratic states together in a rules-based international organization. For the first time in history, all of the major victorious states with whom the US could partner to design the future world order were democracies, further enabling Wilson’s existing idealist international aims (Ikenberry 2019, 117-8). Given America’s position of increased power after the war, Wilson was free to propose a comprehensive international strategy. While Wilson began advocating for the League in 1915, he delayed illustrating an exact position until after the war (Dueck 2006, 58-9). Perhaps this delay suggests that there was something about the moralistic nature of his plan, alongside the international conditions of rising US power, that led Wilson to wait for this postwar moment.

The armistice with Germany at the end of 1918 gave way to the Paris Peace Conference, which began in January and was dominated by Wilson’s proposal for the League of Nations. The president himself represented the United States at the conference and, after extensive debate, won a settlement that honored his fourteen points and promoted his liberal ideals (Link 1979, 102). Meanwhile, domestically in the United States, midterm elections had coincided with the end of the war, leading Wilson’s Democratic party to lose their majority in both chambers of Congress (Knock 1992). Despite that domestic setback, the president focused on organizing the rest of the world behind his idea for the League. When Wilson returned home from Paris in June 1919, he faced the significant task of rallying the American people around the league and winning the support of the

Senate to ratify the Versailles treaty (Link 1979, 104). The ensuing domestic debate and failure to ratify the treaty and establish the League of Nations provoked an overwhelming amount of discourse in the following century (Ikenberry 2019, 117). In response to pushback from members of Congress, Wilson embarked on a lengthy speaking tour across the nation to address the public in an effort to gather what he considered the true source of authority, public support, for the treaty. The president traveled 8000 miles in twenty-two days, delivering forty public addresses (Link 1979, 114). Ultimately, US policymakers rejected membership in the League of Nations that their own president had proposed, abandoning their postwar position of power and international leadership and sending the country back into a period of isolation until the next World War (Dueck 2006, 51-2). However, despite Wilson's failure to establish the League, his language surrounding the League fight and the war offer an important case study into the strategic use of moral rhetoric and US presidents' rhetoric of American exceptionalism.

Comparing Claims of American Exceptionalism Before and After the End of World War I

After examining Wilson's rhetoric of American exceptionalism during and after the end of World War I, I found that this case study confirms my first two hypotheses regarding victory cases. As a reminder, these hypotheses were: (H1) US presidents are more likely to favor the moral theme of American exceptionalism over the material theme in their rhetoric after a victory in a major international war, and (H2) US presidents are more likely to favor the material theme of American exceptionalism over the moral theme in their rhetoric during a major international war. The following table displays the results:

Table 1. American Exceptionalism Claims at the end of World War I in Foreign Policy Focused Speeches by Woodrow Wilson, Apr 1917 – Nov 1920

	Before the End (n=14) <i>April 1917 – Nov 1918</i>	After the End (n=46) <i>Nov 1918 – Nov 1920</i>
Total exceptionalism claims:	53	161
Total moral-focused claims:	19	129
Total material-focused claims:	34	32
Average claims per speech:	3.79	3.5
Percentage moral:	35.85%	80.12%

The results from the analysis of sixty speeches delivered from April 1917 to November 1920 reveal a dramatic increase in the percentage of moral-focused claims of American exceptionalism in the speeches delivered after the end of the war compared to those delivered during the war. Before synthesizing these results with the historical picture of events, it is worth noting some unique features of this case study. Only fourteen speeches are included in the first sample for before the end of the war, and forty-six speeches in the second sample. Multiple factors explain this variation. First, the US entered the war in April 1917, and it ended in November 1918, which meant the US was in the war for less than two years, shortening the allotted time that my method examines speeches in for each case study. Second, the large number of speeches in the sample after the war's end is primarily due to Wilson's tour promoting the League. To address the inconsistency of sample sizes, in Table 1 above, I calculated the average number of claims per speech, which produced a relatively consistent result across the samples. The percentage of moral-focused exceptionalist claims is calculated by dividing the moral claims by the total exceptionalist claims for that sample, so that result would not be affected by differing sample sizes across the wartime and postwar samples.

The Rhetoric of American Exceptionalism at the End of World War I

The results suggest that Woodrow Wilson emphasized material factors more when invoking the rhetoric of American exceptionalism during World War I. That emphasis shifted when the war ended to a greater focus on moral superiority. Throughout his life and presidency, Wilson's Christian faith informed his actions, and he was a noted idealist, often citing moral arguments to back up his decisions. Therefore, his use of moral rhetoric around the end of the war is not surprising. Based on the assessment of his character and individual psychology, one might expect Wilson to consistently employ moral rhetoric at the same level. However, the results do not support that assumption. The findings support the argument that moral rhetoric's political utility depends upon specific external conditions. Moral rhetoric was not as useful for Wilson during the conflict, when the role of ideas was subordinated by the pragmatism of military and economic policy, than after, as he attempted to convince the world and the American people to institute a new world order based on liberal values and American ideas.

Throughout the speeches delivered during the war, Wilson stresses the importance of America to the rest of the world, primarily citing military and economic duty but still relying on some ideational arguments at points. In his address asking for a declaration of war against Germany, he refers multiple times to America's duty, not a moralistic or righteous duty, but what he calls a 'practical' duty. Wilson implores Congress to fulfill "the duty--for it will be a very practical duty--of supplying the nations already at war with Germany with the materials which they can obtain only from us or by our assistance" (Wilson April 2, 1917). He employs the theme of American exceptionalism to emphasize that no other country besides the United States could assist the other nations already at war with Germany. This singling out of the United States as holding a special role in the world's affairs is quintessential exceptionalist rhetoric, yet focuses on the material capacities of the US to supply other nations. The greatness of American purpose and might is referred to again

and again in speeches delivered during the war, such as when pleading to Congress for increased taxation for war purposes, Wilson argues that “The great enterprise must... be pushed with greater and greater energy. The volume of our might must steadily and rapidly be augmented until there can be no question of resisting it” (Wilson May 27, 1918).

The extreme focus on material strength in the war over all other things is emphasized in speeches such as Wilson’s Fifth Annual Message, where he explains, “Our present and immediate task is to win the war, and nothing shall turn us aside from it until it is accomplished. Every power and resource we possess, whether of men, of money, or of materials, is being devoted and will continue to be devoted to that purpose until it is achieved” (Wilson December 4, 1917). Here, we see the confidence characteristic of American exceptionalism that the US will be able to accomplish the task of winning the war; however, the means of doing so are the power and resources of men, money, and materials. Still, it is essential to note that the during-war speeches do not entirely erase moral rhetoric, but there is comparatively more after the war ends. For example, in a Memorial Day address, Wilson describes the war, saying, “It is a struggle of men who love liberty everywhere, and in this cause America will show herself greater than ever because she will rise to a greater thing” (Wilson May 30, 1917). Here, the president invokes a traditional moral theme in American exceptionalism: the US has the special role of protecting liberty everywhere.

After the war, as Wilson promoted the league internationally and across the country, his use of moral rhetoric skyrocketed. What accounted for 40% of his American exceptionalist claims during the war more than doubled after it. There are still some claims that can be classified as relating to material factors, such as, “No soldiers or sailors ever proved themselves more quickly ready for the test of battle or acquitted themselves with more splendid courage and achievement when put to the test” (Wilson December 2, 1918). However, most of Wilson’s rhetoric of American exceptionalism after the First World War ends has a distinctly moral focus. This makes sense since

he spent the years after the war promoting a new international organization based on liberal values that he planned for the US to lead. Wilson made arguments about the superiority of American ideas and values at every possible opportunity. For example, at a Columbus Day address, he argued, “Columbus did do a service to mankind in discovering America, and it is America's pleasure and America's pride that she has been able to show that it was a service to mankind to open that great continent to settlement, the settlement of a free people, of a people, because free, desiring to see other peoples free and to share their liberty with the people of the world” (Wilson January 4, 1919). In this invocation of American exceptionalism, the president is not only claiming that America’s existence is a service to mankind, but that the nation further serves mankind by sharing its value of liberty with the rest of the world.

