

From Settler Colony to Global Hegemon: Integrating
the Exceptionalist Narrative of the American Experience
into World History

For the panel on: “Cultural Encounters
between the Continents over the Centuries”
19th International Congress of Historical Sciences
University of Oslo, 6-13 August 2000

Michael Adas
Rutgers University at New Brunswick
November 1999

The paradox has been there from the early years of settlement along the north Atlantic coast. The Pilgrims and the Puritans soon after them had migrated to the "howling wilderness" of New England out of a determination to build a utopian community that transcended history, a New Zion that was free of the corruption and oppression that they sought to leave behind in Europe. In his metaphor of "a city upon the hill," John Winthrop captured the Puritan's sense of the exceptional nature of their undertaking, which they believed both divinely ordained and without precedent, at least since Biblical times. But while Winthrop underscored the exceptional nature of the Puritan experiment in political, social and religious development, he also stressed its lessons for the rest of humanity; lessons, he believed, would be regarded as "a story and by-word through the world." The city, after all, was on high ground with the "eyes of all people" upon it.¹

Winthrop's metaphor proved to be foundational for the American nation that emerged in the following centuries from a scattering of tiny settler enclaves in New England and along the shores of Chesapeake Bay. Additional images and beliefs--such as the rugged individualism exemplified by the frontiersman, the rags-to-riches ascent of the hardworking entrepreneur, and the non-imperialist nature of American expansion--subsequently reinforced exceptionalist formulations of American national identity on the part of historians and politicians alike. But Winthrop's city on the heights has been among the most enduring and frequently evoked symbols of a national experience that has been seen to be so distinctive that it defies comparison with or incorporation into the history of the rest of humanity. And the discordant internal contradictions of Winthrop's formulation have persisted through centuries of ideological oscillation between exceptionalism and America's variant of a global civilizing mission. Though a number of European, historians have drawn attention to "the basic incompatibility of the exceptionalist claim with political messianism, of singularity with universalism,"² this fundamental tension in Americans' thinking about themselves and others has largely gone unnoticed, or at least it has rarely been seriously addressed in the now substantial historiographic discourse on American exceptionalism. It is therefore heartening to find in a recent review of Seymour Martin Lipset's *American Exceptionalism*, Mary

Nolan's succinct summary of the predicament of peoples -- in this case the Germans -- who have sought to selectively emulate American ways: The [German] goal was to become Americanized while remaining oneself. American exceptionalism, which proclaims the moral and material superiority of the United States, denies the possibility of such emulation and negotiation. The ideology of exceptionalism thus stands in sharp and ironic contrast to much of American foreign and economic policy, from modernization theory to structural adjustment programs, which are premised on America as the only economic and political model.³

Over the centuries, a variety of sometimes overlapping, but often quite distinct, claims for exceptionalism have been made by American thinkers, social commentators and politicians. Winthrop's metaphor exemplifies the cosmic teleology version of exceptionalism that has dominated both political rhetoric and popular convictions. In this view, the emergence of the United States as a global power represents the working out in the mundane realm of a larger, divinely-inspired plan. This sentiment can be found in American readings of their history from the Puritans' conviction that the epidemics that ravaged the Indian population of New England were God's way of preparing the New World for their settlement to Seymour Lipset's recent admission that he believed "hand of providence" responsible for the strong leaders who have emerged in times of crisis in United State's history.⁴ Though in some ways a variant of the "Gott mit Uns" impulse that has been a component of the ideological baggage of most societies throughout history, the divinely-ordained vision of the American experience has been both more comprehensive and extreme than its counterparts elsewhere. It has also proven a good deal more impervious, at least in popular parlance, than most other national variants of divinely-inspired mission to the unsettling excesses of human folly and cruelty that have abounded in most of human history.

