The United States has fascinated foreign observers' criticisms typically involved America's self-confidence, often expressed in vulgar ways; and the nation's emphasis on practicality over elegance. These included the rambunctiousness of the democratic political system; the restlessness to develop natural resources, owing to capitalistic ambition; and the opulence for and tolerance of experiments in communal living, public education, and reform of derelict persons. During the early years of the Republic, the existence of a large country with a populous government, not a monarchy, was indeed unusual. Some foreign visitors consequently hoped that the American experiment would survive even though they predicted its downfall. Foreign observers correctly perceived that the greatest threat to the country was slavery and the sectional conflict that it precipitated. Most travelers who observed slavery considered it to be an aberration of American democracy, not an intrinsic problem.

In the twentieth century, the perception of American exceptionalism was perpetuated by two factors. The first was the telling military and diplomatic role of the United States during World Wars I and II. The second was the prosperity and power of the American economy in the decades following these conflicts, including the status of the United States after 1991 as the world's sole superpower.

Other foreign travelers' commentaries have disparaged the United States, taking the form of either humorous satire or serious criticism. Nineteenth-century foreign observers' criticisms typically involved America's national excesses. These included the rambunctiousness of the democratic political system; the restlessness to develop natural resources, owing to capitalistic ambition and opportunity; boastfulness, often expressed in vulgar ways; and the national emphasis on practicality over ele-

American Exceptionalism, which holdsthat Americans themselves have often used this praise as a basis for the idea of "American exceptionalism," which holds that the United States has followed a unique historical path rather than being enmeshed in the larger patterns and processes of world history.

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Declaration of Independence appealed to the conscience of the world, and the American Revolution enlisted international support. Once the nation was established, what had been an obscure colonial backwater became a phenomenon to be investigated. Foreign visitors took up the challenge of satisfying their curiosity about the United States as the hope of the world and as the country of the future.

In the nineteenth century the idea of exceptionalism developed out of foreigners' observations about the development and nature of American democracy. These observations focused on the conservative nature of the Constitution and political system; the rapidity of industrial development in the absence of government regulation; and the opportunity for and tolerance of experiments in communal living, public education, and reform of delinquent persons. During the early years of the Republic, the existence of a large country with a populous government, not a monarchy, was indeed unusual. Some foreign visitors consequently hoped that the American experiment would survive even though they predicted its downfall. Foreign observers correctly perceived that the greatest threat to the country was slavery and the sectional conflict that it precipitated. Most travelers who observed slavery considered it to be an aberration of American democracy, not an intrinsic problem.

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gance. Foreigners attributed this last tendency to a lack of refined or high culture.

Serious criticism of the country leveled by foreign observers grew in the twentieth century. Twentieth-century observers seemed more analytical than their predecessors, who were more likely simply to describe the American scene. This change occurred of necessity as America became more complex and diverse, an evolution that invited more penetrating observation. Criticisms also grew as a by-product of the country’s greater efforts to influence other nations. Foreign policy moved from the isolationism counseled by George Washington and Thomas Jefferson to the internationalism and interventionism of Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, John Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, and others. America’s cultural development moved from a regional to a national level during the nineteenth century and then to the internationalization of American culture during the twentieth century. Both of these trends met with foreign visitors’ criticism.

Still, to the present day foreign observers who have taken a negative stance toward American politics, society, and culture typically have exercised little or no lasting influence. The same can be said of those who have failed to celebrate the unique, positive qualities of the United States.

**Foreign Observers of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries**

The most important foreigner to record impressions of the United States in its infancy was J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, who composed his *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) over the course of the 1770s and published his work in London. Crèvecoeur immigrated to America in 1754, and settled on a farm in New York State. He traveled extensively among both white and Indian peoples, and was adopted by the Oneida Indians after he met them while occupied as a surveyor in Vermont. In 1780 he was obliged to return to France, but came back to the United States in 1783 and was appointed the French consul in New York City. His *Letters*, quickly published in French and German as well as English, excited Europe about American uniqueness, especially its climate, fauna, and wildlife, and no doubt induced some to settle in the United States. Crèvecoeur posed the question, “What then is the American, this new man?” He described a person whose past prejudices and manners were obliterated and replaced by new ones formed by the person’s allegiance to new government and new land and by his or her new sociopolitical rank. In effect, Crèvecoeur was describing an American melting pot, a country where a new kind of national allegiance, one based on civic identity and economic standing, would replace the old European allegiance, based on ethnic identity.