After returning from Paris to focus his efforts on defending his view of America’s leading role in the international order to a domestic audience, moral arguments permeate his addresses. When addressing the Senate about the Versailles treaty, he retrospectively described the US role in the war in slightly different language than he employed during the war, such as explaining that “the United States entered the war upon a different footing from every other nation... We entered the war as the disinterested champions of right and we interested ourselves in the terms of the peace in no other capacity” (Wilson July 10, 1919). Throughout his national tour promoting the League, he continuously emphasized America's special role in formulating the League and the influence of uniquely American ideas that went into it. For example, when explaining the achievement of the Versailles treaty, he says: “That is a noble achievement, and it is largely due to the influence of such great peoples as the people of America, who hold at their heart this principle, that nobody has the right to impose sovereignty upon anybody else” (Wilson September 4, 1919). He also emphasizes the dependence of the rest of the world on the United States by repeatedly urging that postwar peace depends on American involvement, exclaiming, “I know the splendid steadiness of the

American people, but, my fellow citizens, the whole world needs that steadiness, and the American people are the makeweight in the fortunes of mankind” (Wilson September 6, 1919). One striking feature of these addresses that Wilson gave throughout the nation day after day to new audiences was the novelty of each of them. It was not one single speech given repeatedly, but unique speeches geared towards new concerns about the league and the unique backgrounds of his audiences.

While there are many other examples like these, put all together, the case of World War I suggests that Wilson used the rhetoric of American exceptionalism throughout the end of the war but relied more heavily on material arguments as opposed to moral ones at different times and under different conditions. Wilson had the idea of the League in mind for years before the war, so the shift in rhetoric after the end of the war cannot fully be explained by the ideas present at the Paris Peace Conference. While Wilson made moral arguments throughout the entirety of his presidency and seemed to have genuinely believed them and let them guide his policy, he did not invoke American moral superiority at a consistent rate at all times. The material results of the war established the right to claim material superiority for the US, both domestically and internationally. The US made an enormous, material impact on the rest of the world by joining the conflict. Therefore, it makes sense that for the goal of rallying troops, resources, and other economic forces behind the war cause, claiming that the US was materially superior to the rest of the world was an effective means of argumentation. Nevertheless, after the war, those same material conditions and incentives slowly dissolved. At that moment, arguments for US moral superiority *were* effective in a way they were not during the war when ideas and values were subordinated to the utmost goal of victory.

Chapter 6

World War II

World War II similarly resulted in a reorganization of the international system at the hands of a victorious United States of America. The following section examines this case study by first laying out the historical context at the end of the war, the leadership and rhetorical styles of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman, and the details of the postwar settlements. I then compare Roosevelt and Truman's rhetoric of American exceptionalism during and after the end of World War II and assess their rhetorical efforts to build the postwar international order.

The End of World War II

World War II profoundly transformed America's role in the international system. US foreign policy transitioned from formal neutrality, to material assistance, to forming an alliance designed for victory, and finally to establishing a postwar settlement that repudiated past American isolationist tendencies (Alder 1957, 250). The war brought unprecedented levels of destruction globally, resulting in over fifty million deaths worldwide (Leffler 1992, 1). The peace settlement the US took charge of following the war was the most far-reaching post-war settlement in history.

The previous American strategy of nonentanglement and isolationism following World War I was upended by Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 and the following four years of American involvement in the conflict (Dueck 2006, 83). When the US joined the war, Franklin D. Roosevelt had just begun his unprecedented third term in office. However, he did not live to see the end of the Second World War. Harry Truman had been vice president for just two and a half months when Roosevelt died in April 1945, having never consulted his successor on many critical war-related issues such as the Yalta conference or the development of the atomic bomb (Nye 2020, 52). Still, many of Truman's advisors were the same men who had advised Roosevelt throughout the war, and

Truman sought to implement his predecessor's strategic design for the post-war order (Leffler 1992, 21). The war ended with the Japanese unconditional surrender in September 1945, after two atomic bombs dropped by the United States instantly leveled two cities and killed over 100,000 people. In the years following the end of the war, Truman's administration broke with traditional US foreign policy to make a series of unprecedented overseas commitments and respond to the rising threat of the USSR.

Before his death and the war's end, Roosevelt oversaw the extensive mobilization of the US economy and military. These wartime efforts required massive government spending, converting entire domestic industries towards wartime production and sending millions of Americans to fight in Europe and the Pacific. Roosevelt first articulated his view for a postwar international system in the 1941 Atlantic Charter, where he envisioned an open, global economic order of democracies (Ikenberry 2019, 165). However, during the war, while victory was still uncertain, there was less focus given to the future planning of the international system. Roosevelt did not need to convince the American people to go to war after Pearl Harbor. Americans were largely convinced that events abroad related directly to their future peace and security after facing a domestic attack, so Roosevelt faced little domestic dissent to the war (Alder 1957, 291-4). Therefore, Roosevelt's main goal during the war and before his death was to ensure victory and work with the nation's allies to do so.

Truman, not Roosevelt, oversaw the end of World War II—a victory that confirmed America's military and economic superiority internationally. While Europe was completely devastated following the war, the conditions in the United States were significantly better, despite the deaths of 400,000 American soldiers. The US came out of the conflict richer and stronger than any other country (Leffler 1992, 1). Roughly half of the world's economic production emerged from the US (Ikenberry 2019, 167). Based entirely on economic and military measures in 1945, America was exceptional. This hegemonic position gave the US a window of opportunity to reimagine the

future international order in the postwar era (Dueck 2006, 84). Not expecting to become president and largely excluded from Roosevelt's foreign policy strategy, Truman entered office without a clear agenda. Truman was committed to implementing Roosevelt's existing plans but also had his own Wilsonian vision for international politics (Nye 2020, 53-4). A biographer describes Truman as "a Wilsonian idealist who deeply believed in American international leadership; the duty of American foreign policy was to promote the betterment of mankind" (Hamby 1974). At the end of the war, Truman was distinctly aware of America's power, exemplified by his unprecedented decision to use the first atomic bombs against Japan. But after the war ended, he also had a solid vision for America's role in the world that rested on beliefs about US moral purpose instead of solely on material power.

World War II resulted in two postwar settlements. The first was among Western industrial countries and established a contingency of international security, economic, and political institutions and organizations, almost all led by the US. The second was between the US, the Soviet Union, and their respective allies, establishing a new American strategic idea and one of the first signs of the Cold War: containment (Ikenberry 2019, 163). This settlement was based on both a new balancing of global power and ideological competition (Ibid, 169). A central question at the end of the war was how to deal with the USSR. Truman's diplomacy consisted of establishing the military and economic force he thought necessary to contain the Soviet Union, but also an ideological campaign based on distinctly American values (Nau 2013, 147). The strategy of containment involved an unprecedented expansion of US international involvement and commitment. However, unlike Wilson's postwar settlement after the First World War, beginning in 1946, Truman's strategy gained strong public and congressional support (Dueck 2006, 89).

Through his public addresses after the war, Truman convinced the American people to support a new role for the US in the international order. What became known as the Truman

doctrine exemplified a shift to define the postwar relationship with the Soviet Union in ideological instead of geopolitical terms. Under the strategy of containment, Truman and his administration did not aim to balance their power with the Soviet Union. Instead, the US sought superiority (Ibid, 83). When the British pulled their forces out of Greece and Turkey in February 1946, Truman was ready to identify ideology as the driving force for intervention and emphasize the exceptional quality of American ideas and values to justify US involvement (Nau 2013, 149). While there is no way to know what position Roosevelt would have taken following the war's conclusion, Truman pursued a policy of extreme international involvement. The following section examines whether his rhetoric after the war, compared to Roosevelt's and his own during the war, reveals any strategic use of moral arguments within the well-established idea of American exceptionalism.

