I. American Exceptionalism

A. Conventional Wisdom

1. Exceptional

a. The City on the Hill

b. Early Pre-Revolutionary Puritans

i. new Chosen People

ii. new “Promised Land”

c. America: Manifest Destiny

i. ordained by God

ii. conquer North America

iii. justified “expansion”

d. natural bounty

i. infinite

ii. cornucopia view of nature

e. infinite possibilities

f. infinite opportunity

g. benevolent country

h. a unique and special people

2. Exception

a. no caste tradition

i. no nobility

ii. no restrictive norms

b. no class conflict

i. no socialism, no Marxism

ii. workers and capitalists in harmonious relationship

iii. 1950s: America as “finished society”

c. American individualism

i. self-directing

ii. self-willing

iii. autonomous individual

iv. captain of “his” ship

3. American Dream

a. Early America

b. Early Twentieth century

c. 1950s America

d. Twenty-first century

4. American Exceptionalism and the Enlightenment

a. Individualism

b. Belief in science and technology

c. Progress: GE progress is our most important product

d. Democracy and capitalism

e. strain of anti-intellectualism

II. American Exceptionalism and Social theory

A. William Graham Sumner

B. Social Darwinism

1. Combination of ideas: Darwin, Edmund Spencer and Smith

2. Thesis: the application of Darwin’s theory of evolution to society allows us to understand that success is deserved, as is failure.

3. Theory

a. organisms, incl, human need to adapt to survive

b. each individual and each race are engaged in

a struggle for survival

c. American society: infinite possibilities and opportunity for all

d. Survival of the fittest.

4.. No Government intervention: social welfare

a. allows the weak to survive

b. weakens the species

c. don’t mourn extermination of races: weak

5. Exception: Government intervention

a. eugenics

b. “feeble minded”