The number of foreign visitors increased substantially in the nineteenth century as travel became easier and curiosity about the American experiment grew. Most of the important observers came from the United Kingdom. Frances Trollope arrived in the United States in 1827. She traveled in this country with Frances (Fanny) Wright, another Englishwoman, who had established a utopian community near Memphis, Tennessee, and had written favorably about the country in her *Views of Society and Manners in America* (1821). She observed that even American generals and statesmen tended to be farmers and extolled the virtues of pride in the land, physical fitness, and an organic sense of liberty that an agrarian American society nourished. It is thus ironic that her friend Trollope is remembered as the author of perhaps the most ill-natured of all books of travel in the United States, her *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832). Trollope was the leading figure of what was known as the ‘Tory generation of hypercritical English travelers in this country. The title of Trollope’s work is misleading, for she charged that Americans had no manners; moreover, she complained, they were inquisitive, boring, humorless, and self-satisfied. American women were scrawny; the men hollow-chested and round-shouldered. Persons of neither sex, except for blacks, had an ear for music. The culprit for all of this was Thomas Jefferson, whose proclamation that all were equal set off mediocore people’s ambitions to rise above their proper station. Trollope related a cross-examination she witnessed of President Andrew Jackson by a citizen who did not believe Jackson’s affirmations that his wife Rachel was still alive. Although they detested “Dame Trollope” for her critique, what Americans detested even more was that foreign observers did not esteem the rough-and-tumble ways that Trollope, to be fair, probably exaggerated only slightly.

An even more famous English writer, Charles Dickens, visited the country in 1842. Because of his prior transatlantic fame he received a rapturously cordial reception by ordinary Americans as well as literati and statesmen, including President John Tyler. Thus, Americans were disappointed that Dickens’s *American Notes* (1842) was mostly critical of American society. All the parties Americans threw for him did not charm Dickens. He joined Trollope in excoriating American incivility. He also found fault with slavery, the absence of copyright laws, and the ill-treatment of prison inmates. His work, like Trollope’s, provoked an American backlash, although less severe in his case. An anonymous American pamphlet, *Change for the American Notes* (1843), drew attention to English workhouses, slums, and debtors’ prisons.

Most foreign travelers did not focus on slavery in their accounts. One who did was Frances (Fanny) Kemble, a young London actress. Kemble moved to Darien, Georgia, in 1832, where she married a southern planter. She indicated that she did not know at the time that her husband was an extensive slaveholder. She decided to keep a journal of her daily experiences. This became her *Journal of a Residence on a Georgia Plantation in 1838–1839* (1863). The *journal* relates the story of her growing awareness of the horror of slavery. Kemble especially
sympathized with slave women and the elderly slaves, who suffered from their owners' abuse or negligence.

The most notable German observer of the United States was Francis Lieber, a refugee and correspondent of the liberal revolutions that flashed across Europe throughout the nineteenth century. He arrived in the United States in 1827, became a professor of law and philosophy at Columbia College (later the University of South Carolina) in Columbia, South Carolina, and then moved to Columbia College (later Columbia University) in New York City. Lieber offered several acute glimpses of the American landscape and legal system, including *Letters to a Gentleman in Germany: Written after a Trip from Philadelphia to Niagara* (1834) and *The Stranger in America; or, Letters to a Gentleman in Germany Comprising Sketches of the Manners, Society, and National Peculiarities of the United States* (1835). While Lieber was teaching in South Carolina, he—like the Englishwoman Fanny Kemble—grew to oppose slavery. His public opposition to the institution ultimately led to his relocation to the North.

The French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville shared his English counterparts' revulsion at the American tendency to “barbaric” behavior. But his *Democracy in America* (2 vols., 1835, 1840) offset—and in the long term, overwhelmed—the sting of English carping. *Democracy in America* was the result of Tocqueville's interest in assessing the impact of individual liberty, institutional pluralism, and mass society on the United States. He believed that democracy was inevitable, so he wished to learn and to an extent warn Europe about it before it made its way across the Atlantic. Tocqueville observed that its lack of aristocracy, its hunger for property, and its love of change made American democracy an entirely middle-class society. He was wrong about this. But he was right about much else. He detected that Americans resolved problems by resorting to laws, so lawyers were a natural aristocracy. He worried that slavery might cause a national conflict, which it eventually did. And he foresaw that the United States and Russia would be two great world powers. *Democracy in America* is fascinating because of its eclecticism and its inductive reasoning, developing general principles from careful observation of details. For all of these qualities it is considered the greatest of all foreigners' accounts of the United States.