Alternative versions of American exceptionalism are more amenable to empirical testing. They have also had, particularly in the "American (half) century" of the post-World War II decades, a much greater impact on thinking and writing about United States history as well as approaches to foreign policy in the Cold War era and the first decade of the "new world order. " Though divine

imperatives are often implicit, and at times explicit, in these alternative formulations of exceptionalism, they emphasize the uniquely progressive and socially capacious character of American institutional and material development. The decidedly Whiggish thrust of progressivist variations on the exceptionalist theme owe much to expectations regarding the young American republic held by eighteenth-century European intellectuals.⁵ Their fascination with the American experiment appeared to validate the vision of the city on a hill. In the nineteenth century both in turn informed interpretations of United States history that privileged it as the culmination of the evolutionary advance of human civilization. Whether grounded in the bounty of what was seen to be an undeveloped New World environment or the unique mixture of attributes that made up the American "character", or both, progressivist exceptionalism has celebrated -- in varying blends of attributes and emphases -- the unprecedented extent to which democracy, individualism and social mobility, civil society, free enterprise, ingenuity and inventiveness, and material wellbeing have flourished in the United States. In these areas of human endeavor, which are seen to be definitive in terms of human development, progressivist exceptionalists insist that American achievements have not simply surpassed those of any other society in degree, they have reached quite distinctive levels of enactment and refinement.⁶

From a global perspective, these claims to American uniqueness would not have mattered very much if the United States had remained the geographically remote, rather isolated outlier of western European civilization that it was at least well into the nineteenth century. But the nation's rise to the status of a world power by the late-1800s, and its emergence after World War II as the epicenter of the process of globalization, meant that both Americans' self-images and the way they represented other peoples and cultures would have increasingly significant repercussions for all of humanity. These transformations gave new salience and intensity to the longstanding contradictions between exceptionalism in its varying guises and visions of America as a model for the rest of humankind. As Joyce Appleby has argued, over the course of the nineteenth century, the antithesis of the exceptionalist vision took on increasing importance in American thinking and policy making

aimed at both those who were considered aliens within the republic and foreigners who were increasingly encountered overseas:

The propagandists of American democracy breached the geographic isolation of their country by universalizing what was peculiar to Americans; their endorsement of natural rights, their drive for personal independence, their celebration of democracy. What might be construed elsewhere as uninterestingly plebeian was elevated by the national imagination to a new goal for mankind.⁷

The persisting conviction that the American experience, despite its unprecedented nature, could serve as a template for the future of less fortunate peoples and less developed cultures not only justified increasing interventionism in the outside world, it often promoted a predisposition to denigrate the worth and viability of foreign, particularly non-Western, cultures. At times, these negative assessments remained implicit, even unconscious. More often, American policy makers, missionaries, and bureaucrats were openly disdainful of cultures and peoples deemed to be beyond the pale of Western (or increasingly American) civilization. Though not necessarily racist but decidedly ethnocentric, their approach to these alien societies was premised on the presupposition that their ways of thinking and doing were diametrically opposed to those of an exceptionally progressive and highly developed United States. From missionary tracts on the plains Indians to the journals of American ambassadors overseas, such epithets as savage and barbaric were standard fare in writings on non-Western peoples from the first years of colonization until well into the twentieth century. Chinese or Japanese leaders who resisted United States inroads into their societies in the late-1800s were caricatured as effete, reactionary or xenophobic; while Muslim revivalists at the end of the twentieth century are indiscriminately lumped together as irrational fanatics bent on fomenting violent opposition to American-inspired efforts to promote economic and cultural globalization.⁸

Although often conceived in ignorance, these dismissive representations played a significant role in shaping policies aimed at promoting the Westernization or Americanization of non-Western

peoples and societies. This pattern of denigration, or outright dismissal, also led American agents, overseas advisors and colonial administrators to conclude that alien cultures were *tabula rasas* on which they could inscribe their own values and institutions with impunity. This approach to domination across cultures was manifested in early AngloAmerican policies towards the indigenous Indian peoples of coastal North America, and it persisted in the centuries of settler frontier expansion and Indian dispossession. As recent historians of these processes have concluded, in these circumstances Americanization literally meant "cultural erasure" for the Indians. And there is perhaps no more revealing measure of the low regard that Anglo-Americans had for Indian culture than the fact that, with rare exceptions, even the most sympathetic missionary educators and government agents made no effort to learn the languages of the Indians among whom they worked.⁹

From the nineteenth century, the highly ethnocentric and increasingly racist assumptions of the superiority and universal applicability of Euro-American ways that informed American policies towards the Indians were increasingly deployed in encounters with overseas peoples and cultures. In the 1890s and early 1900s, these presuppositions were worked into a distinctive (but by no means unprecedented or unique) American version of the civilizing mission, and some decades later they undergirded the central tenets of modernization theory. Both ideologies were used to justify social engineering projects designed to transform foreign, and again mainly non-Western, societies whose cultures were essentialized as tradition-bound, materially underdeveloped and hopelessly backward.¹⁰

