AMERITOCRACY:
HOLLYWOOD BLOCKBUSTERS AND THE UNIVERSALISATION OF AMERICAN VALUES

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A thesis submitted to
The University of Birmingham for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

The thesis contends that there is a dominant strand of thinking driving the prevailing metanarrative of American global hegemony. This strand, constructed here as Ameritocracy, taps into three interconnected and fundamental principles concerning the nature of America: that American values are universal, terminal and providential. However, this notion of American universality is contradicted by a troubling parochialism, one that reveals religious, racial and cultural particularities generated from American identity, and from the mythic, providential origin story of America.

The thesis expands on the theory of Ameritocracy, its historical derivation and theoretical antecedents, and its application within the soft power realm of Hollywood film. Ameritocracy finds its apotheosis in the popular blockbuster films of the unipolar era. The global aspirations of the blockbuster conflate with the universality of the medium, and thereby function as the perfect conduit for expounding the presumed universality of the American nation, promoting and proselytising on behalf of American primacy, using Ameritocratic arguments to legitimise and normalise U.S. hegemony. Analysis of blockbuster texts reveals that the notions of universality they embed are often partial and particular, featuring an obfuscation of definitions, between ideals and interests, between ends and means, and between the universal and the American.

Acknowledgements

Since starting this thesis in 2005, I have received invaluable help from several individuals without whom this project would not have come to completion. Firstly, my tutor, Professor Scott Lucas, whose academic focus, intellectual vigour and sense of humour has inspired me since I was an undergraduate. Secondly, Professors Neil Campbell and Geoff King, whose candid interviews added a vibrancy to the documentary film. Thirdly, thanks must go to Tim Fornara, Duncan Kilty, Michael Buckman and others, who gave advice, lent equipment and generally helped to point me in the right direction. Lastly, I have to acknowledge the incredible influence and help of two family members. My wife, Kate Langley, whose patience over the last seven years has been nothing short of Herculean and who has punctuated the PhD process with many moments of love, grace and beauty. The final nod, however, must go to my late grandmother, Francis Dimmick, with whom I spent most of my childhood: Nan, if you hadn't loved TV so much then I wouldn't have fallen in love with the moving image and none of this would have happened. Thank you.

A Note on the Production of an Audio-Visual Thesis

There is considerable literature devoted to determining the core of American identity, much of which references notions connected to the universality of the American idea. However, given that the primary concern of this thesis is the role and function of audio-visual media in expressing this idea, it seemed logical to adopt an audio-visual approach that could engage directly with much of the material being analysed. Such an approach has obvious shortcomings.

Firstly, the size of the written component placed a natural limitation on the depth of possible analysis, in comparison to a conventional written doctoral thesis. Consequently, parts of this component introduce the dynamic of Ameritocracy and ground the concept in historical precedents and theoretical antecedents, but stop short of a deep and full analysis; this enabled this thesis to cover a broader terrain than might have otherwise been possible, whilst also leaving much scope for further, and fuller, study in future.

Secondly, and perhaps primarily, it is well recognised that audio-visual material generates a semiotic excess which written work can easily avoid through prolonged explication. However, this excess also enables the filmic part of this thesis to be more open to criticism and creative interpretation; *Ameritocracy* still has a primary narrative that attempts to link Hollywood film production to notions of American universality and global hegemony, but (through inclusion of non-hegemonic movies, and through playful juxtapositions of images, text, voiceover and music) allows space for negotiated and oppositional readings, and in that sense mimics the sort of processes audiences engage with when watching Hollywood movies. The written thesis advances the same argument as the audio-visual component, although its tone and content is more scholarly and less 'open' as a form; where appropriate I have made reference to oppositional texts and to the polysemic possibilities of Hollywood film.

Ameritocracy does not have a leading voiceover that guides the narrative. I initially experimented with such a voiceover, largely inspired by the documentary work of Adam Curtis (*The Century of the Self* (2002), *The Power of Nightmares* (2004) and *The Trap* (2007)), whose combinations of interview footage, archive imagery and polemical voiceover seemed to suit the development of an 'academic' audio-visual narrative. However, I found that the voiceover made the documentary excessively didactic and with a tendency to too readily slip into diatribe (criticisms which can also be levelled at Curtis's work), whilst also distracting from the filmic texts themselves. Instead, elements of Curtis's approach were used, with inspiration also being drawn from documentaries that dispense with narration entirely in the construction of their argument, including *The Atomic Café* (1982) and *Baraka* (1992). Consequently, the narrative thread of *Ameritocracy* is composed of interview footage with academics and individuals working in the film and culture industries (both filmed and sourced from other media), intercut and overlaid with extensive material from Hollywood movies, American television, Presidential addresses, popular music, quotations from relevant texts and a variety of other sources.

The documentary film presented both intellectual and creative challenges, particularly in regard to how to express this thesis in an audio-visual format that would retain academic rigour without becoming a dry and boring film. How to present historical ideas – for which there is no documentary footage – using fictional film? How to condense a theory with pretensions to a relationship with something as vast, rich and diverse as American identity, in just one hour of documentary film? How to articulate an analytical concept in what is, predominantly, a creative medium? These queries, amongst others, informed much of the editorial decisions behind *Ameritocracy* and, whilst open to criticism, interpretation and development, hopefully form the basis of an emerging audio-visual academia.

