to contribute to major swings in public **moods** or sentiments with respect to U.S. foreign policy. It is commonly argued that "twentieth-century exceptionalism has fueled both interventionism and isolationism."[65] Major swings in public opinion have affected U.S. relations with both allies and enemies. After the Bolshevik revolution the United States invaded the Soviet Union during World War I and refused to recognize it until 1933; during World War II, the Soviet Union under "Uncle Joe" Stalin became the patriotic ally of freedom against fascism; with the rise of the cold war, the Soviet Union represented a monolithic communist threat abroad and at home; the détente years from Nixon to Carter were a time of hope for a cooperative U.S.-Soviet relationship; under Reagan, cooperation was replaced by a new cold war to contain "the evil empire"; and with the collapse of communism Americans hailed Mikhail Gorbachev as a great leader in a post-cold war future to be characterized by global peace and prosperity. These dramatic swings in public moods and U.S. foreign policy have occurred with China, Japan, Germany, and other countries as well, while Americans have maintained a positive and moral self-image. Although American leaders initiated such foreign policy changes, public expectations and support were critical to their pursuit over time. This has often led the public mood to swing from one extreme to another due to the extraordinary high levels of hope and fear aroused within American culture and politics. Hence, the high hopes and optimism of the immediate post-World War II years were replaced by disillusionment and fear during the cold war years. Such public mood swings, unfortunately, often do not reflect the complexity and messiness of world politics at the time, yet heavily affect the formulation of U.S. foreign policy.

Continuity, Change, and the Vietnam War

Most Americans share a common sense of what it is to be an American and this plays an important role in the politics of U.S. foreign policy. Obviously, there are subcultures within American society in which different cultural and national images prevail—some of which may not be comprised of such positive views. Nevertheless, most Americans share a belief in the existence of American innocence, benevolence, and exceptionalism at home and abroad. These cultural beliefs were deeply engrained within most Americans by the turn of the century and the time of Woodrow Wilson, the apostle of freedom, self-determination, and the League of Nations. The great exception in American history was the South, for it was the only region of the country that ever seriously attempted to secede from the union, losing a devastating civil war fought mostly on its lands and coming under military occupation and control following the war. By the cold war years, however, the differences between the South and the North in thought and in practice had diminished. With this great exception, the cultural assumptions of American innocence, benevolence, and exceptionalism seem to have grown stronger over time.

This sense of shared nationalism is especially noticeable during times of war. Thus, despite American fear and apprehension, World War II and the cold war years were also a time of hope and optimism in America. After saving the world from the threat of fascism, most Americans believed that the United States was

innocently thrust onto the world stage to save the world from the tyranny of communism. Not only would the U.S. rearm and contain the national security threat, it would actively serve as a model, helping others to find the peace and prosperity that most Americans have experienced. In the minds of many Americans, especially American leaders, the post-World War II years represented **the American century** and the height of American innocence, benevolence, and, in particular, exceptionalism.[66] Such a mindset helped to justify the pursuit and exercise of American power throughout the world in the name of world responsibility.

As relayed by Godfrey Hodgson, the United States entered the 1960s in an Augustan mood: "united, confident, conscious of a historical mission, and mobilized for the great task of carrying it out." If Americans were anxious about danger from abroad, "it was because they saw their own society as so essentially just and benevolent that danger could come only from elsewhere. If they found international affairs frustrating, it was because they found it infuriating that foreigners could not always believe that their only ambition was a generous desire to share the abundance of American capitalism and the promise of American democracy with those less fortunate than themselves."[67] Such a mood of American confidence and mission was best symbolized by the presidency of John Fitzgerald Kennedy and expressed in his inaugural address on January 20, 1961, when he declared: "Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans—born in this country, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage—and unwilling to witness or permit the slow undoing of those human rights to which this Nation has always been committed, and to which we are committed today at home and around the world. Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty." It was this sense of American confidence and exceptionalism that ultimately led to war and tragedy in the jungles of Vietnam.

The Vietnam War produced the first major assault on the optimistic assumptions of American political culture and national style. The Great Depression of the 1930s had precipitated extreme criticism of the innocence and benevolence of American business and capitalism. In contrast, the events of the 1960s surrounding civil rights and the Vietnam War led many Americans to question the three assumptions in their entirety. How could the United States be innocent if Vietnam was not vital to American security? How could policies that promoted activities such as the "need to destroy cities in order to save them," carpet bombing and the use of napalm, and the My Lai massacre be justified as acts of American benevolence? How did American failure and withdrawal from the war fit with American exceptionalism? Not only did many Americans question their faith in the innocence and goodness of America, most members of the public came to lose their trust in public officials, the government, and the political process.[68]

The split between supporters and critics of the war was more than an ideological disagreement over U.S. foreign policy; it represented a fragmentation of American cultural and nationalistic beliefs. The Vietnam War produced different lessons for different segments of the population. Conservatives and the political