Comparing Claims of American Exceptionalism Before and After the End of World War II

After examining Roosevelt and Truman's rhetoric of American exceptionalism during and after the end of World War II, I found that this case study confirms my first two hypotheses relating to victory cases. For all claims of American exceptionalism in the four years surrounding the end of the Second World War, the percentage of those with a material focus was higher before the war ended, and the percentage of claims with a moral emphasis was higher after the end of the war. The following table displays the results:

Table 2. American Exceptionalism Claims at the end of World War II in Foreign Policy Focused Speeches by FDR and Harry Truman, Sep 1943 – Sep 1947

	Before the End (n=22) <i>Sep 1943 – Sep 1945</i>	After the End (n=24) <i>Sep 1945 – Sep 1947</i>
Total exceptionalism claims:	61	84
Total moral-focused claims:	16	56

Total material-focused claims:	45	28
Average claims per speech:	2.77	3.5
Percentage moral:	26.23%	66.67%

The results from the sample of forty-six speeches delivered from September 1943 to September 1947 show an increase in the percentage of moral-focused claims of American exceptionalism in the speeches delivered after the end of the war compared to those delivered before. However, unlike the case study for World War I, where one president was in office for the entire period studied, this case involves two presidents. While the shift in focus could be related to the change in who held office, there are multiple reasons to think this is not the case. First, Truman was Roosevelt's vice president. Therefore, they were members of the same political party and held many consistent policy positions. Additionally, many people who advised Truman had previously supported Roosevelt (Leffler 1992, 21). Truman took office before the end of the war. 18% of the speeches in the before sample were delivered by Truman. Of those speeches, 38.46% of the American exceptionalist claims were moral, which would still result in an increase in moral-focused claims after the war ended if Roosevelt's speeches were eliminated.

The Rhetoric of American Exceptionalism at the End of World War II

The results suggest that US presidents during World War II placed a greater emphasis on material factors when invoking the rhetoric of American exceptionalism during the war than after the war when they shifted to a greater emphasis on moral purpose to justify their policy. Truman had a Wilsonian view of American exceptionalism, embodied in how he rhetorically disseminated the doctrine of containment after the war (Nye 2020, 55). Nevertheless, Roosevelt also believed in spreading American values abroad since before the US entered the war, yet his rhetoric during the

war largely ignored that position. Roosevelt and Truman's speeches during the war reflected the necessity of mobilizing the American people and economy behind an unparalleled international conflict. This aim resulted in a strategy of reminding the American public of their material superiority to the rest of the world that would bring about eventual victory. By contrast, Truman's speeches after the war reflected a commitment to spreading freedom and developing international institutions based on American values (Nau 2013, 147). In the years following the war's end, the Soviet Union progressively became an ideological competitor to US liberal norms and ideas (Dueck 2006, 83). Yet unlike during the war, Truman responded publicly to the increasing Soviet problem through the use of moral rhetoric instead of reminding the American people of their material posture compared to the rest of the world.

In the speeches delivered during the war, Roosevelt and Truman's international focus primarily involved promoting and establishing America's military and economic might. During the war, Roosevelt's Fireside Chats, where he spoke directly to the American people on the national radio, consistently reminded the public of the exceptional actions of Americans to support the war effort at home and abroad. For instance, in a September 1943 Fireside Chat, the President noted, "Your fellow Americans have given a magnificent account of themselves—on the battlefields and on the oceans and in the skies all over the world" (Roosevelt September 8, 1943). Again, he claims: "We are determined to provide our troops with overpowering superiority, superiority of quantity and quality in any and every category of arms and armaments that they may conceivably need" (Ibid). Roosevelt firmly establishes the idea of American exceptionalism by describing their account as magnificent and their arms as superior. In his final State of the Union Address, Roosevelt states: "Our men have fought with indescribable and unforgettable gallantry under most difficult conditions" (Roosevelt January 6, 1945).

After Roosevelt's death, but before Japan's surrender, Truman continues in the same vein of rhetoric invoking American material superiority. In a statement announcing the use of the first atomic bomb at Hiroshima, he described the military's effort alongside the scientific community as "the greatest achievement of organized science in history" (Truman August 6, 1945). Truman describes the nation as the "most powerful nation in the world—the most powerful nation, perhaps, in all history" (Truman August 9, 1945). While there are some mentions of US moral superiority throughout this period, the vast majority of American exceptionalist claims made by Roosevelt and Truman bear on America's superiority in the material domain.

After the war, we see a shift to more moral-focused invocations of American exceptionalism. From Truman's first address after signing the terms of unconditional surrender by Japan, he takes on a triumphalist tone to announce: "And so on V-J Day we take renewed faith and pride in our own way of life...V-J Day as one of renewed consecration to the principles which have made us the strongest nation on earth and which, in this war, we have striven so mightily to preserve" (Truman September 1, 1945). Instead of identifying the military or the economy as what makes America the strongest nation on earth, Truman credits American principles. While this might seem a subtle change, it speaks to the transformed environment after the war. In the month after the war ended, Truman proclaimed, "We have won the victory of arms; now let us push on to greater conquests--to the total victory of human justice and decency and faith in mankind" (Truman October 2, 1945). America was victorious militarily, so proclaiming its moral purpose was a logical next goal. His rhetoric displays this moral righteousness as he claimed: "The foreign policy of the United States is based firmly on fundamental principles of righteousness and justice. In carrying out those principles we shall firmly adhere to what we believe to be right; and we shall not give our approval to any compromise with evil" (Truman October 27, 1945).

Through the end of 1945 and into 1946, Truman's speeches continuously refer to the American duty to establish and protect peace internationally. Here, we observe Truman's Wilsonian view of American exceptionalism. He claimed that the US had a special role on the international stage. He repeatedly invoked American international leadership, pleading that "America must lead the way to a better world order" and "We have a high responsibility, as Americans" (Truman March 23, 1946; Ibid April 19, 1946). The moral rhetoric culminated in his March 1947 special message announcing the Truman doctrine, with strong assertions such as: "If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world" (Truman March 12, 1947).

The pattern of rhetoric suggests that the conditions after the war enabled Truman to use more moral arguments in defense of American action on the international stage. The liberal internationalist ideas he invoked after the war existed during the conflict, and there are reasons to believe Roosevelt also shared many of them. However, the conditions of the war necessitated the use of material-focused rhetoric to rally the American people behind a conflict determined primarily by material forces. Once US material superiority had been definitively established by victory, the conditions were set to utilize moral rhetoric successfully. To argue for a sweeping reorganization of the entire world order, Truman justified US global leadership on moral grounds.

Chapter 7

The Cold War

The end of the Cold War marked another significant reordering of the international system with the US in a hegemonic position. The following section begins by explaining the conditions at the end of the war and describes the two US presidents in office at this time—Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. I then discuss the presidents' use of American exceptionalist rhetoric around the end of the war and assess it in light of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The End of the Cold War

The Cold War ended suddenly with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, resulting in a sudden shift of global power that transformed the United States' international position from four decades of bipolarity to unipolar supremacy. In the aftermath of the war, the US remained the dominant global power, superior to the rest of the world in economic and military terms (Ikenberry 2019, 233). The Cold War was an unprecedented ideological and military conflict between the US and the Soviet Union, with many related conflicts in the Third World. The war ended unlike any other major twentieth-century conflict resulting in an American victory. After this war, there was no dramatic military victory, armistice, or celebration, but instead, one side's bloodless and unexpected collapse (Hutchings 1997, 343). The events of 1989 allowed US leaders to rethink the nation's international role. However, it also ended in an anticlimactic and irregular way, presenting questions and pessimistic outlooks regarding American standing at home and abroad. The era at the end of the cold war both confronted and confirmed the idea of American exceptionalism (McEvoy-Levy 2001, 32). The two presidents in office during this

period surrounding the end of the war from 1987 to 1991—Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush—sought to rhetorically define and redefine America’s position in the international order.

Although Reagan left office before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, he was a critical player in the years leading up to it in defining and cementing America’s new international position in the coming unipolar era. When Reagan first entered office in 1981, his primary objective was to restore American military and economic might. He aimed to create a strong foundation for diplomacy by modernizing American defenses, assisting allies, and proving that the US would do whatever it took to defend its interests (Shultz 1993, 489). It was evident in 1984 that the American people approved of his first term since he won reelection in a landslide, winning the popular vote in 49 out of 50 states (Nau 2013, 185). Reagan’s initial objectives in the period at the end of the Cold War were to reverse the policy of *détente* and get tougher on the Soviet Union. He combined a rhetorical offensive with a military build-up to pressure the weakening Soviet Union in the second half of the 1980s (Nye 2020, 118). Yet he also pursued negotiations with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev from 1986 to the end of his second term. But Reagan did not trust Gorbachev immediately and only changed his mind about the Soviet Union and the potential for the Cold War to end in 1988 after the USSR’s political liberalization (Haas 2007). Before leaving office in 1989, Reagan and Gorbachev made strides toward the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) and the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty (Brands 2008, 9). While signs of the end of the conflict had been slowly emerging throughout Reagan’s second term, by the time Bush took office, it was still not definite, and there was still debate among advisors and agencies as to whether Gorbachev’s motives could be trusted and what his promised change meant for the future (Ikenberry 2019, 222).