The structure of the documentary component of this thesis loosely matches the three-chapter structure of the written component. The first section of the film serves to explicate

Ameritocracy and place it within a historical context; section two moves on to analyse Hollywood as an industry, its relationship to processes of Americanisation and the various ways in which it intersects with notions of American universality; the third and final section of the film then thematically analyses specific blockbuster movies, and the ways in which they express Ameritocracy. The match between the written and audio-visual components is not perfect, and is not designed to be so; rather, they are two free-standing, yet complimentary elements of the same analysis.

Wherever possible, I attempted to source all footage in high definition, and at the highest possible quality. However, much footage was only available on the internet (YouTube, Vimeo, etc) and thus the quality is less than what would be desirable, certainly for a documentary film made for broadcast.

All references to '*Ameritocracy*', the documentary film, are italicised in the written component of this thesis; any un-italicised reference to 'Ameritocracy' will be a reference to the theoretical concept.

INTRODUCTION

The intellectual enquiry behind this doctoral thesis was initially stimulated by some casual observations inspired by watching Roland Emmerich's 2004 disaster epic, *The Day After Tomorrow*, in which rapid climate change plunges the northern hemisphere into a new ice age. In the film's denouement, with those few Americans that had survived the apocalypse now in enviro-exile in Mexico, the new American President gives his first address to his populace in which he apologises for the previous lack of action on the issue of climate change and speaks hopefully of the future. Even though the address begins with the traditional 'my fellow Americans', it is clear that the audience he is speaking to is global, a fact confirmed by the film's closing image of the entire world as seen from space, with the United States covered by a vast ice sheet. There seemed to be something contradictory at work: the geographic America was gone and yet the President still spoke with the authority of the world's most powerful nation, speaking to, and even on behalf of, all peoples, not just American citizens. 'America' was not so much a place as a universal idea, one whose hegemonic position could not be challenged, not even by something as complete as national apocalypse. Further enquiry into other blockbuster movies (including the rest of Emmerich's oeuvre) suggested that this notion was not unique, but widespread; there seemed to be something fundamental about American identity, and filmic representations of America, that sought to consistently express the universality of the American idea. But to what end?

The Day After Tomorrow was produced and released in the geo-political context of the War on Terror and, even though the film's ostensible theme and concern was environmental collapse, its universalist ideas appeared to have some resonance with the rhetoric emanating from the Bush administration concerning the prosecution of that war. Contentions like 'America will lead the world to peace' (Dietrich, p.130) and 'you're either with us or with the terrorists' (Steyn, p.174) spoke, albeit more aggressively, to a conviction that America could represent and lead all other nations, suggesting that acquiescence to American global

hegemony was inevitable, desirable and the result of the universal nature of American identity. These observations led to a series of questions that underpin this thesis: where did the presumed right of both factual and fictional American Presidents to speak to and on behalf of all peoples come from? What generates and sustains this sense of universality? How does Hollywood contribute to projecting and sustaining American global hegemony, and is there something particular about the nature of blockbuster films that lends them to the projection of American universality? Were Hollywood blockbusters, like Roland Emmerich's, contributing to a universalisation of American values by consistently and uncritically representing those values as universal?

The primary contention of this thesis is that American global hegemony, which manifests in a position of primacy and unipolarity in military, political-economic and cultural terms, is driven by a dominant metanarrative about America: that America is, historically has been and will always continue to be, more than just a nation; 'America' is also a universal, terminal and providential idea with something beneficent to offer all of mankind. This strand of thought, which I have termed Ameritocracy, runs far back into American history and can be found in the nation's cultural content and geo-political endeavour, with the aspirational rhetoric of the former often undermined or contradicted by the pragmatic exigencies of the latter. American universality has often been in conflict with conceptions of American uniqueness and troubled by an underlying parochialism, yet it has proved to be a remarkably consistent element in the ways in which generations of Americans have been taught about American identity and projected that identity overseas. The purpose of thesis, in both its written and audio-visual components, is to outline the dynamic and potential of Ameritocracy, not necessarily to provide full and final answers to the multitude of questions it generates, and thus leaves much scope for further study.

The concept of Ameritocracy is part of a long critical tradition in the discipline of American Studies to penetrate to the core of American identity and action, and, as such, interacts with a

broad range of theories and theorists across a variety of disciplines, including history, ideology, geo-politics, film theory and cultural analysis. In tracking the historical development of Ameritocracy, this thesis has been informed by Louis Hartz's work on the liberal tradition and by Samuel Huntington's more recent scholarship on American identity, but also attempts to move beyond both analyses by constructing a paradigm that enables the frequently opposed secular and sacred aspects of American identity to be drawn together. As a prism through which we might analyse the unipolar era of American global hegemony, Ameritocracy also relates directly to the work of scholars who have sought to understand the nature of the Pax Americana. Again, whilst drawing on the antagonistic work of scholars like Andrew Bacevich and Francis Fukuyama (both of whom, along with many other theorists, utilise notions of American global exceptionalism) Ameritocracy attempts to move beyond arguments revolving around the nature of American primacy or centred in the exceptionalist paradigm. Indeed, Ameritocracy actually functions as the primary metanarrative that underpins both American exceptionalism (with its constructions of American cultural uniqueness) and American hegemony (which concerns American cultural universality), thus offering potential resolution to the 'paradox of a global USA' (Mazlish, Chanda & Weisbrode, 2007).