The most important foreign observer of the United States in the late nineteenth century was James Bryce. A native of Ireland, Bryce went on to serve as the British ambassador to the United States from 1907 to 1913. He began to lay the groundwork for that position in 1870, when he commenced visits to the United States to study its constitutional government. At the time, the rising tide of republicanism in Europe was sparking a national debate in Britain on representative government. Moreover, destiny seemed to be with the American republic. Having passed the test of Civil War, it was forging ahead so irresistibly that European institutions seemed outdated. The product of Bryce's study was his *American Common-wealth* (1888). In this work Bryce captured the enthusiasm of the age. He praised the informality of American manners, signaling a shift in British observers' attitudes from earlier Tory revulsion. He also praised the work ethic of the members of Congress, whose alacrity contrasted sharply for Bryce with the indolence of the House of Lords. He sensed that the great power in American society lay at the time with railway magnates, whose autonomy from government interference fascinated Bryce. Sympathetic to the Progressive movement, he sharply criticized the corrupt urban machine politics of the age, which he felt fell far short of America's democratic potential.

Bryce made friends with many American statesmen, including the jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. and politicians such as Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. Bryce actually advised Wilson during the post–World War I struggle over the League of Nations. Most of the people with whom Bryce corresponded were of Anglo-Saxon background, and disposed to favor a close connection with Britain. Bryce's speeches and writings helped create the idea of an Anglo-Saxon racial superiority and also helped forge close British-American cultural and diplomatic relations. Thus, Bryce shared Wilson's bitterness over the United States' refusal after the war to commit itself to protecting European safety.

A contemporary of Bryce, José Martí, was the first important Latin American observer of the United States. A journalist, Martí arrived in New York City from Cuba in 1881. He began writing about his impressions of the United States for the newspaper *La Nación* de Buenos Aires, Argentina. Charles A. Dana, member of a famous New York City newspaper family, discovered Martí and hired him to write also for his newspaper, the *New York Sun*. Martí gave voice to a growing Latin American ambivalence about the power of the United States. Martí urged Latin Americans to adopt U.S. constitutional doctrines and practices. Commenting on the new immigration patterns of his time, he saw America as a vast melting pot in which “luckless Irishmen, Poles, Italians, Bohemians, Germans [are] redeemed from oppression or misery.” He championed the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson as a literature for all the Americas. On the other hand, Martí feared that U.S. imperialism would manifest itself in an expansion into Latin America, and especially in an annexation of Cuba. He died in 1895, fighting in the first stage of the Cuban revolution against Spain, and so did not live to see U.S. occupation of Cuba as a result of the Spanish-American War of 1898.

**Foreign Observers of the Twentieth Century**

Latin American writers in the twentieth century have seen José Martí as a prophet of both Latin American nationalism and North American hegemony. Important among these was Carlos G. Dávila, Chile's ambassador to the United States from 1927 to 1931 and later a New York City journalist, and Daniel Cosío Villegas, a leading Mexican intellectual and businessman familiar with the United States through both work and residence. Dávila's *We of...*
the Americas was published in 1949. Villegas’s works also include The United States versus Porfirio Díaz (1963) and American Extremes (1964). Both of these observers called for greater economic cooperation between the United States and its Latin American neighbors, not subjugation by the former of the latter. They also advocated Latin American resistance to the spread of North American culture.

John Alfred Spender and Herbert George (H. G.) Wells, English observers of the United States in the early twentieth century, addressed the tension the United States felt at the time between remaining isolated from world affairs and acknowledging its position and duties as a world power. The editor of the prestigious Westminster Gazette, Spender visited the United States in 1921 and in 1927. He recounted his impressions of America in the post–World War I period in his Through English Eyes (1928). Spender attempted to explain to Europeans the American reaction against continuing involvement in European affairs after the war. He urged patience with the American position, and predicted that once Americans realized the strength of the country they would accept their important part in world affairs and break with their historic neutrality.

Wells joined Spender in predicting a more activist U.S. foreign policy. He made six visits to the United States from 1906 to 1940, and it was his experiences on the first of these that prompted his The Future in America: A Search after Realities (1906). Wells, a socialist, spent time on his visit with Jane Addams, Booker T. Washington, and W. E. B. Du Bois. He was also a famous science fiction writer, and so was invited to lunch by Theodore Roosevelt. In his book Wells lamented the status of black Americans. He also expressed concern about the fact that ambitious Americans cared little about the long-term consequences of their capitalistic striving. Yet Roosevelt impressed Wells as “a very symbol of the creative will in man.” Overall, The Future in America was an optimistic account of the overwhelming potential for American economic development in the form of “acquisitive successes, the striving failures, [and] the multitudes of those rising and falling who come between.” At the end of The Future in America, Wells predicted a major Anglo-American role in the eventual emergence of an international government, a prediction vindicated in the formation of the United Nations in 1945, a year before Wells’s death.