The initial policy of George H.W. Bush when he became president in 1989 was to purposefully maneuver the rapidly changing situation in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe towards peaceful integration and democratic reform. By November of that year, the signs marking

the end of the war became amplified and political change accelerated internationally. Within a year of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Two Plus Four Agreement formally unified Germany and accepted the newly united nation into NATO (Ibid). Almost overnight, the Cold War was over, and the United States had an unprecedented position of global power with no competitors. Without making any major policy failures at the war's end, the US was incentivized to maintain many of the internationalist assumptions that defined American international commitments during the war (Dueck 2006, 115). The end of the war proved definitively that US policy and material strength had won out amongst the greatest international adversary in American history (Brands 2008, 9). As president during this period, Bush was responsible for negotiating the end of the war in such a way that protected and extended American interests and values internationally without any significant violence (Nye 2020, 122).

As the dominant power internationally following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States pursued a foreign policy strategy of institution-building with an aim to form a new international order constructed entirely around American management. Bush's postwar plan included the construction of regional institutional initiatives across security, political, and economic issues. This effort resulted in an expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the creation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Ikenberry 2019, 216). In the postwar period, Bush characterized the United States as an exemplar for the fallen Soviet States and Eastern European revolutions. US foreign policy aimed to construct a new international order under American leadership and based on American values following years of bipolarity and alliance competition within the international community (McEvoy-Levy 2001, 48).

A unique element of the end of the Cold War was its domestic public interpretation and how Bush and his administration sought to define a new role for the United States internationally. In

many ways, the Cold War gave meaning to America's role in the world order (Brands 2008, 9). In its aftermath, there was a competition between the Bush Administration and certain members of the domestic communication elite to decide how the Cold War and its conclusion would be interpreted by the American public (McEvoy-Levy 2001, 32). At times, such as with Francis Fukuyama's controversial "end of history" thesis, these debates became quasi-philosophical, questioning what the world would look like with no significant US competitor and whether the liberal world order had won for good (Fukuyama 1989). There were also trends of declinist thought around the end of the war, claiming that America's age of exceptionalism was over with the loss of Cold War stability (Kennedy 1989; Mead 1987). The Bush administration had to rhetorically navigate this debate. It had to prove the necessity of rebuilding the postwar world at the hands of US leadership. For example, Bush had to convince domestic and international audiences that NATO was still a necessary international organization. Towards the Soviet Union during this time, the US pursued a policy of transforming and integrating the Soviet Union into the new liberal, democratic world order (White House Fact Sheet March 20, 1990). Despite the favorable shift in global power for the US, Bush still was responsible for reaffirming America's role in the international system. He did so rhetorically, emphasizing the unique role the US had to play in order to guide the rest of the world into a secure future built on American values.

Comparing Claims of American Exceptionalism Before and After the End of the Cold War

After examining Reagan and Bush's rhetoric of American exceptionalism during and after the end of the Cold War, I found that this case study also confirms my first two hypotheses relating to victory cases. For all claims of American exceptionalism in the four years surrounding the end of the Cold War, the percentage of those with a material focus was higher in the period before the war

ended, and the percentage of claims with a moral focus was higher after the end of the war. The following table displays the results:

Table 3. American Exceptionalism Claims at the end of the Cold War in Foreign Policy Focused Speeches by Reagan and Bush, Nov 1987 – Nov 1991

	Before the End (n=45) <i>Nov 1987 – Nov 1989</i>	After the End (n=19) <i>Nov 1989 – Nov 1991</i>
Total exceptionalism claims:	109	59
Total moral-focused claims:	39	43
Total material-focused claims:	70	16
Average claims per speech:	2.42	3.11
Percentage moral:	35.78%	72.88%

The results from the analysis of sixty-four speeches delivered from November 1987 to November 1991 reveal an increase in the percentage of moral-focused claims of American exceptionalism in the speeches delivered after the end of the war compared to those delivered before. While the case includes two presidents with unique rhetorical styles, Bush was Reagan's Vice President and took office almost a year before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Of the forty-five speeches in the sample from before the end of the war, the first twenty-six were delivered by Reagan and the subsequent nineteen by Bush.

The Rhetoric of American Exceptionalism at the End of the Cold War

The results indicate that US presidents in the years leading up to the end of the Cold War, while still engaged in the conflict, placed a greater emphasis on material factors when invoking the rhetoric of American exceptionalism. By contrast, after the war ended, they shifted to a greater emphasis on moral superiority. While Reaganite foreign policy is known for its moral clarity due to

Reagan's unique ability to simplify complex issues in his rhetoric, his speeches given during the last few years of the war, when Gorbachev's impact on the future of the Soviet Union was still unclear, had less of a moral-focus than his successor's speeches after the war ended. Additionally, Reagan spent much of his presidency employing a rhetorical offensive meant to put pressure on the Soviet Union (Nye 2020, 118-20). Bush, by comparison, did not have the rhetorical skills or inspirational style of Reagan, who was a Hollywood actor before taking office. However, Bush had extensive foreign policy experience, and his objectives were based on prudence (Ibid, 124-5). Bush oversaw the transformation of the international system's structure after the war, avoiding disaster and promoting American interests. To achieve that feat, Bush utilized the moral dimension of American exceptionalism in his rhetoric after the Cold War ended.

In the speeches delivered before the end of the war, Reagan and Bush focused more on America's material advantages, specifically economic ones, compared to the Soviet bloc. While still drawing some attention to the ideological battle at the heart of the Cold War and claiming that American ideas and values were superior to the communist ideology of the USSR, the presidents both employed a program of repeatedly reminding the American public and international audiences of the US' power in purely calculable military and economic terms. Throughout Reagan's public addresses in 1988, he discussed the growth and strength of America's economy in comparison to the rest of the world, making remarks such as: "Yes, American industry is in an export boom, and our economy is strong—in fact, it's the envy of the world" (Reagan January 23, 1988) and "The United States economy remains the most dynamic and exciting one on the globe. Our entrepreneurs, our can-do spirit, and our economic freedom are the envy of the world" (Reagan March 12, 1988). A substantial portion of Reagan's utilization of rhetoric of American exceptionalism references the strength of the US economy. In comparison to both American allies and the Soviets, the president consistently makes claims like, "Well, to tell you the truth, I'm sort of proud of being an American,

proud that since 1983 the United States has created six times as many jobs as has Western Europe” (Reagan May 14, 1988).

There are multiple related explanations for Reagan’s spotlight on the exceptionalism of the US economy. His focus within the material superiority dimension on economic power instead of military power is primarily explained by the fact that the conflict never erupted into military clashes directly between the two superpowers. Another reason for this economic orientation is the nature of the US's open, capitalist financial system compared to the Soviet Union’s centralized planning model. American economic supremacy exemplified the power and superiority of American values, demonstrating the interconnected nature of the two themes of American exceptionalism. Still, while Reagan could have stressed the supremacy of American ideas and values, he continuously highlighted material strength instead. Notably, the strength of the US economy was not described in domestic contexts but with an eye to the international order. Reagan made claims such as: “Today we have a global economy in which the United States is at the very center” (Reagan June 11, 1988) and “our own prosperity is only part of our achievement. We have also led the world toward a remarkable consensus: that economic freedom, not state planning and intervention, holds the key to growth and development” (Reagan June 18, 1988).

A related theme in speeches during this time was that peace must come through strength. Again, this theme connects the power of ideas to material strength. In an August 1988 radio address on his administration’s foreign policy achievements, Reagan says, “What we've learned is that peace is hard to achieve unless the forces of good have the strength to stand firmly for it... But the future for world peace is bright if we Americans continue to stand firm, stand tall, and stand for freedom” (Reagan August 27, 1988). Even as the possibility of the end of the war was in sight at the end of 1988 and the beginning of 1989, Reagan stressed the importance of American power with claims such as: “We can continue to improve relations with the Soviet Union in 1989 if we remember that

the key to improved relations thus far has been our strength and resolution” (Reagan December 31, 1988). Once Bush took office in 1989, he continued this theme from his predecessor. He stated in his Inaugural Address that “we must ensure that America stands before the world united, strong, at peace, and fiscally sound” and “To the world, too, we offer new engagement and a renewed vow: We will stay strong to protect the peace” (Bush January 20, 1989). In his first State of the Union Address, Bush builds on these claims, stating, “There can no longer be any doubt that peace has been made more secure through strength. And when America is stronger, the world is safer... I will not sacrifice American preparedness, and I will not compromise American strength” (Bush February 9, 1989). This finding does not suggest that there were no invocations of moral rhetoric during this time, but the ultimate focus on material strength is notable, especially compared to the subtle change in focus after the Berlin Wall fell.

