



# American Exceptionalism: An Idea that Made a Nation and Remade the World (Routledge Studies in US Foreign Policy)

By Hilde Eliassen Restad

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## American Exceptionalism: An Idea that Made a Nation and Remade the World (Routledge Studies in US Foreign Policy) By Hilde Eliassen Restad

How does American exceptionalism shape American foreign policy?

Conventional wisdom states that American exceptionalism comes in two variations – the exemplary version and the missionary version.

Being exceptional, experts in U.S. foreign policy argue, means that you either withdraw from the world like an isolated but inspiring "city upon a hill," or that you are called upon to actively lead the rest of the world to a better future. In her book, Hilde Eliassen Restad challenges this assumption, arguing that U.S. history has displayed a remarkably constant foreign policy tradition, which she labels unilateral internationalism. The United States, Restad argues, has not vacillated between an "exemplary" and a "missionary" identity. Instead, the United States developed an exceptionalist identity that, while idealizing the United States as an exemplary "city upon a hill," more often than not errs on the side of the missionary crusade in its foreign policy. Utilizing the latest historiography in the study of U.S. foreign relations, the book updates political science scholarship and sheds new light on the role American exceptionalism has played – and continues to play – in shaping America's role in the world.

This work will be of great interest to students and scholars of US foreign policy, security studies, and American politics.

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## Editorial Review

### Review

Restad's book sheds new light by making a very substantial contribution to the literature on American exceptionalism and its role in shaping US foreign policy. Restad (Bjørknes College, Norway) challenges the traditional assumptions of US foreign policy experts that the US should either withdraw from the world like an isolated but inspiring "city upon a hill"• or actively lead the rest of the world. --**K. M. Zaarour, Shaw University CHOICE**

"Hilde Eliassen Restad has accomplished a difficult and important task in reviewing exceptionalism's centrality in the American self-understanding. ... Restad, a Norwegian scholar and teacher trained in the United States, uses her unique background to bring a fresh perspective to exceptionalism and American foreign policy. As an outsider who knows America well, she places the nation's experience in its wider international context and never takes for granted the truth of conventional stories trapped by a priori scholarly commitments to cycles, periods, breaks, and "turnarounds." One of the book's most commendable features is its success in forcing readers to engage its argument. This is a book to wrestle with, a book far from bland theorizing." -- **Richard Gamble, Professor of History, Anna Margaret Ross Alexander Chair in History and Political Science at Hillsdale College**

"In *American exceptionalism*, Hilde Restad provides a tightly argued and provocative overview of America's sense of self. ... Hilde Restad is, if anything, bold to seek an ideational study of exceptionalism amid the mine-strewn landscape of the ongoing American culture wars." -- **Asle Toje, Director of Research at the Nobel Institute, writes in International Affairs**

### About the Author

**Hilde Eliassen Restad** is Associate Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies at Bjørknes College in Oslo, Norway. A Fulbright alumna, she has a Ph.D. in Foreign Affairs from the University of Virginia, and is frequently used as a commentator on U.S. politics in Norway.

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