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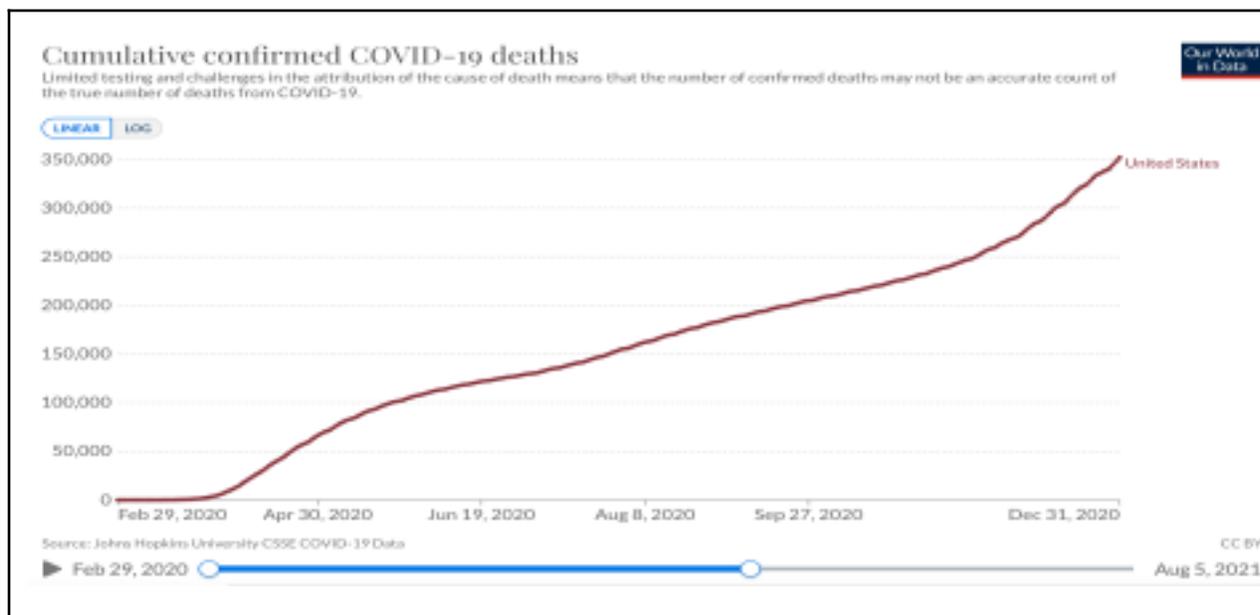
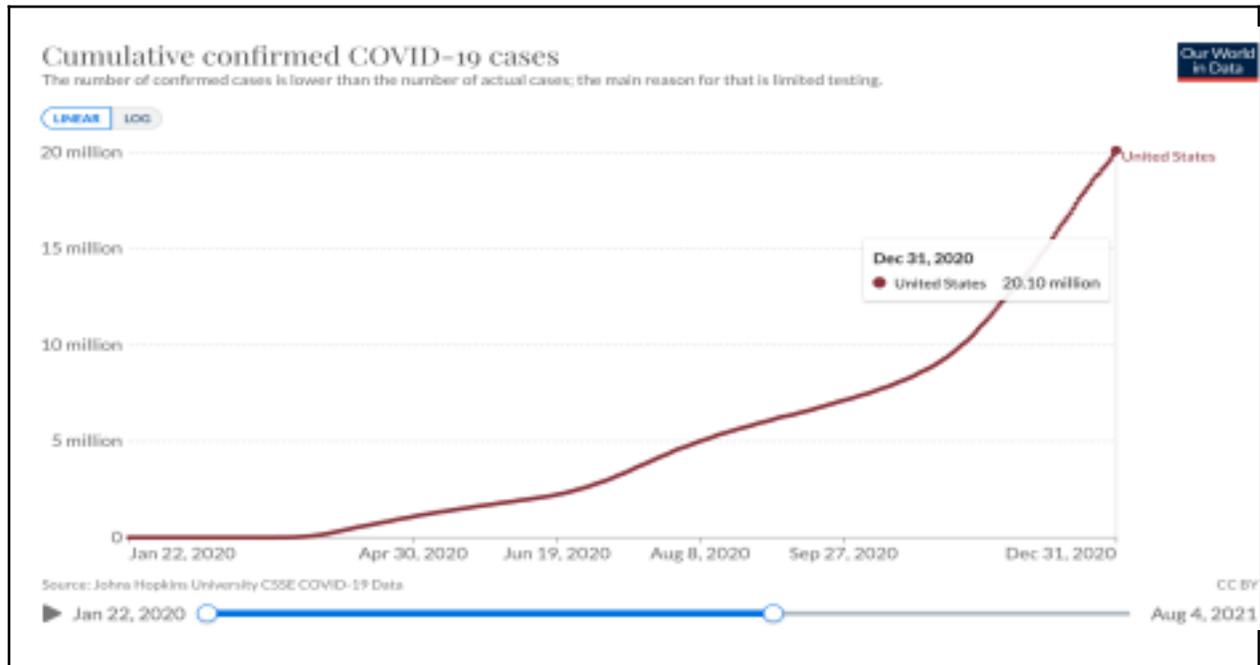
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