After the war, we see a shift to more moral-focused invocations of American exceptionalism. In Bush’s Thanksgiving Address to the Nation, he describes a telephone call with West German Chancellor Kohl just after the Berlin Wall fell. Bush recounts that Kohl told him, “the remarkable change in Eastern Europe would not be taking place without the steadfast support of the United States -- fitting praise from a good friend. For 40 years, we have not wavered in our commitment to freedom” (Bush November 22, 1989). A subtle difference in focus in one of his first postwar speeches, Bush highlights the American commitment to freedom directly instead of the economic strength that early speeches credited for making that freedom possible. In his second State of the Union, the moral-focused rhetoric of American exceptionalism is salient, with claims such as, “America, not just the nation but an idea, alive in the minds of people everywhere. As this new world takes shape, America stands at the center of a widening circle of freedom” (Bush January 31, 1990). Instead of continuing the war-time rhetoric that America’s military and economy are powerful, Bush states, “America's ideas are powerful, and through the power of communication, we

share them with the world” (Bush April 2, 1990). While subtle, presidential speeches by the end of 1989 took on a new tone, signaling the end of the war.

By the end of 1990 and into 1991, the postwar project of taking a leading role in the new world order was in full swing, and Bush’s rhetoric reflects this shift. The Persian Gulf conflict highlights this newly imagined role for the US and demonstrates the moral arguments used to justify it instead of stressing material strength. When announcing the deployment of US armed forces to Saudi Arabia, Bush said, “Standing up for our principle is an American tradition. As it has so many times before, it may take time and tremendous effort, but most of all, it will take unity of purpose. As I’ve witnessed throughout my life in both war and peace, America has never wavered when her purpose is driven by principle” (Bush August 8, 1990). Highlighting American principles and purpose instead of military strength when referencing an armed conflict exemplifies the post-war shift in rhetoric.

After victory in the Persian Gulf, Bush announced, “This is an historic moment. We have in this past year made great progress in ending the long era of conflict and cold war. We have before us the opportunity to forge for ourselves and for future generations a new world order” (Bush January 16, 1991). The claim that the US is responsible for forging the new world order exemplifies the strategy and vision for America’s role in the post-war order. In justifying US involvement in the Persian Gulf, Bush argued, “We went halfway around the world to do what is moral and just and right” (Bush March 6, 1991). In his 1991 State of the Union Address, Bush continued this rhetoric with statements such as, “Our cause is just; our cause is moral; our cause is right” (Bush January 29, 1991). Rhetorically, Bush defines America’s role in the new world order on almost entirely moral grounds, a noted shift from the focus of his and Reagan’s speeches before the Cold War’s conclusion. It is worth noting that the presence of other conflicts within the Cold War does not necessarily impact the theorized shift in rhetorical focus at the end of the war. The purpose of

looking at victory in major wars is because they are moments where the existing international order is significantly rearranged. The end of the Cold War transformed the world order more substantially than the conclusion of the Persian Gulf War, which explains the research focus on the Cold War amidst overlapping conflicts.

The pattern of rhetoric suggests that conditions after the war enabled Bush to increase his use of moral rhetoric beyond the level both he and Reagan felt able to during the last few years of the conflict. While the American post-war foreign policy strategy does not actually change much from during the Cold War, except for the obvious fact that their major competitor disappeared, the way Bush justified that policy did shift. The end of the Cold War created an opportunity for the United States to reorganize the international system according to its interests and values. Although the possibility of conflict was not entirely erased, especially with smaller scale incidents like the Persian Gulf conflict, US preeminence on the international stage after the Soviet Union's collapse enabled an institution-building agenda designed to expand American international leadership. To justify the "new world order," Bush primarily utilized the rhetoric of American exceptionalism with a moral focus. He rhetorically established America's moral purpose after victory in the wake of a protracted conflict.

Chapter 8

The Vietnam War

Unlike the preceding three case studies, the Vietnam War was a long conflict that resulted in defeat for the United States. In this section, I first discuss how the war ended and the American leadership throughout that time. Then, I analyze Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford's rhetoric for invocations of American exceptionalism during this period and assess the research findings.

The End of the Vietnam War

Backtracking chronologically, the Vietnam War ended in an American defeat, offering a fruitful comparison to the previous three victory case studies. The war left the US humiliated after over a decade of fighting and questioned America's role in the international order moving forward. Since the theoretical argument of this project identifies victory in major wars as a driver of American exceptionalist rhetoric with a moral focus, presidential rhetoric surrounding the loss in Vietnam should provide helpful insight into whether US presidents are strategically incentivized to use more moral rhetoric after victory by examining what happens in the case of defeat. This case study's period covers the presidencies of Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, who were both faced with the challenging job of addressing a nation after a major humiliation and defeat.

American involvement in the Vietnam War officially ended in early 1973 when Nixon signed the Paris Peace Accords (Schulzinger 2008). The war wrought death and injury to American soldiers and the Vietnamese people while ravaging America's image at home and abroad. In total, the war resulted in just under 60,000 US casualties, the deaths of millions of Vietnamese, and extensive domestic social unrest in America. Each American president in power during the war feared taking responsibility for the impending loss in Vietnam. Their public rhetoric was filled with the domino

theory metaphor, trapping them into the conflict by constraining the available options in order to avoid a defeat that would threaten America's international position (Nye 2020, 71).

When Nixon took office in 1969, he inherited the Vietnam War from Lyndon B. Johnson, and four years later, he ended the war at a high cost. Initially, Nixon sought to end American involvement in Vietnam honorably and without a humiliating defeat—a herculean task. In 1971, he implemented a combined strategy of military withdrawals with increased military pressure by expanding the war to Cambodia, which resulted in little success (Herring 1979, 241). The final few years of the war were marked by the policy of Vietnamization, transferring the responsibility for the war and South Vietnam's security to the regional powers directly involved. After ending US involvement in Vietnam, most of the domestic focus was on the Watergate scandal that led to Nixon's eventual resignation in August 1974. The period in which Nixon disgracefully left office and Ford ascended to the presidency also contained a series of proposed military aid packages to South Vietnam that Congress denied (Schulzinger 2008, 205). The end of the war represented a US failure to maintain its commitments, which many people believed would damage American credibility on the international stage.

Ford's unexpected presidency put him at the helm of a country whose collective character was frustrated and disillusioned (Herring 1979, 272). While Nixon oversaw the Paris Peace Accords, Ford's time in office witnessed the fall of Saigon and the total defeat of South Vietnam in 1975. The end of the war caused large-scale public reflections on what the war and American defeat meant. Ford attempted not to dwell on recent years but failed to employ a broad public mission in his postwar rhetoric (Nye 2020, 99). Since the end of World War II, the US share of the world economy had decreased, and the Soviet Union had surmounted American nuclear capabilities. On top of these material realities, the humiliation in Vietnam demoralized the country, leading to a wave of academic descriptions of American decline, such as Daniel Bell's 1975 article "The End of American

Exceptionalism,” which argued that American credibility and exceptional standing was overstated (Bell 1975, 205). While victories in major international conflicts seemed to affirm the idea of American exceptionalism, defeat had the opposite effect. Ford faced this sober American mood and intellectual environment during the shortest presidency of modern times. His initial high public approval ratings fell drastically after pardoning Nixon a month in office (Nye 2020, 99). Facing an uphill battle, Ford attempted to reaffirm America’s role in the international system rhetorically.