Any meaningful attempt to integrate the history of the United States into the analysis of broader global developments over the last half millennium requires comparative or world historians to grapple with the foundational and enduring paradox that I have argued runs through the historiography of the United States and informs the myths and discourses that have shaped the Americans' sense of national identity and purpose. The exceptionalist side of the opposing readings of the meaning of the American experience had much to do with what Raymond Grew could still characterize as late as 1985, "The Comparative Weakness of American History."¹¹ There was, of

course, considerable merit in Grew's contention that the indifference, suspicion or outright hostility that many, if not most, historians of the United State still evinced towards comparative, much less world history, could in large part be traced to the nature of the American historical profession and the ways in which promotions and plaudits were earned within that community. As Grew observed: For historians of the United States--who can hardly launch two full careers before

beginning to publish, who are already burdened by the need to master an enormous literature and to meet high standards of expertise within the chronologically limited framework of a single nation--it can seem merely prudent to look the other way when the call for comparison is made.¹²

But, as Grew also recognized, the very kinds of history and ways of approaching historical issues that the profession privileged were perhaps even more important sources of resistance to serious comparative work or even more ambitious studies of broader global patterns. For those who held that key processes in United States history were unprecedented and unique, it followed that they were so significant that they must be studied in and of themselves. From this perspective, it was also not unreasonable to conclude that these processes could not be meaningfully compared to what more comparatively-minded or globally-oriented scholars deemed to be similar developments in other peoples' history. These convictions appeared to most practitioners of American history to be well-founded, given the sheer size of the United States (and the corresponding bulk of its historical production), its relative isolation well into the twentieth century, and, particularly in the postWorld War II decades, its preponderant influence in international affairs. Again Raymond Grew succinctly captures these contextual buttresses of exceptionalism:

Our nation . . . spreads across a huge and essentially monolingual continent where daily experience involves less frequent contact than most nations enjoy with neighbors who speak different tongues, look to very different -traditions, and claim distinctive cultures. Concerned to root their analysis in the full context of the society they study, historians may even in their most formal work be especially subject to the

society and culture that shaped them, which can become a constricting circle for those studying their own society.¹³

Despite this confluence of constraints, it has long been acceptable, at times even fashionable, for historians of the United States to include explorations of the European roots of the new nation's beliefs, institutions or patterns of colonization as vital components of, and even partial explanations for, the exceptional trajectory of American history.¹⁴ But until the last couple of decades there were few serious attempts to compare the discovery and settlement of the Atlantic littoral to similar processes in Australia or Argentina, the history of American frontier expansion to these areas and others exhibiting obvious parallels in many parts of the globe, or the nature of American empire building overseas to imperial expansion by other industrial powers, including Japan. On the contrary, American historians have generally confined their narratives and analyses of these and other defining aspects of the American experience to the United States itself. If they attempted to set that history in a broader transnational framework, they were likely to stress, for examples, the ways in which industrialization produced a peculiarly "American system" of manufacturing; the fundamental distinctions between America's exercise of informal influence overseas and the oppressive empires ruled by its rivals; and the incomparable magnitude and impact of the European migrant flow to the United States in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Implicit, but also at times quite conscious, comparisons appeared to confirm the exceptionalist nature of central features of American history, ranging from what were seen to be distinctive modes of labor organization and agitation and the absence of significant socialist parties to the weakness of the state and what were assumed to be higher levels of mobility and material prosperity relative to other industrial societies.¹⁵

As numerous commentators have observed,¹⁶ the predominance of a national frame of reference for thinking and writing about United States history has reinforced notions of American exceptionalism in major ways. Because national units are in fact difficult to compare successfully, it has discouraged systematic analysis of trans- and cross-cultural historical patterns, and often

reduced comparisons inserted into narratives focussed on developments within the United States to "one-shot brief analogies,"¹⁷ that have often proved more misleading than informative. Until the past three or four decades, this preoccupation with national history had also marginalized both comparative and world history within the profession. As William H. McNeill, who as early as the 1960s defied these trends by producing widely read and cited cross-cultural studies, has observed, for much of the twentieth century professional historians in the United States have had little regard for world perspectives. These are assumed to yield little more than poorly documented generalizations and deeply personal commentaries on the human condition, such as those authored by Toynbee and Spengler in the decades of global crisis following the First World War.¹⁸