Before 1940, America remained in an isolationist¹ state and slowly became an economic powerhouse. But by 1940, American public opinion shifted in favor of using military forces to help defeat the expansionist Axis powers during World War II. It marked an end to their isolationism and a beginning to the exceptional America. (Longley, 2021). America was portrayed by countless American presidents and other figures as the leader of the world for a better future. Instead of focusing on domestic issues, America's foreign policy revolved around involvement in matters around the world. Since the 1940s till modern times, America has been regarded as an exceptional world leader, but the recent developments in how it handled the COVID-19 situation has shed light on some weakness, like unpreparedness and lack of authority. These weaknesses were amplified when we faced a president like none other, one that did not believe in American Exceptionalism — Donald Trump. His lack of belief in the need to portray America as exceptional ideologically may be the very reason for American Declinism. American Declinism, as Michael Prowse defined, was the idea that “something is fundamentally wrong with America's economy and until it is fixed, America will neither compete effectively in global markets nor provide an adequate standard of living for its citizens.” (Prowse, 1992)

¹ Isolationism: The national policy of isolating America from the affairs of other nations by declining to enter into alliances, foreign economic commitments, and international agreements.

1.2 Rationale



With more than 20 million cases and 350,000 deaths from COVID-19 in 2020 alone according to Our World in Data, Donald Trump's presidency and handling of the pandemic was highlighted and questioned, thus becoming this paper's focus. Trump served as a unique figure due to his leadership style and beliefs, in which he did not pursue a foreign policy of American Exceptionalism. He savaged his opponents at every turn, hindered America's ability to stamp out the pandemic and put America into the running for the nation with the least effective response to COVID-19. (Shinkle, 2020). America began to struggle and ask for medical aid, instead of being the powerhouse that extended help to other weaker countries. According to the Atlantic, America's bloated, inefficient health-care system left hospitals ill-prepared for the ensuing wave of sickness. (Yong, 2020) Despite America's large and strong economy, Trump's slow and ignorant response to the issue highlighted the flaws in his leadership. He was ill-prepared to control the situation in America, and lacked purpose or aspirations to help the world, intensifying the struggle with the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, this paper aims to find out how Donald Trump's lack of belief in American Exceptionalism has only hastened their decline.

1.3 Research Questions

1. To what extent does Donald Trump believe in American Exceptionalism?
2. Are American Exceptionalism and American Declinism related?
3. How has Trump's extent of belief in American Exceptionalism led to American Declinism?

1.4 Thesis Statement

Donald Trump's lack of belief in American exceptionalism during his presidency, prominently his handling of COVID-19, has led to American Declinism, a decline in the economy and negative social impacts like cases and deaths from COVID-19.

1.5 Delimitations

This paper will cover only the presidency of Donald Trump(2017-2020), specifically, America's severed ties with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose and effect of these policies, changes and responses will be weighed, domestically and internationally in relation to its own economy, in order to conclude if America has been in decline because of the lack of American exceptionalism in his leadership.

1.6 Significance

As a major economy, American leadership has played a great role in the world. However, Donald Trump's leadership struck me as quite unique, with opposing views towards American Exceptionalism. This differed from most presidents that had all pursued the foreign policy of Exceptionalism after 1940. By understanding what were Trump's beliefs and how these beliefs influenced his actions, we will be able to further understand the reasons behind America's poor response to the pandemic COVID-19 in 2020, as well as understand why he championed the foreign policy "America First".

1.7 Limitations

Due to the recency of Donald Trump's presidency, any post-presidency impacts that he may have caused cannot be fully analysed, thus viewpoints may be more biased against him than it should since no one would have the full image of the vast effects of his presidency. Furthermore, official documents or information may be hidden or redacted, which may limit the reliability. Thus, I will use tertiary sources that have a consolidation of information of redacted sources. This paper will use only findings on Donald Trump before 2021, and any international relations and economic progression after 2020 will not be factored into the evaluation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 American Exceptionalism