Comparing Claims of American Exceptionalism Before and After the End of the Vietnam War

Having examined Nixon and Ford’s rhetoric of American exceptionalism around the end of the Vietnam War, I found that this case study confirms my third hypothesis relating to defeat cases. As a reminder, the hypothesis was: (H3) US presidents are less likely to favor the moral theme of American exceptionalism over the material theme in their rhetoric after a defeat in a major international war. The following table displays the results:

Table 4. American Exceptionalism Claims at the end of the Vietnam War in Foreign Policy Focused Speeches by Nixon and Ford, Jan 1971 – Jan 1975

	Before the End (n=24) <i>Jan 1971 – Jan 1973</i>	After the End (n=13) <i>Jan 1973 – Jan 1975</i>
Total exceptionalism claims:	87	40
Total moral-focused claims:	40	14
Total material-focused claims:	47	26
Average claims per speech:	3.63	3.08
Percentage moral:	45.98%	35%

The results from the analysis of thirty-seven speeches from January 1971 to January 1975 reveal a slight decrease in the percentage of moral-focused claims of American exceptionalism in the speeches delivered after the end of the war compared to those delivered before. However, before and after the end of the war, the percentage of moral-focused claims is lower than that of material-focused claims. It is worth noting that this is a complicated case study, including two presidents, one of whom was almost impeached and resigned. The Watergate scandal overlapped with the end of the war, reorienting the American public's focus domestically at a time when there were critical international factors at play. Yet there is still continuity within this complex case. Ford was Nixon's vice president, and he continued the policies of his predecessor, including relying on Henry Kissinger's advice as Secretary of State (Schulzinger 2008, 211).

The Rhetoric of American Exceptionalism at the End of the Vietnam War

The Vietnam War undermined American exceptionalism. The mood of disillusionment in the wake of defeat represented a moral crisis. Even in the years leading up to the end of the war, the level of domestic protest against the war symbolized the extensive dissatisfaction with the country's foreign policy. The public found the Wilsonian moral mission that justified decades of US international involvement resoundingly unjustified in Vietnam. While the cases of victory seemed to confirm ideas of American superiority, both materially and morally, the humiliation in Vietnam questioned American exceptionalism at its moral foundations. The rhetoric of American exceptionalism in the wake of the Vietnam War revealed a country without a defined moral purpose when it came to foreign policy.

Nixon's speeches in the two years before signing the Paris Peace Accords have a relatively even mix of moral and material-focused rhetoric. These invocations seem to primarily be delivered in an effort to convince the public of American exceptionalism after a protracted conflict severely

questioned it. While defeat became an ever-increasing possibility over this period, Nixon still seemed to believe (or at least wanted to make the American public believe) that the nation could overcome its current challenges. Many of the speeches invoke American exceptionalism in reference to what the country would be like once the conflict in Vietnam was behind them. In his 1971 State of the Union Address, Nixon refers to the troubled years of war and the enduring American spirit, explaining, “We have gone through a long, dark night of the American spirit. But now that night is ending. Now we must let our spirits soar again. Now we are ready for the lift of a driving dream... the people of this Nation are eager to get on with the quest for new greatness” (Nixon January 22, 1971). This claim of American greatness is unique in that it speaks to both the past and future, not the present. Here, we see American exceptionalism as something lost that will be regained. Nixon alternates between nostalgia for past exceptionalism and projections of future exceptionalism. In reflecting on America’s bicentennial and what the nation was like 200 years before, he first remarks, “America was a good country. America stood for spiritual and moral values that far transcended the strength and the wealth of the nations of the Old World” and then qualifies that nostalgic comment with a forward-looking projection that, “on that 200th birthday, we will be very rich and very strong, but more important, we will be truly a good country and the hope of the world still” (Nixon February 2, 1971). This unique temporal posturing is a striking feature of Nixon’s speeches in the final years of the Vietnam War.

There are also many quintessential claims of American exceptionalism in the period before the end of the war. Nixon uses classic Wilsonian rhetoric of US moral superiority, such as: “America's sense of responsibility remains the world's greatest single hope of peace” (Nixon April 7, 1971) and “we must keep America strong in spirit--a nation proud of its greatness as a free society, confident of its mission in the world” (Nixon June 1, 1972). Nixon also repeatedly reaffirmed the strength of America’s military and economy with claims such as, “Today, no nation on earth is more

powerful than the United States” (Nixon October 29, 1972) and “We are number one in terms of our military strength today; we are number one in terms of our productivity economically today” (Nixon August 19, 1971). There are also moments when he combines the two dimensions of American exceptionalism to remind the American people of the country’s material power and moral superiority at the same time. For example, the president claims that “the need for the United States of America to maintain its strength its military strength, its economic strength, and above all its moral and spiritual strength, its faith in this country, its belief in America--has never been greater” (Nixon March 7, 1972).

After the war, the percentage of American exceptionalist claims with a moral focus decreased. Many of the invocations of American exceptionalism in this period are not triumphant, but instead, they are somewhat threatening, highlighting the idea that America must *stay* strong and *maintain* its supremacy. A claim such as, “What is at stake is whether the United States shall become the second strongest nation in the world,” still asserts that the United States is the strongest nation in the world but does so in a way that conveys the threatening possibility that it may lose that position (Nixon March 29, 1972). Many of the invocations of American exceptionalism highlight what was at stake if America retreated from the world. For example, in remarks at the annual White House Correspondents Association dinner in 1973, Nixon stated that “there is no other nation that can provide the leadership for peace in the world. Others have the good intent, but only America has the power, only America has the wealth” (April 14, 1973). This is a clear American exceptionalist claim that refers to the country as qualitatively different from the rest of the world but given in a context meant to reinforce America’s past position instead of project future international leadership. Nixon and Ford primarily do so by referencing American material strength instead of moral superiority through claims such as, “America will maintain its nuclear deterrent strength” (Ford August 19, 1974) and “Our military forces are strong and ready” (Ford January 15, 1975). The

American exceptionalist claims across Nixon and Ford's presidencies are similar. Both presidents seek to redeem and maintain America's exceptional status after the defeat in Vietnam through a mix of moral and material rhetoric that relies slightly more on projecting material power.

The rhetoric of US presidents at the end of the Vietnam War displays a limited response to a national mood of disillusionment and defeat. The main finding from this case study is that the use of moral rhetoric did not increase after the end of this war as it did in the three victory case studies. While many other factors were involved in the period analyzed, such as Nixon's impeachment trial and resignation, this analysis of speeches with a foreign policy focus suggests that the conditions after defeat were unfavorable for utilizing moral arguments to defend and legitimize American action abroad. Without victory, neither material nor moral superiority was proven. While Nixon and Ford attempted to make exceptionalist claims anyway, their rhetorical strategies were limited.

Chapter 9

Discussion and Comparison of Case Studies

If the political utility of the different material and moral themes of American exceptionalist rhetoric depends on certain international conditions, then the conclusions of World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War, and the Cold War provide helpful insight into what those specific conditions are, whether the rhetoric was used successfully, and how the two themes interacted with each other. While the pattern of reliance on material-focused and moral-focused rhetoric of American exceptionalism before and after victory in major wars has its own general implications, the striking differences across cases provide nuanced historical interpretations of the successes and failures of US presidents to achieve their postwar global visions using this rhetoric. It also enables examination of two further questions: whether the idea of American exceptionalism can be entirely relegated to the realm of rhetorical strategy or if it can be considered a value in a deeper sense, and whether the patterns offer any insight into the debate about the idea's origins.

The results of this study strongly suggest that victory in a major war serves as a causal mechanism to increase the percentage of moral exceptionalist claims made by US presidents. In other words, proven material superiority sets the groundwork for claiming moral purpose. For US presidents at the end of World War I, World War II, and the Cold War, the conditions of victory enabled them to make more claims of moral superiority after the war than during the war. This reveals a necessary interaction between power and moral purpose.

Interestingly, for each victory case study, the overall number of American exceptionalist claims stays relatively consistent across the periods before and after the end of the war. The average number of claims per speech increases slightly after the war in the cases of WWII and the Cold War but decreases somewhat in the WWI case. That is also notable since the first two cases include two presidents, but the WWI case does not. Regardless, these are very slight changes. For example, the

volume of average claims per speech during the war for World War I was 3.78 claims per speech, whereas, on average, 3.5 claims were made in the postwar sample.

Therefore, the results do not suggest that the conditions after victory enable the increased political utility of American exceptionalist rhetoric in general. Instead, we find that US presidents are just as incentivized to use the rhetoric of American exceptionalism in the two years leading up to the end of the war as they are in the first two postwar years. The change indicated by the results concerns what the claim of American superiority refers to. We see the same pattern across the three victory cases, where the percentage of moral claims increases in the wake of victory. We do not find this pattern in the case of defeat. Three significant implications follow from this general pattern, and additional conclusions can be drawn by comparing the cases.

