

#ret #disorganized #incomplete

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# 1 | history? essay.

## 1.1 | prompt

title: Prompt

**\*\*Origin narratives for the United States\*\***

The telling of American history has become one of the focal points of conflicts over our national culture.

In a 2-3 page, double spaced essay, evaluate how the authors we've read so far approach the telling of American history.

summary: what are the key considerations in constructing an American history narrative. say these with explicit engagement with the texts.

how to frame early years of American colonialism is a better anti-racism a framing on colonialism?

to understand what should be in the narrative, we need to understand the purpose of the narrative? we shouldn't have a narrative? narrative should be ever changing to solve societal problems?

### 1.1.1 | more planning

can't have one simple narrative

narratives: events filtered by framework, turned into a story

value structures, project narratives onto them America good: America ended slavery, we should be the heroes!

vs. America bad: America was built on slavery and sin

#### **the narrativisation process:**

values narrative structure events

filter events on values fit into narrative structure

narrative absorbed into populace changes/creates – perpetuates – populates values

there is no complete narrative – what should the narrative be? one of many.

narratives are true but not complete

narratives do not need to be complete to be true to have truth?

narratives incomplete incomplete truths revealed narrativization process

rough outline:

- narrativisation process
  - values filter events
    - \* distortive!
  - events fit into narrative structure
    - \* distortive!
  - narrative creates values
    - \* creates distorted/incomplete values!

- big point:
  - \* narratives are inherently distorted/incomplete
- narrativisation
  - process,
  - leads to incomplete/distorted narrative
- america good: give example of narritivation process
  - given the 'america good' set of values, the narrative becomes...
    - \* "america is unquestionably good?"
- america bad: give another example of narritivation process
  - the flipside
- both have truth: give example of truths we can learn from both?
  - we should look to multiple narratives
    - \* embrace the truth in each even when they conflict
- conclusion
  - we have to live with multiple narratives in conflict

thesis: narratives are inherently distorting, and thus we must not operate under a singular narrative

### 1.1.2 |evidencing

- narrativization
  - "i have lived with this book for six years, starting over a dozen times before i settled on a narrative thread" p6 ortiz
    - \* as expereinced by natives
    - \* consuisnly or unconsesly have a set narrative
- broader
  - "this would replace my country right or wrong" cowie
  - "Voters are in search of a place of vision for average Americans, a place of idealism in an age of cynicism, a place of unity in a time of fracture and a place where policy can be embedded in something greater than technocracy." cowie
- america bad
  - anti-statis, cowie
  - "Yet when the American left abandons any vision of social patriotism because of the racist ugliness it has come to symbolize, it concedes the American story to the voices of exclusion and avarice." cowie
  - everything in US hist is about land: dunbar, pg 9
  - the hist of the US is a hist of settler colonialism! dunabr, pg 10

- those who seek hist with an upbeat ending will not get it: dunbar, pg 10
- dunbar calls the consensus narrative wrong in it's essence! pg 10
- says that his narrative is acknolaging reality: dunbar pg 10
- "hope for everyone to be speaking the same language and goverened by the same laws": dunbar jefferson 11
- calls the consensus narrative a myth: dunbar, 12
- according to the origin narrative, the united states was born of rebellion against opression, calls this a fallacy! dunbar 20
- calles normal narrative chauvunistic/provincialism: dunbar 21
- dunbar calls american hist v bad: end of 22
- america good
  - etho-state? nationalism? cowie
  - unconsuins manifest destiny: dunbar 10
  - colonizer and colonized had a diolouge: dunbar 13
  - prestigious book with native making carpet with stars and stripes: dunbar 14
  - according to the origin narrative, the united states was born of rebellion against opression: dunbar 20
  - civil war was the second rev which ended slavery: dunbar 20
- ending
  - "As we approach midterm elections, we urgently need to hear these messages in good faith and rise to their challenge."

- good
  - dunbar pointing at people
  - better anti-racism
  - reclaiming patriotism
  - pilgrims and puritians?
    - \* talking about exceptionlism
  - american paradox
    - \* american ideals were developed
- bad
  - dunbar
  - 1619 projects
  -

Scott Fitzgerald famously wrote: “\*The test of a first-rate intelligence\* is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.

truths to learn from both: - america has committed atrocities that still haunt us and need to be dealt with in the modern day. - america has fought hard and succeeded in making progress.