Trevor McCrisken argued that American exceptionalism defined America as “an extraordinary nation with a special role to play in human history; not only unique but also superior among nations.” (McCrisken, 2003, p.1) Similar to the “Manifest Destiny”, America was portrayed by politicians as superior compared to other countries, and was the powerhouse made to lead and develop the rest of the world. I believe that American Exceptionalism is more accurate and relevant compared to Manifest Destiny, because this is America’s ideology, a belief they have shaped and chosen for themselves, and not for self-interest. Political leaders’ belief in American exceptionalism was an “enduring identity narrative” in America. (Routledge, 2015). Historian Richard Hofstadter argued that America did not have an ideology, rather, it was one. (Roche, J., 1957, 13) He implied that Exceptionalism was inaccurate in describing presidencies because one should not conclude that all presidents addressed and pursued American exceptionalism in the same way. I agree that Exceptionalism has set the parameters for how presidents would narrate the story of “America” and its place in the world during their presidencies. However, these different methods of pursuing Exceptionalism had a general guideline to adhere to. Jake Sullivan argued that it was crucial for them in their pursuit of American Exceptionalism, to remember that “Being exceptional means putting these core attributes to work for America’s own interests, yes—but also for the common good.” (Sullivan, 2019). He argued that Exceptionalism had to reconcile nationalism with internationalism, no matter how they intended to do so and how the circumstances would require them to. Presidents had a difficult job, where they had to grow their own economy, look out for their society, and also serve as a leader for the world. This is because any failure to reconcile nationalism with internationalism would break the boundaries of American Exceptionalism, which may be problematic for governance.

2.2 Donald Trump and American Exceptionalism

While Donald Trump proclaimed that he would make America “great again” during his presidential speech, one might think that Trump was promoting American Exceptionalism. Yet, this paper argues that Donald Trump was not promoting moral or ideational superiority over other countries, nor pursuing the ideological belief and aspirations tied to American Exceptionalism. Instead, he focused on the materialistic greatness of America.

Scholar Hilde Eliassen Restad argued that Donald Trump did not pursue American Exceptionalism as past American Presidents had done. She argued that Trump’s master narrative viewed the world somewhat similarly to realists: as a competitive, anarchic place where it was every state for itself, where alliances were temporary, and only the fittest survived. She continued to argue that with this worldview, making America “great” meant making America economically wealthy, militarily powerful, and safeguarding the white, Christian cultural heritage of America. (Restad, 2019) This inherently pointed to Trump’s presidency as that of a right-wing populist, that displayed characteristics of xenophobia, ultranationalism, as well as anti-elitist and anti-intellectual sentiments. He lacked the belief in American Exceptionalism, where he prioritised nationalism above internationalism, and denied that the people had a higher calling for greatness.

Donald Trump’s prioritization of nationalism over internationalism may seem like isolationism, focusing on making America “great again” economically. But scholar James Curran pointed out that while Trumps’ approach may be consistent with some aspects of 1930s isolationism, Trump was driven not so much by a conviction in America’s divine providence, but primarily by grievance, the perception that his country was being exploited by others. He argued that Trump instead had a non-interventionist stance fuelled by resentment. (Curran, 2018, p.9) This aligns with Restad’s argument of Trump’s master narrative of the world. With this direction of thought, Trump has caused confusion over America’s role in the world, and allowed for new superpowers like China to rise to the occasion and help other countries. This would in turn fuel the

resentment that Trump had as they would slowly cease to be the only economic powerhouse.

2.3 American Declinism

Scholar Paul Kennedy argued that declinism in America occurred when overextended foreign commitments strained domestic resources, and challenges in military, economic and technological sectors arose from rival nations. (Kennedy, 1987) But this merely explained factors leading to decline, not declinism. On top of that, many would assume America is not declining due to its ability to stay as a major economy for years. Instead of economic telltales, scholar Edward Luttwak warned that there were symptoms of decline in America like polarisation of wealth that would also bring racism, xenophobia or class resentment. (Luttwak, 1993) He hinted that declinism was not all measured on an economic scale, but rather a variety of factors. Thus, I believe this decline on an economic scale could serve as the base of declinism, that would snowball into the various other symptoms that Luttwak mentioned. Kennedy argued that decline on an economic scale would cause Americans to be more aware of the decline, but their perception of decline in power would be more significant than the decline itself. (Kennedy, 1987) This spotlights the position of president, where any unskilful leadership can lead to dwindling trust in the government. Large factors of determining decline would not only include economic growth, but national identity, perception of success and continuous improvement. This is because the president's main aims are to build on such factors, in order to motivate citizens to contribute to society. Without a defined purpose, the society would face the inability to function at maximum capacity. This implied that declinism was not entirely economic, but also an ideological one.

