I. American Exceptionalism: Mythology/Ideology

A. Function: Narrative or Story

1. Narrative

a. collective

b. individual

c. inclusion

2. Legitimation

a. status quo

b. institutions

c. power arrangements

3. Justification

a. policies

b. practices

c. absolves persons of moral responsibility

4. Social control

5. Narrative as exclusion

B. American Exceptionalism

1. Unique country

a. qualitatively different from and superior to all other countries

i. special relationship to God

ii. embodies the highest values of humanity

b. country to which all others look as both symbol and

reality for what is possible

c. Americans are a unique and special people

\*\*Narrative and Identity: collective-special relation to God and individual-member of unique community

2. Infinite possibilities

a. no constraints on individual achievement

i. no class or caste structure

ii. no restrictive culture or social traditions

iii. no class conflict

iv. freedom

b. institutions serve to benefit all: create opportunity for all

c. unlimited resources

i. early America: infinite natural resources primarily land

ii. today: human resources: innovation, creativity,

entrepreneurship

d. American Dream

\*\*Narrative as legitimation: legitimates status quo, institutional arrangements and primary success norm (individual work ethic)

\*\*Narrative as social control: American Dream, failure-individual’s fault

**"The only limit to the height of your achievements is the reach of your dreams and your willingness to work hard for them."**

3. Benevolent country

a. guided through relationship to God or highest

human values

b. most generous country in the world

c. acts with force only to defend itself and to help other countries and other peoples

d. burdens itself by trying to be world’s policeman for good

\*\*Narrative as Justification: actions, policies are good because they are guided by Providence or Progress

C. Constructing a Myth

1. “A New Chosen People” Puritans

a. Puritans viewed themselves as the New Israelites

b. The “New “World” was the New Promised Land

Psalms 2:8 “Ask of me, and I shall give thee, the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession”

c. New Covenant:

i. “As a City upon a Hill”

**“for we must Consider that we shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eyes of all people are upon us” (John Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Mitt Romney)**

ii.. task: “errand in the wild” to a Christian utopia

d. “the Other”

e. nature

2. Becoming a Nation-State: American Exceptionalism and the Declaration of Independence

a. the status that “the Laws of Nature and Nature’s God entitle . . .”

b. “. . .protection of divine Providence”

c. grievances

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

3. Manifest Destiny

a. term emerged in 1840s in newspaper article, but idea preexisted the term

b. God has ordained the white race (Anglo-Saxon) to expand to the Pacific

c. The new geography, new institutions from sea to sea are god’s will and inevitable

"Texas has been absorbed into the Union in the inevitable fulfillment of the general law which is rolling our population westward.... It was disintegrated form Mexico in the natural course of events, by a process perfectly legitimate on its own part, blameless on ours.... (its) incorporation into the Union was not only inevitable, but the most natural, right and proper thing in the world.... California will, probably, next fall away from...Mexico.... Imbecile and distracted, Mexico never can exert any real governmental authority over such a country.... The Anglo-Saxon foot is already on its borders. Already the advance guard of the irresistible army of Anglo-Saxon emigration has begun to pour down upon it armed with the plow and the rifle, and markings its trail with schools and colleges, courts and representative halls, mills and meeting houses. A population will soon be in actual occupation of California, over which it will be idle for Mexico to dream of dominion... All this without agency of our government, without responsibility of our people- -**in natural flow of events, the spontaneous working of principles, and the adaptation of the tendencies and wants of the human race to the elemental circumstances** in the midst of which they find themselves placed." ([Blum](http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/essays/1801-1900/manifest-destiny/references-cited.php#blum) 277)

\*\* Mythology as identity: special peoples (white race), w/ God., excluded and inferior others. As justification: removal, taking land, enslaving, removing and killing peoples, and “war with nature.”

4. First Guilded Age

a. Robber Barons

b. People

i. wage labor

ii. urban slums

iii. mules vs humans

c. American Exceptionalism

5. American Exceptionalism

a. Churches and Sermons “Acres of Diamonds”

b. Newspapers: “The Gospel of Wealth”

c. Universities, Politicians, Robber Barons:

Social Darwinism

D. Social Darwinism

1. William Graham Sumner

“Let it be understood that we cannot go outside of this alternative: liberty. Inequality, survival of the fittest; not-liberty, equality, survival of the unfittest. The former carries society forward and favors all its best members, the latter carries society downwards and favors all its worst members.

2. Combination of theories/ideologies

a. evolution

b. free market

c. biological determinism

d. Calvinism

3. Thesis: Society is progressing (social evolutionism) through competition between individuals, racial groups, and nations

a. humans “struggle for existence”

i. society is site of struggle, not nature

ii. free market and competition

ii. measure of fittest: success and failure in market place

v. rich have proven to be the “fittest”

superior intelligence

work ethic

b. survival of the fittest guarantees

i. social progress

ii. wealth of a nation

\*\*Identifies American society with “natural” forces (Progress and “evolution” ) Legitimates status quo, economic system, inequality, and justifies it (not just personal, but social benefits)

c. government policy to help poor undermines evolution

d. government intervention

i. distorts the natural competitive environment of capitalism

ii. allows the weak to survive

ii. weakens the species

iii. undermines natural evolutionary process

e. Social Darwinism and Manifest Destiny

i. Spanish-American War

ii. McKinley

I walked the floor of the White House night after night until midnight; and I am not ashamed to tell you, gentlemen, that I went down on my knees and prayed Almighty God for light and guidance more than one night. And one night late it came to me this way—I don’t know how it was, but it came: (1) That we could not give them back to Spain—that would be cowardly and dishonorable; (2) that we could not turn them over to France and Germany—our commercial rivals in the Orient—that would be bad business and discreditable; (3) that we could not leave them to themselves—they were unfit for self-government—and they would soon have anarchy and misrule over there worse than Spain’s was; and (4) that there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God’s grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow-men for whom Christ also died. And then I went to bed, and went to sleep. . .

iii. Benevolent Assimilation

\*\*Identity and the Other: other is inferior, and the groups or races or peoples elimination through U.S. actions is justified because of evolution and progress.

d. Myth of Rugged Individualism