Three Significant Implications

First, to at least some extent, the rhetorical pattern implies that US presidents have strategically used the idea of American exceptionalism in their rhetoric throughout recent American history. Rhetoric is a presidential tool (Tullis 1987). While we can further discuss each president's individual leader psychology and situational motives by comparing across cases, this implication remains. Still, it is essential to note that one can genuinely believe in something and still be strategic when it comes to how one speaks about it. For example, most historians would agree that Woodrow Wilson fully believed that America was exceptional. He considered himself an idealist and proposed the League of Nations in an effort to promote world peace led by the US (Nye 2020, 5). Despite Wilson genuinely believing the moral arguments he put forth, he still waited for the right time to make those arguments. He began planning the League and speaking of it privately before even taking office, yet he waited until after WWI ended to act on it fully. Even if Wilson believed the United States was morally superior throughout his time in office, he only stressed that belief

rhetorically after the war ended. Perhaps Wilson did not use the idea of American exceptionalism in a hypocritical way, but that does not imply that his use of the concept was not strategic. Without psychologically analyzing each president, their rhetorical actions speak for themselves, suggesting that each victorious president used American exceptionalist rhetoric instrumentally to promote their foreign policy goals.

Second, power and ideas interact to shape foreign policy. The longevity and influence of an idea like American exceptionalism is made possible by material realities that uphold it. As noted previously, any theory of international relations that does not account for the role of ideas in politics cannot fully explain the impact of the continuous trend of American exceptionalism in US foreign policy. A classical realist stance on international politics that disregards the importance of ideas would overlook the role that the notion of American exceptionalism has had in US foreign policy. Wendt (1992) points to the interaction between national identity and interests in international affairs. Over centuries, the idea of American exceptionalism has become the cornerstone of American national identity. This is not to say that the idea itself does all the work. As the final implication will further explore, material factors interact with ideational ones in critical ways. However, it seems that the idea of American exceptionalism enables specific actions just as much, if not more, than actual American material strength that empirical measures can back up. In each victory case, the US left the war in a hegemonic position with an unmatched share of global power. If calculations of power were all that mattered, why would the use of moral exceptionalist rhetoric increase under these conditions? Morals matter, even if only in the sense of using moral arguments as a rhetorical strategy. Ideas and power must both be taken into account to produce the most accurate understanding of US foreign policy and the importance of American exceptionalism to it as an idea.

Third, and most significantly, the pattern revealed by the results suggests that proven material superiority enables projected moral superiority. There is an interaction between the two

dimensions of American exceptionalism, tied to real-world conditions, that operates in one direction. An emphasis on material superiority in presidential rhetoric during a war is proven true after victory. If a president claims that the United States has the strongest military in the world and then that military wins a world war, then the president's claim is validated at least to some degree. The cases offer three moments where presidents in an immediate postwar context propose a new vision for America's role in international relations that has a strikingly moral foundation but is ultimately based on the nation's power after gaining a hegemonic position. The material conditions directly interact with ideational factors to produce the rhetoric of American exceptionalism. By conceiving American exceptionalism as including two separate dimensions or themes of material and moral superiority, we can see how external conditions validate one dimension, and by doing so, provide the means to promote the second dimension. Looking at American exceptionalism as one singular idea without differentiating between its two dimensions or by only considering the moral dimension, you lose sight of the idea's complexity and internal interaction among its moral and material components. Beyond simply interacting, the prevalence of the two themes reveals that their use enables one another. In other words, the conditions that make arguments of moral superiority an effective political strategy are enabled by claims of material superiority endorsed by reality.

Explaining the Varying Levels of Success in using American Exceptionalist Rhetoric

A remaining concern is that in the three victory case studies, if moral superiority rhetoric was used strategically to promote a new vision for America's role in international relations, then that strategy worked with varying levels of success across the three cases. In the case of World War I, Wilson's League failed, and the US relinquished the benefits of its new position of international power to enter a period of isolation. By contrast, the US-led peace settlements of World War II were successful and lasting. The end of the Cold War differed from the other two postwar settlements

because instead of being destroyed and reimaged, the old international order stayed surprisingly consistent despite one superpower collapsing. While the presidents in each case all used a similar rhetorical strategy of increasing the moral focus of American exceptionalist claims after the wars ended, the postwar visions for the United States' future role in the world order failed in the case of WWI, succeeded in the case of WWII, and largely did not change in the case of the Cold War. Each postwar president presented a specific vision for the future world order. Whether that vision succeeded illustrates how effective their rhetoric actually was. Comparing what else happened in each case provides further insight into the situations where moral arguments are most effective.

After the First World War, Wilson's use of moral rhetoric to promote the League and ratify the Treaty of Versailles was ineffective because he deployed moral rhetoric to promote a security obligation that directly affected quickly changing domestic material factors. The primary criticism of Wilson's League by domestic American audiences was that it entailed too great a general collective security obligation (Dueck 2006). The League aimed to promote world peace through sanctions that would prevent aggression and war, where each member had military obligations to preserve the territorial integrity and political independence of the other member states (Link 1979). While Wilson's rhetorical campaign following the war focused intensely on the integral role of American moral leadership in the new world order, that moral duty came with an unprecedented peacetime military commitment abroad. In light of the insight that material superiority sets the conditions for claims of moral superiority, the case of WWI suggests that the US domestic audience was still not entirely convinced they had the material capabilities to take on the role of moral purpose Wilson envisioned. In other words, the power realist elements were not well integrated with Wilson's moralistic rhetoric.

In the case of WWII, Truman's use of postwar moral rhetoric was overwhelmingly compelling, and perhaps a contributing factor to its success was that it also promoted an ideological

conflict with the USSR. The far-reaching peace settlements following World War II drastically transformed the United States' role in the international order and also marked the eve of the Cold War. Truman faced virtually no domestic resistance to establishing a new era of American commitments abroad. He strongly relied on Wilsonian language to argue for this increased international involvement, but unlike Wilson, his use of the same moral rhetoric worked. The breakdown of the US-Soviet relationship following the end of WWII shaped the nature of American postwar security commitments in Europe (Ikenberry 2001). The moral arguments Truman used in defense of this new level of security commitments were seen as credible because there was an ideological opponent to which American values and ideas could be directly compared. While the new order was primarily based on the postwar balance of power, the way Truman presented his foreign policy vision at home redefined that balance of power in ideological and moralistic terms. This initiative led to new institutions and relations among industrial powers that have lasted to the present day. The success of the American WWII postwar vision suggests that when multiple value systems are in salient competition, moral rhetoric becomes argumentatively effective for political leaders. American moral superiority held more weight when the threat of an alternative ideological system based on different values loomed after the Second World War.

After the Cold War, George H.W. Bush's rhetoric was not necessarily ineffective, but it did not create a drastically new vision for America's role in the international order. Compared to past major wars, the old international order was not reshaped to the same extent after the Cold War. The way the war ended proved to the West that its version of the international order had succeeded (Ikenberry 2001). Since the Cold War was an ideological conflict in addition to being a military one, the US victory legitimized American moral superiority to certain audiences in the same way as it confirmed material superiority after the other wars. Bush still employed postwar claims of American exceptionalism in a similar moral-focused way as his predecessors. However, these claims were

mainly used to promote the continuation of US involvement internationally instead of serving to reimagine its role entirely. The US-led post-Cold War regional institution-building efforts further cemented America's position of international leadership that had been forming for decades. Moral rhetoric reaffirmed this leadership role against domestic challenges proclaiming American decline without an adversary, but not many preceding policies drastically changed.

Is American Exceptionalism a Rhetorical Strategy or an Actual Value?

The results help answer an entrenched question within the scholarship of American exceptionalism—is American exceptionalism purely a rhetorical strategy or an actual value? The continuous reliance on the rhetoric of American exceptionalism throughout the twentieth century suggests that it is an idea that has become an integral part of American national identity. But at the same time, the strategic use of the idea at specific times suggests that part of the reason for its long-term use is its instrumental benefits. The case studies examined here suggest that American exceptionalist rhetoric was most effective when it coincided with moments when the US did seem exceptional in reality and not just rhetorically.