## 1.2 | Outline.

- **narrativization process**

- narratives dictate what is viewed as reality in the past and in the present
- however, narratives are inherently not reality because they need to follow the narrativization process:
  - \* values filter events and distort
  - \* events fit into narrative structure and distort
  - \* narrative creates values
    - creates distorted/incomplete values!
- thesis: narratives are inherently misleading/distortive, and thus we must not operate under a singular narrative

- example of one narrative given value america good

- given the value america good, one could create the narrative:
  - \* stars and stripes carpet as example of filtering and distorting
  - \* could argue, slavery was the norm, america ended it and should be applauded
    - second revolution

- example of one narrative given value america bad

- heike describes pilgrim utopian vision as unambiguously and utterly failed
  - \* many would view as quite ambiguous
- what cowie points to as needs to be reclaimed
- jones and dunbar describes as founded as a slavocracy

## 1.3 | Quote. Bin.

- narrative

- america good

- "To dismiss the rise of liberty and equality in American history as a mere sham is not only to ignore hard facts, it is also to evade the problem presented by those facts. The rise of liberty and equality in this country was accompanied by the rise of slavery." morgan, 5
- "It was slavery, I suggest, more than any other single factor, that had made the difference, slavery that enabled Virginia to nourish representative government in a plantation society, slavery that transformed the Virginia of Governor Berkeley to the Virginia of Jefferson, slavery that made the Virginians dare to speak a political language that magnified the rights of free men, and slavery, therefore, that brought Virginians into the same common-wealth political tradition with New Englanders." morgan, 26
- "'a radical work of historical revisionism aiming to indoctrinate our kids to hate America,' he called it. 'The entire premise' of the Times project, he told the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, 'is that America is at root a systematically racist country to the core and irredeemable.'" Cotton, washington post
- "The metaphor of 1776 is more powerful than that of 1619 because what makes America most itself isn't four centuries of racist subjugation. It's 244 years of effort by Americans — sometimes halting, but often heroic — to live up to our greatest ideal.'" Stephens, washington post

- "Because race-conscious anti-racism makes a ritual out of noticing how the present is similar to the past, it can end up being blind to the many ways in which the present differs from the past." Hughes ABAR
- "But this underplays how much progress we have already made", "The current system, warts and all, has enabled huge progress for black people in recent decades. Overturning the liberal principles on which our institutions are based would not hasten progress towards racial equality; it would threaten the very stability that is required for incremental progress to occur." Hughes ABAR
- gives example of manifest destiny,
  - \* *"Out of Many: a History of the American People. ... Navajo woman, dressed formally in velvet and adorned with heavy sterling silver and turquoise jewelry. ... weaving a nearly finished rug. The design? The Stars and Stripes! ... 'But it's a real photograph'"*
- america bad
  - "Even though the historical record of the Pilgrims and the Puritans unambiguously shows that the realization of a utopian community on American soil utterly failed, their rhetoric has survived their social experiments in remarkable ways." heike 159
  - "It is not incidental that 10 of this nation's first 12 presidents were enslavers, and some might argue that this nation was founded not as a democracy but as a slavocracy." jones 4
  - "Conveniently left out of our founding mythology is the fact that one of the primary reasons some of the colonists decided to declare their independence from Britain was because they wanted to protect the institution of slavery." jones 4
  - "At the time, one-fifth of the population within the 13 colonies struggled under a brutal system of slavery unlike anything that had existed in the world before." jones 3
  - "On the other track are radical critics of the racism and imperialism of the american state who often support local community and transnational solidarity but maintain a deep cynicism, even despair, about the american project. Both groups have abdicated the national story to their shared political enemies. What remains is a fervent hybrid of nationalism and anti-statism, an echo of the rebel yell." cowie 1
  - "Yet when the American left abandons any vision of social patriotism because of the racist ugliness it has come to symbolize, it concedes the American story to the voices of exclusion and avarice." cowie 2
  - "Patriotism may well be the last refuge of the scoundrel, but as a pragmatist like Mr. Rorty would tell you, it is too powerful and too important to leave to the scoundrels. Voters are in search of a place of vision for average Americans, a place of idealism in an age of cynicism," cowie 3
  - "The history of the United States is a history of settler colonialism—the founding of a state based on the ideology of white supremacy, the widespread practice of African slavery" dubar 10
  - "Those who seek history with an upbeat ending, a history of redemption and reconciliation, may look around and observe that such a conclusion is not visible" dunbar 10
  - "According to the origin narrative, the United States was born of rebellion against oppression—against empire—and this is the product of the first anticolonial revolution for national liberation. The narrative flows from that fallacy: the broadening and deepening of democracy; the Civil War and the ensuing "second revolution," which ended slavery" dunbar 20 - "narrative of progress" calls it a fallacy
  - "crushed and subjugated the original civilizations in the territories it now rules." "history of the United States" dunbar, 22
- truth in both
  - "This would replace "my country right or wrong" with the centuries-long struggle, as the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. put it, "to be true to what you said on paper." cowie 2