2.4 Donald Trump and American Declinism

Donald Trump's lack of belief in American Exceptionalism, set the stage for reversal. His ability to understand and contemplate America's declinism seemed like the first steps to reversal. Following Restad's argument of Trump's definition of "America First", he aimed for greatness in

wealth, in the rebuilding of America's great economy. As discussed earlier, tackling the base problem, their decline on an economic scale could turn over the situation, and rejuvenate citizens' perceptions of their position in the world. Yet, as Curran claimed, Trump took on a non-interventionist foreign policy and an uncompetitive position in the world. On top of that, under his leadership, xenophobia, racism and polarisation of wealth had only increased. The emergence of such symptoms suggested that declinism still persisted. Henry R. Nau argued that the decline of America was of the "intellectual and political soul of America"(R. Nau, 1990), rather than the economy. In line with Kennedy's argument, they pointed to society as a determining factor. Trump's denial of a higher calling for ideological greatness had only led to the undefined purpose of America in the world during his presidency. Without a solid national identity, the society perceived itself as in decline.

As to whether Trump was to blame for being unable to slow down the decline, Curran provided a balanced view that one could not ignore other factors that had led to decline because the questioning of American power and purpose predated Trump. He shared the view that even before Trump's election, Americans were undergoing a profound reappraisal of their world role due to events such as the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.(Curran, 2018, p.2) This paper therefore argues that Donald Trump was not the root cause of American Declinism, but rather a large factor in hastening the decline of America as a global power. Not only was the end beyond his means, the end did not justify his means. His influence over the Americans as a populist and his tendency to cause chaos had only dug a deeper hole for America, and had shown the world what decline could do to America.

Chapter 3: Methodology

I will be using McCrisken's definition of American exceptionalism, that America was "an extraordinary nation with a special role to play in human history; not only unique but also superior among nations". I will use this definition along with the idea that it must draw a balance between internationalism and nationalism as Jake Sullivan suggested. Analysis will be done on America during

the presidency of Donald Trump through primary sources like their social media usage, interviews, speeches and actions. Secondary sources like newspapers and opinion pieces will back up claims of impacts during their presidency. McCrisken's definition of American exceptionalism is crucial to this research because it accurately describes that exceptionalism cannot be acknowledged by all Americans and is highlighted by presidents because it is an unconscious spirit that comes with the identification of being American. This is also crucial because of how it will reflect upon Trump's stance towards Exceptionalism.

This research paper also makes use of Michael Prowse, Paul Kennedy and Edward Luttwak's definition of American Declinism as mentioned above, in order to evaluate America's decline. COVID-19 cases and deaths, as well as stock movements and jobless claims surrounding Trump's actions, will also be evaluated.

Chapter 4: Discussion and Analysis

4.1 The Impact of Trump's Lack of American Exceptionalism on the Response to COVID-19

4.1.1 Trump in 2019

In January, the Intelligence Community's Worldwide Threat Assessment warned that America was vulnerable to a global pandemic, which could lead to massive rates of death and disability, severely affect global economy, strain international resources, and increase calls on America for support. (R.Coats, 2019) This would have proved another chance for America to again stand in the limelight, and show the world why they were the Exceptional America, worthy of leading the world. The Trump administration concluded a months-long simulation in October 2019, code-named "Crimson Contagion," designed to respond to a global influenza pandemic, where a fictitious respiratory virus that began in China quickly spread around the world. It determined that America was underprepared, underfunded, and under-coordinated to fight an influenza-like pandemic. It foregrounded the lack of Personal Protective Equipment(PPE) preparedness and problems in the supply chain for medical equipment including ventilators and other ancillary medical supplies.

(E.Sanger, Lipton, Sullivan, Crowley, 2020) Even though they were aware of what they lacked in terms of pandemic preparedness, Trump ignored the countless warnings and signs. There was no calling to be ever prepared for any potential international crisis. His lack of Exceptionalism, coupled along with his anti-intellectual and reckless approach to his pandemic preparedness, had set the stage for decline in America in 2020.

4.1.2 January - February 2020

During this period, U.S. intelligence agencies issued over a dozen detailed warnings about the threat of COVID-19 in the President's Daily Brief, and issued classified reports about it including a detailed explanation of the potential cataclysmic disease in Wuhan, China. (Margolin, Gordon, 2020) The bodies in charge of the COVID-19 response did not want to harm their economic sector or cause public distress, and thus stayed low, but set up background layouts. These instructions followed Trump's line of thought, where the economy came first. Trump's view of the world as a competitive place, caused him to place priority on the economy over the people, despite the imminent threat of a pandemic. He did not reflect the qualities of Exceptionalism, and the lack of care for the people's health, was the first step into the social aspect of American Declinism.