In an extended critique of American exceptionalism, Ian Tyrrell has also deplored the neglect, and often the outright dismissal, of cross-cultural research by historians of the United States. In Tyrrell's view, the Americans' preoccupation with their own history has not only discouraged serious scholarship with a transnational frame of reference, it has skewed much of the comparative work that has been undertaken in recent decades. His contention that comparative work undertaken by American scholars has usually begun with questions or patterns discerned in United States history that were then tested through an examination of similar phenomena in other areas works well for many of the studies written before the late 1960s.¹⁹ As Tyrrell himself notes, his critique of American historians' approaches to comparative history owes much to Raymond Grew, who several years earlier argued that critical topics in United States history were usually the starting point for forays into cross-cultural analysis, including those focussing on slave systems, frontiers, and race relations. Grew observed that issues arising in the study of the history of other societies had rarely shaped investigations of comparable phenomena in America, and he argued that even scholars who have made significant use of case evidence drawn from elsewhere in the Americas, Africa or Eurasia rarely sustained a serious research commitment to these areas.²⁰

The fine comparative studies of such scholars as George Fredrickson, Philip Curtin, Jack Greene, and Ian Steele render the categorical assessments of Tyrrell and Grew dubious at best.²¹ But

they are even more troubling in view of the unintended and ironic Americacentrism that Tyrrell and Grew themselves exhibit. Neither takes into account the very substantial corpus of comparative historical work produced by American scholars that does not feature United States case examples or American interaction with other societies.²² On topics ranging from colonialism and peasant protest to international immigration and environmental transformations, this scholarship has in fact contributed substantially to the development of the comparative and global subfields in terms of theory and methodology, in the identification of critical issues for study and debate, and not the least in enhancing our understanding of the history of other peoples and regions, especially those in the "nonWestern" world, who had been long neglected or ignored by American historians. Grew may well be correct in concluding that because of the excessively inward-looking nature of much of American historical scholarship, it has not had an international impact commensurate with the high quality and innovativeness characteristic of much of a prodigious quantity of research and writing.²³ But if the major contributions American scholars have made to both comparative and global history beyond that centered on issues rooted in United States historiography are taken fully into account, in these subfields of research and writing at least their influence proves a good deal more considerable than Grew allows.²⁴

The need for the full integration of the American experience into comparative and global history has perhaps been the most convincingly demonstrated by the important ways in which cross-cultural studies have shaped the research agenda for a diverse range of subfields dealing with processes that have been central to the American experience. In core fields of research ranging from slave systems and racial ideologies to frontier expansion, industrialization and struggles for civil rights, comparative studies have since the 1960s proved critical to the development of United States historiography. They have identified questions that need to be pursued, established issues worthy of serious debate, and plotted broader historical patterns that had earlier tended to be obscured by a surfeit of primary source materials and a privileging of specialized research.²⁵ All of these tasks were, of course, precisely those for which Marc Bloch argued many decades ago that comparative

analysis was indispensable.²⁶ And though Americanists have applied comparative techniques to case examples far more separated in time and space, and thus more disparate in cultural and historical origins and trajectories than Block deemed prudent,²⁷ their work has proved as potent an antidote to assumptions of national exceptionalism as his Seminal studies on medieval Europe.

In conceiving United States history comparatively and thus integrating it meaningfully into a larger global context, it has been essential to distinguish between exceptionalism and difference. Exceptionalist perspectives have by no means been confined to historians, social commentators and politicians in the United States. Like their counterparts in earlier societies and in rival contemporary nations, American exceptionalists have almost invariably presumed the superiority of their own culture and, from the late eighteenth century, of the national character that culture had nurtured. But arguments for the uniqueness of the United States have been both more foundational and enduring, and they have tended to emphasize sources of superiority and trajectories of dominance that distinguish the history of the republic in fundamental ways from that of the rest of humankind. From the first decades of European settlement in North America, exceptionalists have almost invariably stressed unprecedented and qualitatively (and very often quantitatively) distinctive patterns of societal (and later national) development that transcend the environmental and social obstacles that are alleged to have prevented earlier civilizations or contemporary national rivals from attaining similar levels of individual and collective fulfillment. American exceptionalists tend to see the rise of the United States to global power as part of a larger teleological progression towards -depending on the observer and time frame in question -- human virtue, utopian sublimity, civilization, development or modernity. And, as I have argued above, in apparent contradiction to most of the foregoing assumptions, they have premised their prescriptions for interaction with foreign peoples and cultures on assimilationist imperatives that exceed those of even their most expansive and chauvinistic counterparts past or present.