- "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function." Scott Fitzgerald
- "How might acknowledging the reality of US history work to transform society?" dunbar 10
- "i have lived with this book for six years, starting over a dozen times before i settled on a narrative thread" p6 ortiz

## 1.4 | Writing. Let's get this.

Historical narratives dictate what is viewed as reality. We look to them to describe the past reality but also to understand the present one. However, narratives are inherently not reality. The process of converting events into a narrative – narrativization – is fundamentally distortive. Narrativized reality is no longer reality. This process has four major steps: first, the myriad events of reality are filtered based on a set of values. Second, these filtered events are interpreted through the set of values. Third, these filtered events are fitted into a narrative structure, and finally, fourth, this narrative creates new values in the populace that consumes it. Each of these steps moves the inputs farther from reality and closer to a narrative. Such is the narrativization process, fundamentally only able to create narratives which reflect a value set instead of reality in its entirety. However, despite that they are not reality, narratives are still quite valuable. But because narratives are inherently misleading, we must not operate under a singular narrative.

This narrativization process is evident in the historical narrative generated from the value that America is fundamentally good. Dunbar-Ortiz gives an relatively egregious example of the distortion inherent in this process. She describes the inside cover of the prestigious book *Out of Many: A History of the American People*, where an image of a "Navajo woman, dressed formally [was] weaving a nearly finished rug," which held the design of "the Stars and Stripes." After hearing Dunbar-Ortiz's objections, the authors of the book responded "but it's a real photograph" (Dunbar-Ortiz, 14). The authors cherry-picked this unrepresentative event of the rug creation and twisted it to fit their agenda of American unity and collaboration. While yes, it is a "real" photograph, it clearly no longer represents reality due to the narrativization process. Others acknowledge the atrocities committed in early American history, but argue that "what makes America most itself isn't four centuries of racist subjugation. It's 244 years of effort by Americans — sometimes halting, but often heroic — to live up to our greatest ideal" (Ellison - Stephens). Hughes argues in his article *A Better Anti-Racism* that "the current system, warts and all, has enabled huge progress for black people in recent decades," and that many underplay "how much progress we have already made" (Hughes). This narrative of American history frames slavery as the norm when America was created, and something that America fought hard to abolish. It takes the same history, and makes America the heroes.

On the flip-side, narratives can also be generated using the opposite value – that America is fundamentally bad. Dunbar-Ortiz points to the prior origin narrative and directly contradicts it. She claims that America was not "born of rebellion against oppression" and didn't lead to "the broadening and deepening of democracy," but instead was "founded on the ideology of white supremacy" and "crushed and subjugated the original civilizations in the territories it now rules" (Dunbar-Ortiz, 20-22). Dunbar-Ortiz directly contradicts Hughes, claiming that the "narrative of progress" itself is a fallacy (Dunbar-Ortiz, 20). Both Hughes and Dunbar-Ortiz work with the same corpus of events, and come to radically different and blatantly contradictory narratives. These contradictions exist because they don't stem from impossible contradictions in reality but from contradictions with the value set each narrative was generated with. Each narrative is incomplete, and invalid when used as a proxy for reality. However, this is no fault of Dunbar-Ortiz or Hughes, it is simply the inherent nature of narratives. Heike argues that the creation "of the utopian community" within America "unambiguously [and] utterly failed" (Heike, 159). However, to Stephens or Hughes, it may seem quite a bit more ambiguous. Heike, like so many others, falls into the trap of viewing their narrative as reality, thus making their conclusions "unambiguous" and "utter."

Though narratives are inherently distortive and untrue when used as proxies for reality, from narratives – even contradicting ones – we can still find truth. These two opposite values, summed up as "my country right or wrong" by Cowie, create narratives which are all incomplete; from Morgan's description of dismissing the "rise of liberty and equality" in America as a "mere sham" as an ignoral of the "hard facts" to the narratives

of those dismissing (Cowie 2 et al. Morgan 5). As is declared in the "my country right" narrative, Americans did fight long and hard against atrocity, and they did succeed in making progress. Such is a truth we can learn and acknowledge. However, we can also acknowledge the atrocities America has committed, and that these atrocities still haunt us today and need to be dealt with. The American narrative is just that: a narrative. There is truth in it just as there is truth in Shakespeare, despite his plays being untrue in the sense that they are not reality. We must recognize that these narratives, while appealing to subscribe to, are not reality. Then, we must go one step further and recognize that despite them not being reality, they still hold truth.

final essay: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/13kjHipLoFWtNgC34VILjlxv3iTuqMZCfSYCbqJdtt4/edit>

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