On January 9, WHO issued guidance for countries to detect and respond to COVID-19, as well as perform risk assessments and create response plans to it. While America's response seemed decently quick, when Donald Trump began to step in, response to the pandemic worsened. On January 18, Alex Azar, Secretary of Health and Human Services, tried to speak to Trump about the outbreak for the first time. Instead, he ignored the warning and instead insisted on discussing vaping. Trump dismissed COVID-19 concerns as alarmist and multiple of Trump's advisers struggled to get him to take it seriously. (Ballhaus, Armour, 2020) Trump's dismissive attitude towards COVID-19, was potentially one of the largest factors in the rise in cases eventually. While his intentions were notable, in which he did not want to alarm the public too

much, and wanted to press on about issues pertaining to the American public, he failed to prioritise COVID-19, which greatly impacted effective virus response.

On January 20, America announced their first case of COVID-19, and China soon closed off Wuhan. When asked in a CNBC interview whether he was worried about the pandemic, Trump stated that America had the pandemic “totally under control” and that he trusted China in their response to the virus(Kernen, 2020) He outright downplayed the threat of COVID-19, and underestimated the threat their first case could have on the American population, despite the state of heightened alert that the world was starting to adopt.

On January 28, National Security Advisor Robert O’Brien told Trump that “This will be the biggest national security threat you face in your presidency.”(Costa, Rucker, 2020), and WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a “Public Health Emergency.” If these continuous warnings did not ring enough bells, Trump decided to host a campaign rally in Iowa with thousands of people anyway, claiming that he had “very little problem in this country at this moment.” While this moment may seem like Exceptionalism, I disagree. This only showed how ignorant Trump was, and highlighted how much he lacked Exceptionalism. Exceptionalism, in the context of a pandemic, should not be the belief that they are infallible by a virus, or untouchable, but rather it is the belief that they are prepared and ready to serve the people and help the world the best they can.

The Centres for Disease Protection and Prevention(CDC) declined the diagnostic test made by the WHO. Instead, they chose to develop their own test, which it later had to recall, as they had sent contaminated and malfunctioning COVID-19 test kits. As a result, nearly 100 public health laboratories could not use the test kits, causing a long lag in the ability of America to meet testing demands.(Kaplan,2020) Despite this situation, HHS supply chain officials claimed that there was “no indication of supply chain shortage or of issues with masks.” This showed that America was in no state to lead or help the world, as they were unaware of their own lack in preparedness. However, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that America had

donated nearly 18 tons of medical supplies to China, including masks, gowns, gauze, respirators, and other vital materials. He stated that “These donations are a testament to the generosity of the American people.” (Goodman, Schulkin, 2020) This act also depleted their overall medical supplies. By analysing the diction he used, it is evident that some officials in the government still believed in their involvement in international affairs, and extended their hand to those who needed it. It highlights how America as a whole has not completely lost its ideology of Exceptionalism, but more that Trump did not believe so.

On February 9, Peter Navarro, Trump’s economic advisor, submitted a memo to the COVID-19 task force, urging the government to halve the number of N95 masks being exported abroad and ramp up production, to secure existing doses of Remdesivir, and to focus on developing a program to fast track a vaccine. (Goodman, Schulkin, 2020) This served as one of the many warnings given to Trump regarding the medical supply stockpile. While it was a commendable effort to support other countries, namely China, by exporting masks, Trump was unable to find the balance between his internationalism and nationalism. He failed to produce enough masks to fit this balance, and was unaware, or rather, refused to acknowledge the fact that they did not have enough masks.

On February 14, the HHS and the NSC produced a memo titled “American Government Response to the 2019 Novel Coronavirus.”, which outlined possible mitigation measures towards COVID-19, including significantly limiting public gatherings and cancellation of almost all sporting events, performances, and public and private meetings that cannot be convened by phone, school closures and widespread “stay at home” directives from public and private organizations with nearly 100% telework for some. (Lipton, E. Sanger, Haberman, D. Shear, Mazzetti, E. Barnes, 2020) Although the HHS and NSC put in much effort into their response to the pandemic, their efforts were insufficient. Trump cancelled the meeting when they intended to present the memo. Crucial weeks went by before their views were reluctantly accepted by Trump, when COVID-19 was spreading largely unimpeded. On February 19, Trump assured the

public against worrying about COVID-19, stating that “it’s going to work out fine” and that the warmer weather in April had “a very negative effect on that and that type of a virus.”(Goodman, Schulkin, 2020) Instead, the number of cases by the end of April had risen to more than 1 million in total.

On February 24, Trump gave false assurance that the stock market was “starting to look very good” and COVID-19 was “very much under control.” The stock market started to decline sharply following news of the spread of COVID-19. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped by 1000 points by the end of the day.(Zeballos-Roig, 2020) This accurately reflected the importance of the position of president, which Trump had not made use of meaningfully in the pandemic. While he himself had placed great emphasis on the importance of building the economy, he failed to recognise how social impacts could affect the economy.

The Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security published a study that ranked America as the most prepared country in the world to face a pandemic, but warned that “international preparedness is weak” and that “no country is fully prepared.” However, America ranked 19th in overall risk environment and vulnerability to biological threats, including political and security risk, socioeconomic resilience, the adequacy of infrastructure, environmental risks, and public health vulnerabilities that may inhibit their ability to prevent or respond to a pandemic. (Nalabandian, O’Brien, League, Ravi, Meyer, Snyder, Mullen, Warmbrod, 2020) Despite this, Trump insisted that COVID-19 will disappear “like a miracle”, confident that they could easily maneuver around it. His plain ignorance reiterates his lack of calling to protect the society.

4.1.3 March - April 2020

From March onwards, Trump became more aware of the fact that COVID-19 was getting serious, and was slowly becoming willing to work towards a COVID-free America, after months of persuasion. On March 11, WHO declared that COVID-19 was a global health pandemic. Trump then declared COVID-19 a national emergency. Federal agencies began placing bulk orders on

N95 masks, ventilators, and other medical equipment. The HHS and Department of Defence coordinated an airlift of 500,000 swab and sample kits commonly used in COVID-19 diagnostic tests from Italy. (Goodman, Schulkin, 2020) But it was still not sufficient, and perhaps too late. A survey by HHS on 323 hospitals across America showed that hospitals continued facing severe shortages of critical supplies and PPE, and difficulty maintaining adequate staff. They also found that some protective gear provided to hospitals was expired or dry-rotted. Due to shortage of safety gear at a Mount Sinai hospital in New York, nurses resorted to wearing trash bags. (Gamio, Cai, Hassan, 2020)

On March 27, Trump signed the “Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security” (CARES) Act, a \$2 trillion dollar stimulus bill, designed to curb the economic impact of the pandemic and “provide emergency assistance and health care response for individuals, families, and businesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.”(Rapperport, Cochrane, Fandos, 2020) It was the largest stimulus package in the history of America and a huge step in Trump’s presidency. It reflected Trump’s concerns over society and the economy.

However, Trump blamed state governors for supply shortages in their states. He stated, “The complainers should [. . .] have been stocked up and ready long before this crisis hit.” Ironically, he had removed many pandemic-preparation funds and supply production before COVID-19 hit, severely limiting the supplies each state could have obtained, which showed how his ignorance and denial of his own faults caused him to lack insight and instead blame mishaps on other people. By the end of March, the total number of Americans that applied for unemployment benefits was over 10 million. (Long, 2020) Due to the lack of early action and preparedness, he had instead caused greater societal suffering than his original intentions. While preventing civilians from worrying and overreacting is commendable, Trump failed to understand that this would cause more people to be unprepared, and hit harder when it affects them.

Donald J. Trump

@realdonaldtrump

Massive amounts of medical supplies, even hospitals and medical centers, are being delivered directly to states and hospitals by the Federal Government. Some have insatiable appetites & are never satisfied (politics?). Remember, we are a backup for them. The complainers should...

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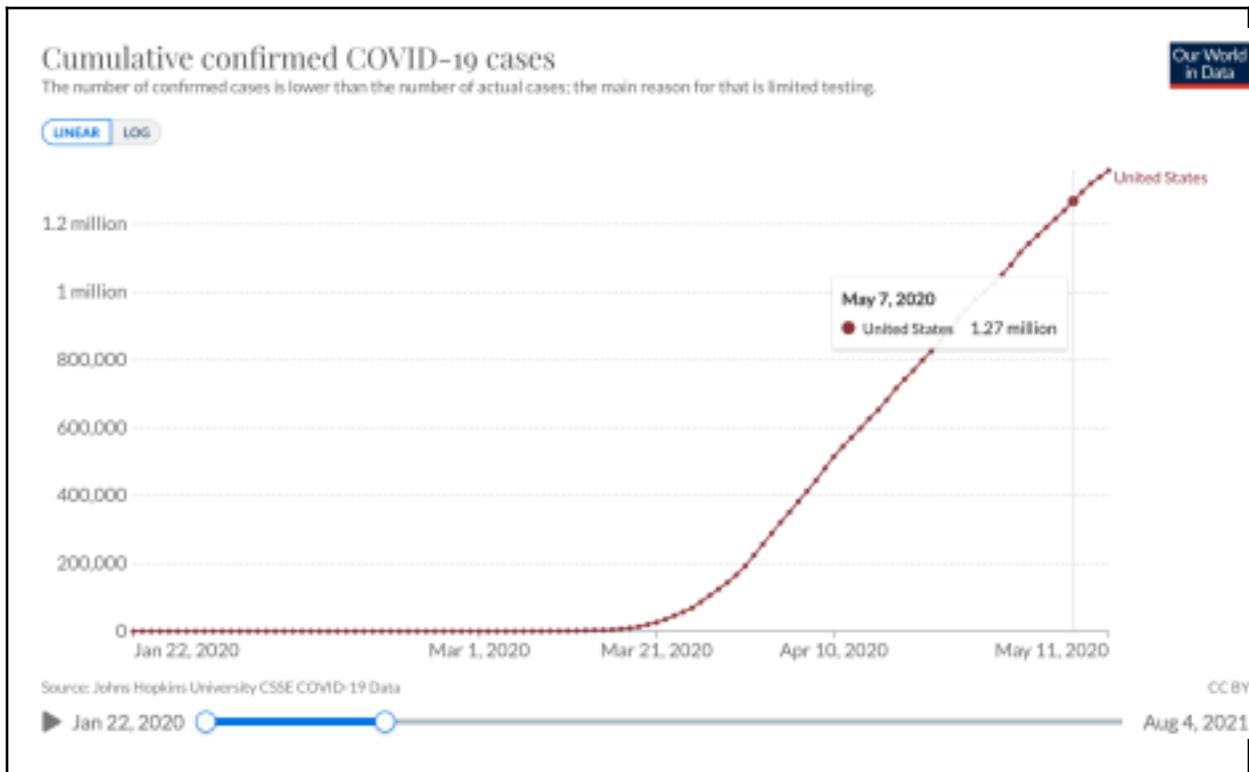
On April 23, Trump suggested checking whether the ingestion of disinfectants could help treat coronavirus. Even though he was genuinely sarcastic,, many White House Officials were concerned and confused by his suggestion. (Rogers, Hauser, Yuhas, Haberman, 2020) The American Association of Poison Control Center (AAPCC) released figures that showed that deaths due to household disinfectants in the months of March and April had seen an astronomical rise of 93% and 121%.(2020) Even though he did not mean it seriously, the words of the president were deemed by citizens as reliable, causing further chaos in the society, as many believed his sarcastic statement.

