Many of the virtues and principles of the initial English colonists (1607-1630) were prevalent in the actions of citizens of the developing country (1650-2000) and are continuously molded upon in the 21st century American character (2000-Present). These ideals, mainly of goodwill through support, desire for wealth, and exemplarity through actions, are observed repeatedly in the four hundred year history of English presence in the North American continent. From the first Puritan settlers in the Virginia at Jamestown, the soldiers during the Second World War, to the modern American citizen living the “American Dream,” these values have only developed in their magnitude. The affects of these virtues have grown to be more global over the centuries but their basic essence remains the same.

The ideal of goodwill and generosity through the provision of financial and social security to the poor is a legacy passed on from the colonial Americans to their future generations and the standard is still established in the present world. During the early 17th century, 75% of the Europeans were peasants. Many of them were burdened by the heavy taxation by the Catholic Church. The rise in population towards the end of the 16th century brought about more strenuous conditions such as malnutrition, deforestation and extensive spread of diseases. Prices in England grew while the wages fell; this led to a huge gap between the rich and the poor. The vagabonds (Unemployed migrants) threatened the political and judicial system of England, forcing the parliament to pass “Poor Laws” and
enforce an ideology of ‘Social Reciprocity’: Required the upper class/privileged to act with self restraint and dignity. With the opening of Joint-Stock Companies (New form of business enterprise), large scale emigrations of the “Needy People” were funded. In 1630, the group of 700 passengers under John Winthrop came with the ideology of creating a society in which “The rich had an obligation to show charity and mercy to the poor.” The belief of establishing a colony for the settlement of the poor was also hypothesized in the writings of the explorer Sir Humphrey Gilbert who proposed the settlement of the needy people in the foreign territories (Document A, The Enduring Vision 5th Ed.) This dogma continued to be dominant even after nearly 300 years, when between 1880 and 1924, 2,340,000 Jews migrated from Russia to the United States to escape discrimination and lead a better life (Microsoft Encarta Ref. Library 2004). Jews continued to be subject to harsh maltreatment such as forced religious conversion or expulsions. The US was regarded as a safe resort to seek refuge. The American government, during the late 1930s and early 1940s, sought to provide political and economic shelter to European Jews being subject to genocide (Holocaust). This sentiment of liberality towards the “Huddled masses yearning to be free” (Document A- Emma Lazarus) still perseveres in modern day America. According to the American Immigration Council’s Policy Centre, a person unable or unwilling to return to the home country because of a “Well-found fear of persecution” due to race, membership in a social group, political opinion or national origin can request for a ‘Refugee’ status in the US. The World Refugee Survey in 2009 showed that there are close to 650,000 refugees in the Americas. Let alone in 2009, 60,000 refugees settled in the United States. During the last decade, averages of 52,200 refugees were admitted yearly. The sheer number portrays the responsibility that the US takes as a more privileged country, one that has the resources, power and mental mindset to allow such demographic change. An attitude as such does not develop overnight, but rather over a period of 400 years.
The desire to gain more wealth without employment of much effort proves to be another legacy passed on from the colonial Americans to their future generations that prevailed not only during the course of history since the colonists, but continues to be current in present world. The first colony established by the Virginia Company of London in Jamestown (1607) most nearly avoided failure. The pilgrims came to the New World in search of gold and in this greed had forgotten to bring along farmers to grow food for sustenance. Their single minded goal towards the obtainment of gold and expensive minerals diverted their need to survive by overpowering their avarice. Even by 1612, most of the opportunists settling in the New World directed their efforts solely towards the acquirement of wealth; most of them set up tobacco plantations to profit from the transcontinental trade. Sir Gilbert summarized this desire by stressing the need to go to diverse and rich countries to fulfill the materialistic desires (Document B). This trend continued to exist in the late 19th century when the discovery of gold in California in 1848 led to a massive movement of people during the period known as the Gold Rush of 1849. The desire still existed in the American people to obtain riches. In 1849 alone, $10 million worth of gold was mined and miners were easily able to grab $400 per day. Just as the prospect of settling in the New World had brought thousands of immigrants to the Americas, during the Gold Rush, 200,000 gold seekers managed to reach California by 1852 (Encarta Reference Library 2004). Effects of such greed are very evidently visible in today’s world. The Recession of 2008 was put in effect by the imbalances in the economic system and the desire for everyone to become wealthier by any means possible. Economic fraud proves to be a devastating consequence of the legacy passed on by the colonial settlers. Even though many principles of the initial settlers have passed down the generations to the current one, not all of them are absolutely for the betterment of society. In 2008, 13.9% of the country lived below the poverty line, a 1% increase since 2007, i.e. around 30,000 more citizens. The high risks involved in dealing with
such enterprises should be carefully evaluated and the greed must not be allowed to overpower one’s actions.

The ideal of exemplarity through actions is a social and political legacy of the colonial Americans that became and continues to become an important course of action used by the US to advocate her beliefs. The colony established by John Winthrop in 1630 was founded on the basis of establishing a “City upon a Hill.” The creation of this perfect and godly city would spur up sentiments of jealousy in England and they would finally idolize the “City upon the Hill” and reform the Church of England to Puritanism. They were under the belief that God would aid them if they tried to produce the faultless city governed by Godly principles (Document D). This ideology is deeply ingrained in the American mindset and repeats several times over the course of history. During the Cold War era (1940s to 1980s) United States and USSR was deadlocked in heavy political and economical debates. The Unites States had established a policy of Capitalism and Democracy which was opposed by the USSR’s strives to spread Communism. Both superpowers struggled to enforce their respective ideologies on the world and came very close to a starting a global nuclear war. This period of persistence depicts the US’s desire to successfully influence the world and portray itself as a perfect example. In the modern world, too, superpowers such as the US focus on influencing the global point of view. During the recent political crisis in the Middle East, especially Libya, the US government portrayed its desire to spread democracy globally. In part, the reasoning behind aiding the rebellion could have been economic as an establishment of a democracy would help negotiate fuel/oil import rates. But another aspect of establishing democracy in Libya would lead more countries to follow the American system of government and hence idolize them. This helps the US establish itself as the ideal model
and gain political power. This ideal will continue to mold the American individual for centuries to come.

For better or for worse, the virtues and principles of the initial English colonists (1607-1630), those of goodwill through support, desire for wealth, and exemplarity through actions, were predominant in the actions of citizens of the developing country and continue to be molded upon in the 21st century American character.