I think it fair to argue that the findings of most comparativists who make extensive use of case evidence drawn from United States history underscore the importance of difference as opposed to

the exceptional nature of the American experience.²⁸ Though exceptionalist claims have only rarely been based on well-grounded comparisons,²⁹ that is, of course, the only way they can be empirically verified or disproved. But, as most of the cross-cultural analyses of key patterns in American history written in recent decades amply demonstrate, serious comparison is better suited to determining the extent to which and why developments in the United States paralleled or diverged from those other societies. The fact that much of the comparative work done thus far has stressed difference rather than similarity has been troubling for a number of prominent advocates of internationalist history, such as Ian Tyrrell and Akira Iriye. They have urged that we can best counter American exceptionalism by deploying international and transregional (i.e. encompassing the Atlantic basin or the Pacific rim) approaches that play down national differences and foreground cross-cultural similarities, which Iriye suggests are ultimately products of the unity of the human condition.³⁰ But both recurring and divergent historical patterns are proper subjects for comparative and international history. And both similarities and differences challenge American exceptionalism by placing United States history in broader global frames of reference that allow us to identify and explore underlying commonalities in major patterns of societal development across time and space. *All* societies exhibit variations on these shared themes; and each has experienced trans-cultural processes of historical transformation, such as agrarian expansion, industrialization or conquest, in distinctive ways.

Akira Iriye's realization as a student in postwar Japan that his national history "could best be understood when it was examined from without as well as from within,"³¹ provides a compelling point of departure for historians of the United States who have urged in variety of ways that comparative or internationalist approaches can provide more inclusive, nuanced, and complex understandings of the American experience than those propagated by a constricted master narrative that has been informed by exceptionalist thinking since the seventeenth century. At the most basic level, comparative analyses and global perspectives have contributed significantly to the disaggregation of the unified visions that have long dominated the writing of both United States and

world history. They demonstrate that national units, taken as a whole or conceived as autonomous entities, are difficult, if not impossible, to compare meaningfully. Comparative and world history perspectives expose concepts of national purpose and character as the same sort of essentialisms associated with now discredited approaches to history that were grounded in racial, religious or civilizational typologies. And they illustrate the ways in which national frames of reference can obscure or skew our understandings of cross-cultural interactions or trans-national phenomena.

Rather than whole civilizations (a term that is problematic in and of itself) or unified national narratives, serious comparison and manageable world history compel us to focus on clearly delineated processes and particular types of institutions, social movements or discourses. Somewhat paradoxically, this narrowing of the breadth of occurrences and issues to be studied requires comparativists and globalists to concentrate on the history of specific sub-regions, or even locales, that are then compared in depth to areas in other societies that evince the same type of transformations, institutional development or socio-intellectual upheavals. This approach to historical analysis inevitably forces us beyond elite- and malecentric narratives that until recent decades have dominated the historiography of both the United States and the areas to which it has been compared.³² In this way comparative and international perspectives have prompted or reinforced broader efforts by historians and other social scientists to give agency and voice to a diverse range of ethnic, gender, and class groups that had long neglected, or altogether ignored.³³ Close attention to the ways in which global transformations and cross-cultural movements of peoples, ideas and things have shaped and complicated diversity throughout American history would appear to be essential for a society which viewed from the long-term vantage point of the history of humankind is perhaps the most remarkable for its ever more complex pluralism and its intensely creative, multicultural synergy.

Beyond the identification in the history of the United States, as well as the societies to which it has been compared, of questions worth asking and underlying patterns deserving exploration, a broader contextualization of the American experience in world history is indispensable to

understanding the nation's rise to global power. Whether one is concerned with frontier expansion, industrialization, overseas colonization or America's critical roles in the spread of the capitalist world system, global perspectives on these multifaceted processes are essential to any attempt to understand the motives, responses and actions of those who actually participated in them. Inter-continental migrations supplied the manpower; North American frontier regions and overseas areas contributed much of the resource base, including investment capital until the last half of the nineteenth century; and foreign rivals -political, military, commercial and ecclesiastical -- often provided the impetus for the everincreasing importance of cross-cultural exchanges in the history of the United States.