On top of this, Trump referred to COVID-19 as the China virus, increasing anti-asian sentiments. Anti-Asian incidents continued in the US since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, with numerous media reports about attacks and discrimination linked to COVID-19. By late April, a coalition of Asian-American groups that had created a reporting center called STOP AAPI HATE said it had received almost 1,500 reports of incidents of racism, hate speech, discrimination, and physical attacks against Asians and Asian-Americans.(2020) As a president described as a right-wing populist, which displays characteristics of xenophobia,

ultranationalism, as well as anti-elitist and anti-intellectual sentiments, Trump did not stop referring to COVID-19 as the China virus, until the end of 2020. His lack of American Exceptionalism has failed to provide a definition of what it meant to be American, and thus bred discrimination against non-white Americans, causing great outrage in the community.

4.1.4 May - June 2020

Leading up to May 7, the total number of cases rose to 1.27 million cases. On May 11, Trump falsely declared that the number of COVID-19 cases was “dropping around our country very, very substantially.”(Goodman, Schulkin, 2020), but it was not decreasing at all.



Despite the countless times Trump assured citizens that they had full control, Fauci stated that America did not have total control of the outbreak and warned against prematurely opening

up the economy.(Goodman, Schulkin, 2020) Dr. Rick Bright, program leader at Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority, urged the government to adopt a unified national response to the pandemic.(Bright,2020) However, Trump proceeded to ignore their proposals, and instead defamed them in his tweets.



<https://www.thetrumparchive.com/>

On May 19, Trump stated that he was taking hydroxychloroquine and encouraged doctors to prescribe the drug. (Goodman, Schulkin, 2020)He attempted to convince ordinary citizens to take the drug, and claimed that he had been taking one everyday. Researchers then published a multinational study of the use of hydroxychloroquine or chloroquine and its use as treatment for COVID-19, concluding that the use of the drug was associated with an increased risk of significant and sudden heart arrhythmias. They were unable to confirm a benefit for using the drug on hospitalized COVID-19 patients.(Goodman, Schulkin, 2020) There was large debate over it, including Neil Carvuto, Dr Harvey Risch and other medical experts. While the debate was never fully completed, the risk in which he placed his citizens in, reflected how the society was going through chaos as debate sparked among people. On top of the fact that they were already in a poorer economic state due to the pandemic, the society was slowly declining.

4.1.5 July - August 2020

On July 14, Redfield urged Trump to wear a mask to “set an example,” calling mask-wearing for all Americans a “civic duty.” (Goodman, Schulkin, 2020) While typical presidents would want to set an example in order to be seen as worthy to lead, Trump broke the boundaries of such leadership. He did not believe the greater calling for Americans, and that there was no ideological reputation they had to withhold, allowing him to act as wished. Only when cases hit more than 3 million, did he finally take it seriously, and encourage people to wear one because it was an act of patriotism. Even though the act of wearing a mask is more for one’s own health, he uses his charisma to appeal to people’s patriotism, as a form of his strong belief in nationalism.