There is seemingly an obvious relationship between Ameritocracy and Joseph Nye's conceptions of hard and soft power; clearly, Ameritocracy relates directly to both the rhetorical arguments that rationalise the application of American hard power, and to the persuasive, value-based assertions of American soft power. However, I have utilised Nye's terms sparingly, in order to focus on more specific terms and arguments that have particular relevance to Hollywood film production and its interactions with American ideology, such as hegemony, propaganda, 'commercial aesthetic' (Maltby, 1983), and cultural transfer.

This thesis focuses on how the political meanings and ideological functions of American economic and military primacy (with its rhetoric of universality) become abstracted into the medium of film, which, with its status as an allegedly universal language, has made

Hollywood a particularly fertile breeding ground for Ameritocratic ideas; indeed, the visual medium of cinema, globally dominated by Hollywood, is an extremely effective means to project myths of American hegemony. Moreover, the global aspirations of American blockbuster cinema offer an ideal conduit for the projection of American values as universal values, wherein abstractions of 'America' can combine with the industrial political economy of Hollywood. The appeals of the Hollywood blockbuster speak not only to the universal commercial interests of the American cinema industry, but also to the broader ideological imperatives of the American nation.

Whilst much scholarship has been undertaken concerning the commercial aspects of filmic universality (Maltby, Sklar, Olson and other theorists who have examined Hollywood movies as commercial, aesthetic and ideological objects) little work has been done in analysing how such universality manifests textually. Geoff King's work on the ubiquity of frontier mythology in Hollywood blockbuster narratives had much relevance, as did Slotkin's broader work on the frontier and it's centrality to American national identity. Similarly, Bercovitch's work on myth and the jeremiad, as a 'universal' rhetorical form, was equally pertinent. However, the frontier and the jeremiad are aspects of a broader Ameritocratic impulse in Hollywood cinema; they are both persistently deployed as narrative constructs (as constituents of a monomythic narrative lexicon) in blockbuster movies, but not necessarily as ends in themselves, but rather as textual and contextual means to express and renew American universality.

The first chapter of this thesis will explicate the concept of Ameritocracy and place it within a historical context, whilst exploring its theoretical antecedents and conceptual companions. Chapter two will examine how Ameritocracy inter-relates with theories of Americanisation and globalisation, before exploring how Hollywood developed its commercial and industrial activities in such a way that made national cinema the ideal location for the projection of national ideology. Finally, chapter three will hone in on Roland Emmerich as a case study for

how Ameritocracy manifests textually, and examines his films as examples of how American universality is suffused in the content of Hollywood blockbusters, not just manifesting in the context of their political economy.

CHAPTER ONE

Ameritocracy: The Proof and Projection of Primacy

> In effect, the New Jerusalem had become the New Rome, an identity that did not supplant America's founding purpose but pointed toward its fulfillment – and the fulfillment of history itself. (Bacevich 2003, p.95)

Introduction

It is widely held that as the Cold War ended, the United States of America (US) advanced her global position from 'superpower' to 'hyperpower', ushering in an era of unipolarity and American global primacy. In 1989, upon the cusp of that shift in nomenclature, Francis Fukuyama suggested that in fact

> What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government. (Fukuyama, 1992)

Fukayama's triumphal words inaugurated what appeared to be an unprecedented global consensus concerning the efficacy and legitimacy of liberal democracy as a socio-political system, proven in the cauldron of Cold War combat. Fukuyama has since clarified his argument (2007), stating that '*The End of History* was never linked to a specifically American model of social or political organisation' and thus the post-historical world he envisioned had nothing to do with 'the Americans' continuing belief in God, national sovereignty, and their military'. Nonetheless, neo-conservative elements within the United States political establishment saw the theory as confirmation that the American way had triumphed, not just over communism, but also over all alternative forms of government, and that the world was a better place for it. The 'end of history' thesis, despite its nuances and Fukuyama's later disavowal of its usage by neo-conservatives, could easily be perceived as 'a testament to

idealistic beliefs in the ultimate global triumph of America's liberal political economy… [and as] a celebratory universalistic articulation of the American way' (Youngs, p.218). As President George HW Bush remarked in his 1991 State of the Union address, 'the triumph of democratic ideas in eastern Europe and Latin America, and the continuing struggle for freedom elsewhere, all around the world, all confirm the wisdom of our nations founders.' In short, American principles and values were good for the world. Moreover, Bush's reference to the Founding Fathers suggests that the conditions of American dominance implied (if not explicitly denoted) by Fukuyama's theory were not just the result of winning the Cold War, a particular moment of historical happenstance, but that such dominance marked the fulfilment of the nation's historical and providential purpose to spread freedom and democracy to the world.