The most important foreign observer of American race relations was the Swedish economist, Gunnar Myrdal. In 1944, Myrdal published his two-volume study of black-white relations, An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy. He asserted that white Americans experience a troubling dilemma because of the discrepancy between the hallowed “American Creed,” whereby they think, talk, and act under the influence of egalitarian and Christian precepts, and the oppressive way they treat black Americans. Myrdal, who was later awarded a Nobel Prize in economics, predicted that this moral dilemma, heightened by the democratic rhetoric of World War II, would force changes in American race relations and end the country’s greatest scandal. In the quarter century of civil rights activism and achievement that followed Myrdal’s publication, “dilemma” served as a common metaphor for American race relations. Although Myrdal would eventually be seen as overly optimistic, in 1964 American intellectuals ranked his book one of the most significant works in the twentieth century for changing the direction of society.

The civil rights movement gained strength through the 1960s. This coincided with a time when many African nations moved out from under European colonization to independence. Black Americans and Africans, each group battling racism, shared political strategies and explored new cultural alliances. Tom Mboya was a leader of the independence movement of Kenya. He visited the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, and assessed his experience in several newspaper articles, which were collected in his The Challenge of Nationhood (1970). In this work Mboya discouraged black Americans’ plans for expatriation to Africa. Instead, he called for patient efforts to realize their full potential as American citizens and encouraged Africans to support black Americans’ efforts to achieve political and, more important to Mboya, economic equality in the United States. Like his American counterparts Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X before him, in 1969 Tom Mboya was assassinated.

The most important Asian observer of the United States was Francis L. K. Hsu, who was born in Manchuria in 1909 and immigrated to the United States shortly before World War II. A distinguished anthropologist at Northwestern University, he wrote extensively on the interaction between Chinese and American cultures. His Americans and Chinese: Passages to Differences (1953) confirmed a change in foreigners’ observations about the spread of American power and influence from enthusiasm to anxiety. Hsu recognized that American influence had extended beyond the West and was in the process of spreading into Asia. For him, Americanization—the global spread of American corporate interests, based on assumptions of individual achievement, competitiveness, and exploitation of natural resources—was a pejorative term.

Finally, the most important contemporary foreign observer of American culture is Rob Kroes, who is associated with the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies and the European Association for American Studies. Kroes is a well-known authority on the impact of American popular culture on the rest of the world as well as on the United States itself. Perhaps the most memorable title of his some dozen works on the subject was If You’ve Seen One, You’ve Seen the Mall: Europeans and American Mass Culture (1996). A later work is titled Them and Us: Questions of Citizenship in a Globalizing World (2000).

BIBLIOGRAPHY
The works listed below are included because they describe the impact of the interpretations of the United States discussed
above. In the cases of works written by the foreign observers themselves, the editions selected include helpful introductions that provide the context and significance of the work, as well as in some cases the responses of Americans to the work.


Timothy M. Roberts

See also *American Dilemma, An; Democracy in America.*

**AMERICA FIRST COMMITTEE (AFC).** Founded in 1940 to fight against U.S. participation in World War II, the AFC initially enjoyed the backing of Henry Ford and the historian Charles A. Beard. Isolationists in all parts of the United States were involved, but the committee was especially active in Chicago. Indeed, the entire American Midwest stood as one of the strongholds of isolationist feeling. After Charles Lindbergh, an AFC leader, made what was widely considered an anti-Semitic speech in September 1941, the organization began to decline. The Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 only further eroded support for the America First Committee and similar isolationist pressure groups.

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Wayne Andrews / A. E.

See also *Isolationism; and vol. 9: America First.*

**AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL** is a patriotic hymn that originated as a poem written by Katharine Lee Bates in the summer of 1893 after a trip to Colorado Springs. The poem first appeared in *The Congregationalist* in 1895 and was set to music months later. Bates simplified the text in 1904 and made changes to the third stanza years later to create the words that are known today. From over seventy musical settings, the one now best known was written by S. A. Ward. Many citizens have lobbied Congress to make it the national anthem. The beloved hymn was performed frequently following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


Connie Ann Kirk

**AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES.** The Massachusetts legislature established the American Academy of Arts and Sciences on 4 May 1780. Following the broad vision of John Adams, the Academy’s founder, the charter directed the Academy’s programs toward both the development of knowledge—historical, natural, physical, and medical—and its applications for the improvement of society. The sixty-two incorporating fellows, all from Massachusetts, represented varying interests and high standing in the political, professional, and commercial sectors of the state. The first new members, chosen by the Academy in 1781, included Benjamin Franklin and George Washington as American fellows, as well as several foreign honorary members.

The initial volume of *Academy Memoirs* appeared in 1785, and the *Proceedings* followed in 1846. The early publications reveal the important place that science and technology held in the Academy from the outset, reflecting an era when the learned population could comprehend and even contribute to the development of scientific