The results and analysis suggest that the discourse of American exceptionalism has survived so consistently throughout the past century partially because the US acted on its claims of exceptional status, whether or not one thinks the claims were valid or the nation's actions justified. The US proved its military strength during each of the major victories, which set the conditions to make moral claims. But perhaps the US also, more often than not, adhered to the moral claims US presidents made. Throughout the twentieth century, the US did rebuild the liberal bloc of Europe. This effort attempted to prove that the nation was trustworthy and would follow the moral purpose it promulgated. Perhaps by continuously using American exceptionalism as a rhetorical device, it became an actual value. This is not to say that the proclaimed moral righteousness was justified or

right. Still, the idea of American exceptionalism served as more than just a rhetorical strategy to push certain policy positions. If true, it demonstrates the power of ideas in foreign policy and the power of rhetoric to constitute collective values.

Implications for the Origins of American Exceptionalism

A final insight that this study offers concerns the ongoing debates about the origins of American exceptionalism. The core of these debates deals with whether American exceptionalism is primarily a result of America's unique geographical position, spanning the width of a continent with major oceans on both sides and a host of seemingly endless resources, or whether it is mostly a result of the nation being "born modern" and liberal. This entrenched debate over the causes of American exceptionalism is tightly intertwined with the theory I propose and the subsequent research findings about the rhetoric of American exceptionalism. Exploring the idea's use in presidential rhetoric offers insight into this discussion because the two proposed distinct themes of American exceptionalism run parallel to the two explanations of its origin.

My findings suggest that there is not one single root cause of American exceptionalism. The variation between material and moral claims of American exceptionalism means that both material power and ideational factors matter. Although this is a longstanding tension that these findings alone cannot entirely solve, it reveals an important feature of this debate that possibly impacts any discussions of the relationship between power and ideas. While my research codes single claims of American exceptionalism as either moral or material-focused, the variability between the two types of claims does not mean that they are separable questions. The consistent pattern across the victory case studies reveals that the two themes of American exceptionalism interact with one another. There is a necessary interaction between power and moral purpose, whereby the presentation of power sets the stage for claims resting on perceived moral purpose. Regarding the debate about

origins, this finding suggests that the two explanations necessarily interact with one another. American exceptionalism as an idea grew out of the unique combination of geographical realities and material resources along with the nation's ideational grounding in liberal values.

Chapter 10

Conclusion

Theodore Roosevelt, an American president not involved in any of the previously discussed case studies, described the United States' international commitments in a speech, saying, "Our chief usefulness to humanity rests on combining power with high purpose" (Chace 2004, 108). After analyzing over 200 speeches delivered by American presidents at the conclusions of four major wars, this single quote serves as a microcosm for the 654 total invocations of American exceptionalism identified in this paper. This paper built on existing scholarship on presidential rhetoric and took a new approach to scholarship on the impact of American exceptionalism in foreign policy to examine the occurrence of two themes—material and moral superiority—in the foreign policy rhetoric of US presidents at the pivotal moments marking the ends of major wars.

The research using presidential speeches from four war case studies throughout the twentieth century confirms all three of my hypotheses. First, in the cases of American victory, US presidents were more likely to favor the moral theme of American exceptionalism over the material theme in their rhetoric after the war ended. Second, also in victory cases, presidents were more likely to favor the material theme of American exceptionalism over the moral theme in their rhetoric during a major international war. Lastly, in the case of an American loss, presidents were less likely to favor the moral theme of American exceptionalism over the material theme in their rhetoric after the defeat in a major international war. These findings suggest an interaction between these two dimensions of American exceptionalism. The legitimacy given to claims of material superiority by winning a major war sets the conditions for the increased reliance on moral rhetoric.

While this research was limited by its focus only on presidential speeches during these four case studies, future research should expand beyond presidential rhetoric to examine how other political actors and the public conceived the idea of American exceptionalism. Additionally, looking

beyond these four cases at the ends of major wars would offer important insight into how the concept operates when there is no major reorganization of the international system. More broadly, the relationship between power and moral purpose can be further studied in ways unrelated to American exceptionalism. While American exceptionalism offers a valuable look into this relationship because it is an idea where morality and power clearly come together, it is not the only way to study this topic. This work is closely related to scholarship on power in political theory and normative political philosophy. Future research in political theory should broaden the theoretical scope of the ideas mentioned here to understand better how power and morality interact in political life.

Chapter 11

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Appendix A

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Appendix B

Content Analysis Codebook

Speech Identification Information

1. Date
 - a. The date the speech was delivered. (Format: MM/DD/YY)
2. Speech Title
 - a. The title of the speech.
3. President
 - a. The president who delivered the speech. Options include:
 - i. 1 = Wilson*
 - ii. 2 = Roosevelt*
 - iii. 3 = Truman*
 - iv. 4 = Nixon*
 - v. 5 = Ford*
 - vi. 6 = Reagan*
 - vii. 7 = Bush*
4. Case Study
 - a. The case study within which the speech took place. Options include:
 - i. 1 = World War I*
 - ii. 2 = World War II*
 - iii. 3 = The Vietnam War*
 - iv. 4 = The Cold War.*
5. Before/After
 - a. Whether the speech took place before or after the end of the war. Options include:
 - i. 1 = Before the end of the war*
 - ii. 2 = After the end of the war*

American Exceptionalism Analysis

6. Claim of American Exceptionalism Generally
 - a. Is the claim about the United States?
 - i. Example words or phrases include: America, the United States, us, our country, our nation, our purpose, our, we.

- b. Does the claim suggest that America, its people, government, military, economy, or other related facets are qualitatively different from other nations or the rest of the world? Does the claim relate to particularly exceptional behavior?
 - i. Example words or phrases include: superiority, excellence, exceptional, great, strength, purpose, principle, special, success, achievement, victory, magnificent, tremendous, unmatched, unparalleled, no...other countries/nations, best/greatest/most ____... in the (history of the) world, saved/savior (of) the world, leader of the world.
- 7. Invocation of American exceptionalism with regard to the subject of material superiority.
 - a. Is the American exceptionalism invocation used in reference to a material subject?
 - i. This category will be coded if the claim describes the American economy, natural resources, industrial production, scientific discoveries/ingenuity, or military.
 - 1. Examples:
 - a. America has the strongest military in the world.
 - b. American economic power is unmatched.
- 8. Invocation of American exceptionalism with regard to the subject of moral superiority.
 - a. Is the American exceptionalism invocation used in reference to a moral subject?
 - i. This category will be coded if the claim describes American values, morals, ideas, ideology, principles, spirit, righteousness, duties, or obligations, including democracy, freedom, liberty, and other liberal values.
 - 1. Examples:
 - a. The United States must lead the world to peace.
 - b. American democracy is an exemplar for the world.

c. We know what's right.

** The moral and material context does not have to be in the same sentence as the claim of American exceptionalism, but the context must be within two sentences before or after the claim.

Appendix C

Content Analysis Code Sheet

Unit of Analysis – Claim of American exceptionalism	American Exceptionalism Analysis
<p style="text-align: center;">Speech Identification Information</p> <p>1. Date: _____ Format: MM/DD/YY</p> <p>2. Speech Title: _____ _____ _____</p> <p>3. President: _____ 1 = Wilson 2 = Roosevelt 3 = Truman 4 = Nixon 5 = Ford 6 = Reagan 7 = Bush</p> <p>4. Case Study: _____ 1 = World War I 2 = World War II 3 = the Vietnam War 4 = the Cold War</p> <p>5. Before/After: _____ 1 = before the end of the war 2 = after the end of the war</p>	<p>6. Is there a claim of American exceptionalism? _____</p> <p>(A claim that suggests America, its people, government, military, economy, or other related facets are qualitatively different from other nations or the rest of the world)</p> <p>7. Does it reference the US? _____</p> <p>8. Exceptionalist rhetoric? _____</p> <p><i>If yes to 6, 7, and 8.</i></p> <p>9. Is the American exceptionalism invocation used in reference to a material subject? _____</p> <p>(American economy, military natural resources, industrial production, or scientific discoveries/ingenuity)</p> <p>10. Is the American exceptionalism invocation used in reference to a moral subject? _____</p> <p>(American values, morals, ideas, ideology, principles, righteousness, duties, or obligations)</p>