Consequently, a preponderance of phrases and paradigms have emerged in the last two decades (particularly since 9/11 and the military actions of the War on Terror, which have brought America's role in the world under heavy scrutiny), seeking to delineate and understand the phenomenon of American global dominance, which, for the purposes of this thesis, I will broadly collate under the umbrella term of American primacy. Many theorists have configured primacy via classical and biblical analogy: as Colossus (Ferguson, 2005) and Goliath (Mandelbaum, 2005), as a new Jerusalem or a new Rome[1] (Bacevich, 2003), each drawing on the traditional myths of Western civilisation and implying an unparalleled sense of scale, reach and power. Many of these analyses also draw obvious comparisons to the comparatively more recent imperial escapades of the European age of empire, comparing and contrasting the status and styles of the empires of the old world with the "empire for/of liberty" of the new world. However, whilst the specific objects of comparison may vary, and debates around whether the American conjugation of primacy is better or fairer than previous

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[1] Comparisons of the US to ancient Rome naturally make one think of filmic representations of the 'eternal city' and its empire, and the ways in which Hollywood handles 'history'. Ridley Scott's epic *Gladiator* (2000) is a classic example: the actual events of history are treated very loosely, with 'Rome' serving instead as the location for a 'universal' (although actually quite American) parable concerning the conflict between tyranny and democracy: "the general who became a slave, the slave who became a gladiator, the gladiator who defied an Emperor."

imperial models (and whether America technically constitutes an empire at all) continue, the fact of American primacy itself is uncontested[2]. It is obviously worth noting that, at time of writing (September 2011), America's economic dominance has been severely tested by the financial crises of the last few years. With the BRIC economies continuing to grow and provide increasing amounts of competition, it seems that, economically at least, American dominance can no longer be assumed.

Culturally, American primacy has often been articulated through the catch-all term 'Americanisation', the sense that through the prolonged and continued exposure to American culture in all its myriad forms, all peoples are becoming more like Americans (in both structural paradigms and cultural values), transformed into *Homo Americanus*. Consequently, Americanisation has been used as both a synonym for globalisation, seen as the engine of transformation, and as an expletive to express fears of homogenisation and cultural imperialism, seen as the potential outcomes of transformation. We should not forget, however, that the original, and arguably primary, focus of the transformative powers of Americanisation has been domestic, referring to the processes of assimilation undergone by immigrant populations to the US. Each usage of the term, external and internal, has had positive and negative attributes; however, that such a process exists and dominates global cultural transfer is indisputable.

In economics, primacy found specific articulation in the 1980s and 1990s through the Washington Consensus, a general orientation of national economies towards market fundamentalism and neo-liberal globalisation. Indeed, given the degree to which capitalism and democracy are intricately entwined in both the ideological rhetoric and the day-to-day

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[2] Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is a paucity of Hollywood films which critically engage with the scale and scope of American primacy, no matter how configured. *Apocalypse Now* (Coppola, 1979) attempted in part to contextualise the Vietnam War within an imperialist paradigm, although it is crucial to note that the most 'anti-imperialist' scene (in which Willard and his compatriots encounter former French colonialists defending their homestead) was entirely cut from the theatrical release. More recently, films like *Syriana* (Gaghan, 2005) and *Lord of War* (Niccol, 2005) have engaged with the geo-political contexts of oil and arms production respectively, and some limited critique of American complicity in anti-democratic processes which sustain both industries, although without recourse to an imperial paradigm.

reality of America, what is most unusual about both Fukuyama and President Bush's triumphalist declarations about liberal democracy is the curious omission of capitalism as the economic component of that system. It seems likely that this is not an acceptance that other forms of economics could work as adequately with liberal democracy, but rather an insinuation that capitalism is so entrenched within the American conjugation of liberalism and democracy, so pervasive and ubiquitous, that to specify it would be redundant[3]. However, the rise of China as an economic power over recent decades suggests that liberalism, democracy and capitalism are not mutually inclusive; the American conjugation of these terms, projected as theoretically universal, is thus conceivably rather parochial.

In foreign policy, the language of primacy has instead revolved around hyperpower and unipolarity, the nature of what some have dubbed the 'American Imperium' and others, in more benevolent terms, the 'Pax Americana'. Irrespective of which expression is put to use, and whether American primacy is represented in a positive or negative light, the focus of the phraseology is clear: in all spheres American primacy is self-evident or, in military terminology, America has achieved 'full spectrum dominance'. Clearly, the manifestations of American primacy are myriad and, at least within the empirical sphere of hard power, axiomatic.

However, American primacy is also hegemonic, a term that is more applicable to the American model than 'empire' as

> hegemony suggests more than dominance in the strictly political military or even political economic senses. There is a sense of leadership. This implies there will be much consensus mixed in with the usual coercion. As well as being feared for its power, the hegemon is also greatly admired for its achievements. So much so that

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[3] Similarly to notions of American empire, there are few Hollywood films that provide a meaningful critique of American consumer-capitalism. Both *Fight Club* (Fincher, 1999) and *American Beauty* (Mendes, 1999) provide somewhat thin analyses of capitalist-materialist culture, and in both cases it seems that the films actually speak more to a perceived emasculation of white male Americans than to the inequities of the capitalist system. The Joker of Nolan's *Dark Knight* (2008) can also be considered as an anti-capitalist in some respects, although as with Tyler Durden in *Fight Club*, his anarchist leanings are presented not as a rational critique, but as the outcome of mental derangement.

others come to emulate the hegemon. In this way the hegemon comes to be widely

regarded as the model for the future. (Slater and Taylor 1999, p.5)