By the last half of the twentieth century, transnational exchanges have become so routinized and pervasive that they impinge on virtually all aspects of American life, hence literally globalizing all dimensions of contemporary United States history. As early as the oil crisis of 1973, it was clear to all who were willing to see that what had been long been presumed to be American corporations had in fact metamorphosed into international conglomerates with bottom line priorities that often had little to do the national interest. New waves of immigration -- more likely in post-1960s decades to flow from Latin America and Asia rather than Europe -- have complicated and increased the ethnic and cultural diversity of the United States to the point where the majority status of peoples of European descent is challenged, or has already been eclipsed, in the fastest growing and most dynamic areas of the country. The resources this polyglot population consumes, the products it produces and the environmental consequences of both are now calibrated in terms of international capital flows, market exchanges and ecological agendas that envision the earth as a single entity.

Except in times of crisis, it is unlikely that most Americans give much thought to world events in their day-to-day lives, even though those lives are permeated with consumer products, from clothing to Pok6mon trading cards, manufactured in once "exotic" regions like the Pacific Rim or Central America. But from the Gulf War through a series of costly overseas interventions like those in Somalia, Bosnia and Kosovo, international conflicts, which the press now routinely

proclaim vital to the national interest, have more and more preoccupied a populace apparently resigned to paying the considerable costs, in taxes if not casualties, of America's self-appointed role as policeman of yet another new world order. And from the late-1930s, the executive guardians of more contested global dispensations have devoted significantly higher portions of their personal energies and political capital to foreign affairs. During World War II and the Cold War decades, this shift in leadership priorities was more obvious. But it is striking that world events both made and undid the first postCold War president, George Bush, who engineered a pyrrhic victory in the Persian Gulf only to be defeated in large part because he came to be perceived as a leader who had neglected domestic affairs. And overseas crises and foreign relations have increasingly become the preoccupation of the last president of the century, Bill Clinton, whose success in enacting domestic programs has been largely limited to those inextricably bound up in broader projects to advance globalization, such as NAFTA and GATT.

In view of the relatively isolated and peripheral position of the United States until at least the last decades of the eighteenth century, and arguably then again for much of the nineteenth, world historians might well be justified in minimizing the importance of colonial America and the young republic in terms of global developments in the early modern era and the first decades of industrial age. And in fact many have. Other than to lament the myopia and provincialism of their American audience, prominent post-World War II scholars, such as William H. McNeill, Marshall Hodgson, J.H. Parry, and Eric Wolf, whose pioneering cross-cultural writings and prescriptions for the study of world history revitalized a moribund field, made little use of United States case examples and only rarely commented on American variations on larger global themes. Foreign area specialists, who abounded in the early decades of the Cold War, when government, university and foundation funding made possible the proliferation of language programs and multidisciplinary centers, were even more determined than the pioneers of the new world history to promote the study of other peoples' societies and cultures. In pursuit of these new perspectives, they often quite consciously neglected related developments in the United States or American influences on their areas of

expertise. In many instances they did so out of the conviction that the American impact had been already been excessively studied and its importance consistently overstated. Similar reasoning also helps to account for the scant coverage given to American case examples in college history courses with comparative and global dimensions in this formative period. In the 1960s and 1970s, the growing influence within the historical profession of comparative approaches that very often included major United States case examples, prompted many world historians and area specialists to reassess their often deliberate marginalization of America's impact on the broader historical experience of humankind. It was soon apparent that distinctive, but by no means exceptional, American versions of trans-cultural and inter-continental historical processes, such as settler colonialism, frontier expansion, slavery, racism, segregation, immigration, industrialization and imperialism, were simply too integral to world history to be neglected or ignored. United States variants on common global themes were also too important in terms of their often unsurpassed scale and complexity and their cross-cultural impact to be left out of broader cross-cultural narratives. Meaningfully integrating American history into global narratives and comparative analyses also countered the tendency for the writings and courses of areas specialists and world historians to be ghettoized, confined in their appeal to relatively small numbers of readers and students. But above all, the traumatic descent in the 1960s into the Vietnam quagmire underscored the deficiencies and literal dangers of conceiving the world history of the early modern and modern eras without a meaningful United States component. It also led to the realization that without serious inquiry into the history of the societies in the areas into which the Americans increasingly intruded and the larger global systems in which they came to play dominant roles, we cannot begin to understand the political, military, economic and cultural impact on the rest of the world of America's emergence in the twentieth century to global hegemon.