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4.1.6 September - December 2020

In October, an outbreak of COVID-19 occurred in the White House. Trump, among many others, tested positive for COVID-19. He was hospitalized for four days, requiring oxygen twice.(Buchanan, Gamio, Leatherby, Keefe, Koettl, Walker, 2020) While infectious, Trump left the hospital in an SUV to wave at nearby fans, a move heavily criticized as endangering the health of

the secret service who must accompany him.(Olorunnipa, Dawsey, Goldstein, 2020) On top of that, he continued to set a bad example for the public despite having already faced the consequences, posing as a negative influence on the public. The White House rejected a CDC offer to contact trace the COVID-19 outbreak in the White House, where 200 people were potentially exposed to COVID-19.(Stein, Murphy, 2020)Even after Trump recovered from the ordeal, he held a campaign rally in Sanford, Florida and declared that he was “immune” to COVID-19 and that he felt “so powerful”. This downplay on COVID-19 further impacted the public’s wariness of it, even though there were 9 million cases of COVID-19 by the end of October. He then proceeded to call Dr. Fauci and other public health officials “idiots”, claiming that it was because of him that the number of deaths were only at 200000.

On October 29, America experienced nearly 100000 COVID-19 cases in one day, the highest number of cases in a day.(Farzan, Noack, Bellware, Berger, Telford, Knowles, Sands,2020) Trump falsely claimed that doctors were overcounting COVID-19 deaths to make more money, in order to maintain his reputation among the people. However, studies of 18 Trump campaign rallies by the Department of Economics at Stanford University found that the rallies likely led to an additional 30000 cases of COVID-19 and likely 700 deaths.(Bernheim, Buchmann, Freitas-Groff, Otero, 2020)This accurately showed how Trump himself was a large reason for the deaths in America, and that there should not be anyone else that could be to blame. He aimed to prevent panic among the Americans, and instead, caused them to suffer.

4.2 Severed ties with WHO

Throughout WHO’s 72-year history, America has been WHO’s greatest supporter. During the WHO’s latest funding cycle, America contributed \$893 million— 15% of the entire budget and more than twice as much as any other country.(Wolfson, 2020) That had been the norm for decades and put America at the center of the world’s most important public-health apparatus. However, Trump had switched up this narrative.

In April, Trump halted WHO funding despite an internal State Department memo urging him not to because it would undermine their ability to address global urgent needs and their role as a global health leader. (Torbati, 2020) However, Trump ignored them, and did so to assess WHO's role in severely mismanaging and covering up the spread of COVID-19, like opposing travel restrictions from China and other nations, as well as failing to adequately obtain, vet and share information in a timely and transparent fashion. While he claimed that they would still engage with WHO in meaningful reforms, he wanted to redirect funding for global health. He also suggested that the WHO may have had adverse political motivations and was "China-centric." (Wolfson, 2020) On 6 July, America notified WHO of its effective withdrawal from WHO. But in order to leave the organization, America had to give a one-year notice and pay outstanding dues of \$198 million in unpaid membership dues, which meant they could only leave in 2021.

While America had not left WHO in 2020, the action spoke volumes. Firstly, it confirmed his nationalistic approach, and unwillingness to involve himself in internationalism. It showed that he did not support the notion of American Exceptionalism, and did not believe that America had a hand in the overall improvement of the world. Secondly, it highlighted his realist view of the world, as a competitive and anarchic place. It hinted at Trump's fears of China overtaking America in economic might, and thus did not want to work with WHO, which he suspected, supported the rise of China. This fear not only strongly supports how he viewed the world as a competitive place, but also that they had to be number one in the world in terms of their economy. This strays far from the beliefs in Exceptionalism. Moreover, his emphasis on the economy would cause a lack of priority in the people, which would impact their perception of America in the world. This would serve as one of the worst forms of declinism, when the people stopped believing. Lastly, it reinforced how crucial America was to world stability. While it could be argued that Trump was just an interloper in America's saga, Trump had threatened the liberal international order, and diluted the power of American Exceptionalism with his own materialistic beliefs. He did not

define the meaning of being American, but had instead sparked greater xenophobic and ultranationalistic sentiments, changing their role in this world.

5 Conclusion

In response to COVID-19, Trump was slow to act at a time when each day of inaction mattered most—in terms of both the eventual public health harms as well as the severe economic costs. They disseminated misinformation that left the public less safe and more vulnerable to discounting the severity of the pandemic. Trump was ignorant and made anti-intellectual decisions because he did not feel any restraint by the need to exude Exceptionalism in America. Instead, his ultranationalistic character that did not believe in the core idea of American Exceptionalism, and only led America to its decline, both in the economy and society.

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