During the Cold War, the West required a hegemon to defeat the threat of communism; American leadership was, predominantly, actively invited. In the absence of that threat, the United States has continued to argue the case for American leadership, with the emulation it suggests implicitly invoked. In his 1992 inaugural address, President Clinton suggested that 'clearly, America must continue to lead the world we did so much to make', referring to the post-communist order as a 'new world'. Similarly, President Obama, speaking at the United Nations in September 2009, stated that 'every nation must know: America will live its values, and we will lead by example'. The importance of American global hegemony and leadership is central to the ways in which American Presidents have articulated American identity to Americans and to the world, particularly in the post Cold War era; this hegemonic viewpoint is not, however, conditional upon the partisan differences between Democrats and Republicans or the particular arrangements of geo-political factors of particular eras (although these contribute to the strength of specific iterations), but stems from something more fundamental. Andrew Bacevich (2003, p.98) notes that when, in Dec 2001, President Bush stated that '"America will lead the world to peace," he was not simply resurrecting some windy Wilsonian platitude. He was affirming the nation's fundamental strategic purpose and modus operandi'.

American leadership, and thereby modelling (and encouragement of emulation) of her socio-economic and political system, is deeply rooted in American national identity, and thus the presumptions of American leadership made by Presidents Clinton and Bush, were not original; they were, in fact, a re-articulation of a predominant theme in American thought regarding the promotion and extension of American principles and values. Matthew Fraser (2003, p.10), utilising Joseph Nye's hard and soft power structure (1990), argues that

recognition of America as a 'hyperpower' is usually based on material facts –

specifically, the superiority of American hard power. Yet America's global

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domination has been achieved largely through non-military means – in short, through the extension, assertion, and influence of its soft power. If hard power, by definition, is based on facts, soft power is based on values. American hard power is necessary to maintain global stability. American soft power… spreads, validates and reinforces common norms, values, beliefs, and lifestyles. Hard power threatens, soft power seduces.

The 'common norms, values, beliefs, and lifestyles' that are being spread, validated and reinforced are bound up with complex and sometimes contradictory notions concerning the *idea* of 'America'; her founding myths and icons, her enduring political and social qualities, and her meaning for the world. It is the contention of this thesis that a dominant strand of thinking running through American social, political and religious thought generates and sustains the idea of America that is being promulgated. This strand, which I have termed 'Ameritocracy', informs the 'sense of leadership' that infuses American hegemony and primacy, and is generated by a tri-fold structure of assumptions about the idea of America. Firstly, that American values are universal, applicable to everyone, everywhere. Secondly, that America is the terminal society; in Fukuyama's terms 'the end point of mankind's ideological evolution' (1989), thus making America a model, in Nye's terms, 'bound to lead' (1990). Thirdly, that American values are also providential; the assumption, or, more appropriately, faith, that America is not only universal and terminal, but was chosen by God to be so. However, it is the contention of this thesis that the three interconnected notions of universality, terminality and providentiality are each problematised, if not rendered paradoxical, by the events of American history and the (un)realities of American self-representation.

Ameritocracy constitutes the major thrust of the prevailing metanarrative of American hegemony, providing the values and assumptions that underpin the gaining and sustaining of primacy. The focus of this thesis, therefore, is not the demonstration of primacy through foreign policy, and the extension of liberal democratic capitalism through the economic,

military and political means at America's disposal, but how the values and assumptions of primacy are projected and proved in American popular culture, specifically Hollywood blockbusters. In this regard, world-systems theory (Wallerstein 1984, Flint and Falah, 2004) offers us a useful, complementary definition of hegemony and the cultural power deployed to sustain it:

> A hegemonic power has its cultural power, the prime modernity. As a hegemonic power, a state takes on the responsibility of defining and disseminating a particular model, or vision, of civilization, known as prime modernity… The ideological basis of the hegemonic power's rule lies in its ability to maintain cultural universality. In other words, hegemonic cultural power rests upon the assumption that the prime modernity is desired by all, beneficial to all and attainable by all. Resistance to prime modernity by any state is a chink in the armor of universality, inevitability and belief in the ability and desire of all to arrange their societies along the model of the hegemonic state. (Flint and Falah 2004, p.1380)

What marks the US out as qualitatively different from previous hegemons, and their unique iterations of prime modernity, is threefold. Firstly, the degree of religiosity and messianism in the American project, particularly its sense of providential destiny is unparalleled, at least since the fall of the Roman Empire. Partly, this religiosity manifests in a broad Christian theology that suffuses much of American public and private life, but much of it is also transposed into an intense civil religion wherein the object of worship is the nation itself. Secondly, due to the development of myriad means of mass communication in the twentieth century, the scale and scope of America's ability to define and disseminate prime modernity has no historical parallel. Finally, American universality was assumed long before hegemony and primacy were practically realised, qualitatively differentiating America from her hegemonic forebears. The Ameritocratic ideas implicit in prime modernity were fundamental to the project and idea of America before the inception of the United States, and thus predated the rise of American power and influence in the twentieth century. Hegemony, and prime modernity, thus merely legitimises American exceptionalism; Americans were arguing for the

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universality of their values and their nation when hegemonic privilege resided overseas with the British, and before them the Dutch. Superpower and hyperpower status has merely delivered in practice what Americans had long believed in theory: that America is not only exceptional, but destined and bound to lead the world.