1. Winthrop's expectations were conveyed to his Puritan followers in a lay sermon delivered on their arrival in the New World. See, "A Model of Christian Charity," in Alan Heimert and Andrew Delbanco, eds., *The Puritans in America: A Narrative Anthology* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1985), pp. 71-74.
2. Quoted passage from Serge Ricard, "The Exceptionalist Syndrome in U.S. Continental and Overseas Expansionism," in David K. Adams and Cornelis A. van Minnen, eds. *Reflections on American Exceptionalism* (Kiel, 1994), p. 73. See also, Elise Marienstras, *Les Mythes fondateurs de la nation américaine* (Paris, 1976), pp. 90-98.
3. "Against Exceptionalisms," *American Historical Review* 102/3 (1997): 773. A quarter of a century ago, William Appleman Williams listed among a number of key themes in American history "an intense consciousness of *uniqueness*" and "a hyperactive sense of mission," (italics his), but he offered no commentary on their apparent opposition. See, *America Confronts a Revolutionary World* (New York, 1976), p. 27.
4. Peter N. Carroll, *Puritans and the Wilderness: The Intellectual Significance of the New England Frontier, 1629-1700* (New York, Columbia, 1967), pp. 13-14, 37-38; and Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York, 1996), p. 14.
5. On these connections, see especially Joyce Appleby, "Recovering America's Historic Diversity: Beyond Exceptionalism," *The Journal of American History* 79/2 (1992): 419-21.
6. The basic tenets of progressivist exceptionalism, which peaked in historical circles in the 1950s and early 1960s, were perhaps the most fully explicated in David Potter's, *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character* (Chicago, 1954) and Daniel Borstin's three-volume, essentialist portrait of *The Americans* (New York, 1958-1971).
7. "Recovering America's Diversity," p. 424.
8. The most wide-ranging treatment of these responses to the American Indians can be found in Roy Harvey Pearce, *The Savages of America* (Baltimore, 1953). For China, see Peter Buck, *American Science and Modern China, 1876-1936* (London, 1980), and for Japan, Walter LeFeber, *The Clash* (1997). Recent reactions to Muslim "fundamentalism" range from Samuel Huntington's strident prognostications in "The Clash of Civilizations, 11 *Foreign Affairs*. (Summer, 1993), to the more muted and balanced strictures in Benjamin Barber's *Jihad or MacWorld* (New York, 1992).
9. The concept of cultural erasure is explored by Priscilla Wald in her provocative essay on "Terms of Assimilation: Legislating Subjectivity in the Emerging Nation," in Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds. *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham, 1993), pp. 59-84. See also, Robert Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian* (New York, 1978), especially pp. 137, 150; and William G. McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries, 1789-1839* (New Haven, 1984), pp. 51, 63-64, 70-71, 143, 151.
10. Michael Adas, "Improving on the Civilizing Mission? Assumptions of United Exceptionalism in the Colonisation of the Philippines," *Itinerario* 22/4 (1998): 44-66; and Dean Tipps, "Modernization Theory and the Comparative Study of Societies: A Critical Perspective," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 15/2 (1973): 199-226.
11. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 16/1 (1985): 87-101.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

14. As long as the American side of this interaction was privileged, a dynamic underscored by Carlton Hayes comment in the mid-1940s that few who specialized in United States history shared his view that the American experience was best studied in the context of a broadly-defined, expansive European civilization. See, "The American Frontier--Frontier of What?" *American Historical Review* 51/2 (1946) : 200.

15. For a superb exploration of these issues, despite conclusions that may prove unsettling for comparativists and globalists, see Michael Kammen, "The Problem of American Exceptionalism: A Reconsideration," *American Quarterly* 45/1 (1993): 1-43.

16. For an early and thorough critique of these associations, see Laurence Veysey, "The Autonomy of American History Reconsidered," *American Quarterly* 31/4 (1979) : 455-477.