Ameritocracy in Context:

> If a single theme pervades the history of American thinking about the world, it is that the United States has a peculiar obligation to better the lot of humanity. Call it a Puritan survival, or a sport from the Lockean roots of natural-rights philosophy, or a manifestation of American exceptionalism; but for whatever reasons, Americans have commonly spoken and acted as though the salvation of the world depended on them. (Brands 1998, vii)

Ameritocracy is part of a long critical tradition to attempt to determine the core of American identity. There is a tendency for theorists of American studies to think of the origin of American identity in monolithic terms, often conceived of under the banners of either Americanism or American exceptionalism, or broadly citing either Puritanism or the Enlightenment as the breeding ground of a fundamental American character. Obviously, the intricate diversities of American culture and history mean that any such singular constructions tend towards reductive, all-encompassing notions of American identity, which can exclude the influence of particular groups and ideologies, and obscure social and political conflict in the United States. Moreover, the fact 'all sides appeal to terms such as equality or democracy or liberty should not conceal from us the fundamentally different meanings these terms have in political cultures' (Ellis 1993, p.151) within the United States. However, for external observers of America, this is problematic; looking at America through Hollywood film, as much of the world does, this internal conflict is difficult to perceive, overwhelmed by an outward projection of consensus and cohesion.

The nuanced (and peculiarly American) meanings of equality and democracy, freedom and liberty, are often elided when projected abroad; they become signifiers whose signified content is reduced, or emptied, so that the 'fundamentally different meanings' of the terms are no longer readable. Each term becomes a mere shell, easy to deploy in myriad, sometimes

conflicting contexts, because their meanings are not fixed, but in flux, with a singular and vague reference to 'America' often their only content. 'America' too is a deeply contested term, one that can be filled by the liberal tradition or neo-conservatism, by military power or civil religion, or by any number of discordant or complementary ideas and ideals; however, Ameritocracy offers cohesion to 'America', pulling antagonistic notions together, and assimilating them beneath the banner of a singular, universal nation.

Ironically then, whilst American culture itself is not monolithic, it can be argued that 'America - in its actions and effect on other people around the world - forms an immensely coherent whole' (Sardar and Davies 2003, p.9). Similarly, Hollywood produces a fairly homogenised, standard output that confirms, supports or promotes American hegemony, utilizing Ameritocracy to do so. This output reinforces a notion of a monolithic, mythic America, extending the once *de facto* national motto of 'E Pluribus Unum' into a post-national realm; an 'unum' so large that it's 'pluribus' is planetary in scale (the official national motto, In God We Trust, is also Ameritocratic, and steeped in a providential meaning that conveys a sense of American mission). The exportation of American value systems are also attempts to establish, via the model of American nationalism, what it means to be developed and democratic (the prime modernity), and thereby what it means to be human. Indeed, it is arguable therefore, that American national identity openly invites such singular readings, to absorb conflicting narratives into a unitary, universal consensus.

Bercovitch acknowledges the assimilatory prowess of 'America' in suggesting that 'the special genius of the rhetoric of American consensus… is to co–opt the energies of radicalism; to reabsorb the very terms of the opposition into the promise of the New, that long-nurtured vision of Futurity that carries us forever back, through a procession of sacred landmarks… to the ideological premises of modern democratic liberalism' (1986, cited in Bové, 1992, p.54). Similarly, Louis Hartz (1955), the pre-eminent scholar of American political thought of the mid twentieth century, also focused on the liberal tradition and its

Lockean underpinnings as the consistent element of Americanness, whilst many critics have more broadly discussed the American Creed as the centre of American identity, placing political principles at the heart of American cultural and social life. Some critics, most recently Samuel Huntington (2005), have sought to move beyond creedal definitions, focusing instead on the religious, racial and ethnic aspects of American identity, coagulated under 'Anglo-protestant culture' as a means to explain American uniqueness. David Gelertner (2007) has taken the religious argument even further, arguing that America is not just a nation, but also an explicitly religious, and specifically biblical, idea. Clearly, these definitions constitute extremely contested terrain, with theorists from widely varying viewpoints across the political spectrum arguing for ownership of the different terms. However, each definition draws back to and moves beyond an idea and definition of 'America', not simply as the obvious starting point for an assessment of national character, but as a mythic touchstone, certain aspects of which are deemed unchanging; arguments may vary concerning the source of these aspects, but their nature is seemingly incontestable. Ameritocracy constitutes these fundamental, unchanging aspects of American identity; a profound faith in the universal, terminal and providential nature of the nation and its role in, *and meaning for*, the world.

In this respect, Ameritocracy prefigures exceptionalist and Americanist ideas. It is, in Gramsci's terms, the 'common sense' foundation upon which the ideologies of American exceptionalism and Americanism are built, and the means by which American hegemony is sustained. But hegemony, too, has different contextual meanings. In world-systems theory 'hegemony is the global diffusion of economic, political and cultural practices originating from the activities of one nation-state' (Flint and Falah 2004, p.1381) with prime modernity as 'the integrative power of hegemony, offering cultural products as guidebooks towards an emulation of economic, political, and cultural practices that are deemed to be universally beneficial and applicable.' (Ibid., p.1383)

The emphasis in the world-systems construction of hegemony is on externalities; the projection, distribution and absorption of prime modernity, and the interactions of the hegemon with other nations that reify its universality. However, the Gramscian conception also offers us a way to focus on the internal aspects of hegemony, of how prime modernity will be modelled domestically:

> By hegemony, Gramsci meant the permeation *throughout* society of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs and morality that has the effect of supporting the status quo in power relations. Hegemony in this sense might be defined as an 'organising principle' that is diffused by the process of socialisation into every area of daily life. To the extent that this prevailing consciousness is internalised by the population it becomes part of what is generally called 'common sense' so that the philosophy, culture and morality of the ruling elite comes to appear as the natural order of things. (Boggs 1976, p.39)

These complementary definitions of hegemony remind us that American hegemony is not just something experienced by the rest of the world; it is something firstly, and in many senses more intensely, experienced by the American people themselves. Cultural products are not just 'guidebooks' for emulation, but part of a system of organising principles, instruction manuals for national identity to be internalised by the American population. However, these definitions of hegemony also suggest that the complexities of 'an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs and morality' will necessitate complex representations and projections of that system in cultural products. Even a cursory glance at Hollywood blockbusters, whose primary aim is the provision of simple pleasures, suggests otherwise; complexity is rendered repeatedly into simplicity and predictability in narrative form, content and outcome. Complexity is commercially difficult; on screen, it is simplicity that sells.

In the following subsections, I will outline the relationship of Ameritocracy to two significant theories of American national identity: American exceptionalism and Americanism. Americanisation, that other great summative term used to express both the experience of identity in America and the experience of cultures encountering America in the world, will be

discussed at length in the next chapter, with specific reference to Hollywood. The remaining sections of this chapter will then explore how Ameritocracy consistently manifests in American social, political and cultural thought: its emergence with Puritanism, consolidation in the American Creed, expansion in ideas of the frontier and Manifest Destiny, reification in Wilsonian Internationalism and the onset of the 'American Century' (Luce, 1941), and culmination in the era of American primacy.

Ameritocracy and American Exceptionalism

American exceptionalism is the belief that the United States is qualitatively different from all other nations, based on its unique origin story and socio-political mores, and orientated around 'the idea of the United States as a unique and indeed superior civilization outside the normal historically determined path of human history" (Tyrell 2007, p.65). Many scholars are careful to point out that such definitions of exceptionalism need not necessarily mean superior, just different, and that many, if not most, nations think of themselves as in some way exceptional. However, what truly marks American exceptionalism as different from other notions of national exceptionalism is its Ameritocratic underpinnings, and the ways in which the conception of American universality is not merely content to model qualitative differences, but to share them beneficently with the world; 'the belief (rhetorical or sincere) that America's foreign affairs, unlike those of other nations, are not self-interested but based on a mission to offer the world a better form of society', specifically 'to set an example to the rest of the world, to export American freedom and democracy and so conduct a foreign policy unlike that of any other nation' (Mauk and Oakland 2002, p.153).

Naturally, there are those that refute this version of American exceptionalism, and the notion that Americans have a profound and popular mission to proselytise their model to the rest of the world. Kohut & Stokes outline (using extensive data from the 2005 Global Attitude Project of the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press) the recent and historical disparities between the rhetoric of American 'Influentials' and the opinions of the American general public. 'The American people, as opposed to some of their leaders, seek no converts to their ideology. To be sure, seven in ten Americans think it is a good idea to promote "American-style" democracy in the world, but the American public evinces no missionary zeal for the task' (2006, p.73). However, the distinction between promoting American-style democracy and possessing missionary zeal for the task is negligible; the difference is one of intensity, not sentiment. Moreover, the fact that the American general public may not share

the zeal for universalisation possessed by their leaders is of little relevance, or consolation, to the rest of the world, whose encounters with America are not with the opinions of the American public *per se*. Rather, those that do encounter America out in the world do so through the empirical facts of American hard power and the cultural products and projections of American soft power, from Hollywood movies and hamburgers to popular television and presidential speeches. From the point of reception, the reluctance of the American public to evince an Ameritocratic ideology is almost invisible; the powerful images and ideals, products and perceptions collated under 'America' obscure the diverse opinions and positions of actual Americans. Indeed, even the notion of an "American-style" democracy that has universal applicability is extremely vague, its precise intentions hazy, if not completely hidden behind inverted commas which obscure its real meanings.

There are also obvious conflicts and contradictions at work here, in the interaction between Ameritocracy and exceptionalism. As Tyrell (2007, p.65) suggests, it is paradoxical that 'though American exceptionalism separates the United States from other nations, in political rhetoric American ideals that are rooted in American exceptionalism, such as freedom, liberty and democracy, can be applied as a model for other societies'. So, is it possible for America to be at once unique and universal? The answer always seems to tautologically fold back in upon itself: America is unique *because* of her true universality. American terminality is equally troubled by paradox, for how can America be the final form of human government if it is still evolving, still trying to perfect the ideas of 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness', still seeking 'a more perfect union'? The answer is provided by the teleological nature of American terminality and primarily derives from two sources: the seemingly universal principles of Puritanism, which conveys the nation's spiritual purpose through setting national ideals, and the Enlightenment, which delivers the nation's material purpose through the machinery of liberal democratic capitalism. Both purposes, and the religious and secular ideas of universalism that generate them, feed into a diffuse notion of 'progress', towards an idealistic end, but the terminal point is never, indeed, can never, be reached. It must always be

deferred, so that the moral certainty in the efficacy of progress, which both generates American terminality and justifies its constant deferral, can be sustained. So, America thus becomes the terminal society precisely because of her ability to renew and evolve; each renewal of identity restates American universality, uniting Americans together in their faith in the American idea, in progress and prime modernity, contested as that idea may be.