17. The apt characterization is Carl Degler's. See, "Comparative History: An Essay Review," *Journal of Southern History* 34/3 (1968): 426.

18. "A Defense of World History," in *Mythistory and Other Essays* (Chicago, 1986), especially pp. 82-95.

19. "American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History," *American Historical Review* 96/4 (1991) :1032-1039.

20. "Comparative Weakness," p. 99.

21. See, for examples, Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (Oxford, 1981) and *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (Oxford, 1995); Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison, 1969); Greene, *Peripheries and Center: Constitutional Development in the Extended Politics of the British Empire and the United States, 1607-1788* (Athens, Ga., 1986) ; and Steele, *The English Atlantic, 1675-1740: An Exploration of Communications and Community* (New York, 1986).

22. This oversight is also true of leading comparativists , such as Carl Degler and George Fredrickson, whose periodic reflections on the state of the comparative subfield, take little account of work that does not make significant use of United States, or at the very least European, case examples. See, Degler, "Comparative History," and "In Pursuit of American History," *American Historical Review* 92/1 (1987): 1-12; and Fredrickson, "Comparative History," in Michael Kammen, ed., *The Past Before Us* (Ithaca, 1980), pp. 457-473, and "From Exceptionalism to Variability: Recent Developments in Cross-National Comparative History," *Journal of American History* 82/2 (1995): 587-604.

23. Grew, "Comparative Weakness," p. 87.

24. Among the more influential of this very substantial body of works are, Jerry H. Bentley, *Old World Encounters* (Oxford, 1993) Arnold Pacey, *Technology in World Civilization* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1990); William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power* (Chicago, 1982); Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution* (Cambridge, England, 1988); Philip Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade*

in *World History* (Cambridge, England, 1984) ; Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (New York, 1986); Eric Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1969); and Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (London, 1979).

25. Even a partial survey of the works in each of these subfields would require an extensive essay in itself. But to gain a sense of the impact of comparative studies on United States historiography, one might reflect on the impact in the postwar decades of the seminal, if highly controversial, arguments of Frank Tannebaum and Stanley Elkins, and try to imagine the state of such critical fields as slavery, racism, and frontier settlement without the comparative contributions of Carl Degler, David Brion Davis, Eugene Genovese, George Fredrickson, John Cell, Philip Curtin, Sidney Mintz , Orlando Patterson, Jack Greene, Herbert Klein, John Thornton, Philip Morgan and Richard White.

26. Bloch's case "Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes" was first made in 1928 in Oslo, as a paper at the Sixth International Congress of Historical Sciences. My citations are from the English translation by J.E. Anderson, entitled "A Contribution towards a Comparative History of European Societies," in Bloch, *Land and Work in Medieval Europe: Selected Papers by Marc Bloch* (New York, 1969), pp. 44-81.

27. For an insightful critique of the limitations of Bloch's comparative vision that is centered on these issues, see William H. Sewell, Jr., "Marc Bloch and the Logic of Comparative History," *History and Theory* 6/2 (1967) : 208-218.

28. A distinction that Allen Dawley insisted upon well over a decade ago. See, "Farewell to 'American Exceptionalism,'" 111 in Heffer and Rovet, eds. *Why Is There No Socialism in the United States* (New York, pp. 311-15. For a more recent stress on the importance of these semantic distinctions for American historiography more broadly, see Kammen, "Problem of American Exceptionalism," especially pp. 15, 24, 32.

29. Here the works of Seymour Martin Lipset are perhaps the most notable exception, though, despite the rhetorical flourishes, he too has stressed the differences that comparison can reveal. See, for example, his recent essay on "American Exceptionalism Reaffirmed," in Byron E. Shafer, ed., *Is America Different? A New Look at American Exceptionalism* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 1-45.

30. Tyrrell, "American Exceptionalism," pp. 1034-1038; and Akira Iriye, "The Internationalization of History," *American Historical Review* 94/1 (1989): 3-5.

31. "Internationalization of History," p. 9.

32. Several decades ago, Laurence Veysey perceptively drew attention to the correspondence between exceptionalist generalizations concerning national character and a unified narrative of American history that was all but monopolized by white males. See, "Autonomy of American History," p. 457-58.

33. A trend that was emphasized by Joyce Appleby in her presidential address to the Organization of American Historians. See, "Recovering America's Diversity," especially pp. 426-31.