Ameritocracy and Americanism

Americanism, like exceptionalism, is a profound and steadfast faith in the *idea* of America. In this regard, we can begin to think of 'America' not so much as a nation state, but as a national state of mind, confirmed in American historian Richard Hofstadter's statement that 'it has been our fate as a nation not to have ideologies but to be one' (cited in Huntington 1981, p.25). However, Americanism has a complex relationship with exceptionalism and, as Pieterse (2004, p.124) suggests, 'serves a double function as a summary account of American historical and geographical particulars and as an ideology… As such American exceptionalism is a form of "Americanism" and part of what it purports to describe'. As with exceptionalism, Ameritocracy's relationship to Americanism concerns universality, and the proselytisation of the national faith beyond the national borders; the transference of American specialness from a distinctive representation to a projected, embodied force, and the applications of what are internal, domestic constructs onto external, international realities. If, as Pieterse (2004, p.128) additionally comments, 'Americanism combined with exceptionalism yields a fervent nationalism that is exceptional among contemporary societies, huddled around the Constitution, the presidency, an unusual cult of the flag, and a pop culture of America Number One', Ameritocracy is concerned with how these particularities can be rendered universal. We will see that Hollywood has a particularly crucial role to play here, in establishing that the American, by its very nature, is *already* the universal.

Kazin & McCartin extend the debate, arguing that '"Americanism" has two different meanings. It signifies what is distinctive about the United States (and the colonies and territories that formed it) and *loyalty* to that nation, rooted in a defense of its political ideals,' (2006, p.1) both of which are valid definitions of the term, referencing both exceptionalism and the Creed, but they are primarily internally focused. Hartz spoke, more pertinently, of Americanism in relation to America in the world, and the problems that this internal-external

dichotomy inevitably raises. After more than half a century of global action, his words still ring remarkably true:

> On the world plane itself, however, "Americanism" has had a dual life, which has confused many observers. First of all… it has been characterised by a strong isolationist impulse: the sense that America's very liberal joy lay in the escape from a decadent Old World that could only infect it with its own diseases. This was the spirit that pervaded most men even in the revolutionary age of American history... And yet, in the twentieth century, "Americanism" has also crusaded abroad in a Wilsonian way, projecting itself headlong into the ancient societies of Europe and Asia. The explanation is not hard to find. Embodying an absolute moral ethos, "Americanism", once it is driven on to the world stage by events, is inspired willy-nilly to reconstruct the very alien things it tries to avoid. Its messianism is the polar counterpart of its isolationism… an absolute national morality is inspired either to withdraw from "alien" things or to transform them: it cannot live in comfort constantly by their side. (1955, p.285)

The momentum of Ameritocracy, the insistent urge to actively universalise the idea and ideal of universalism itself, is what truly propels the doctrine of Americanism. Americanism is thus not so much 'driven on to the world stage by events', although these clearly play a part, but rather such events release Americanism from the inertia of isolationism, so that defensive withdrawal from "alien" others is surpassed by an offensive tactic of transformation. As such, Hartz argues, 'Americanism is at once heightened and shattered by the crashing impact of the rest of the world upon it' (Hartz 1955, p.287), a statement perhaps more pertinent now than when he wrote it. The development of an American Imperium or Pax Americana has placed the American national narrative under considerable stress, as pursuit of American interests has seemingly contradicted her ideals. Donald Rumsfeld's contention that 'the United States doesn't do empire' spoke to American principles, not necessarily to their practice.

This sense of duality, of a disconnect between rhetoric and reality, and of two Americas and the problems of resolving them into a coherent whole, is common in American culture, if not essential to American identity. For Walt Whitman, contradiction was fundamental to what it means to be American: 'I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself. I am large, I contain multitudes.' For African- (and other hyphenated) Americans, this 'two-ness' has often been experienced in terms of a DuBoisian 'double consciousness' (1903) wherein the hyphen simultaneously connects and separates the old world from the new, and where the experience of diversity cherished by Whitman is tempered by the realities of how diversity has been historically realised. Similarly, when Mark Twain stated his 'loyalty to the country always, loyalty to the government when it deserves it', he was articulating a like disconnect, one between the concepts of *America* and the United States; one mythical and universal, and making grand promises, the other real and particular, and breaking them. The twentieth century, the 'American Century' (Luce, 1941), brought these dichotomies to the rest of the world as other nations wrestled with processes of Americanisation within their own borders and as America wrestled with the exigencies and implications of the 'truly *American* internationalism' (Ibid., p.260) Luce had called for.

Defining Ameritocracy

In popular nomenclature (inside and outside of the nation), the United States, as in this thesis, is routinely referred to as 'America', a term which more accurately describes the entire hemispheric landmass that lies between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. It has not always been this way. 'The American adjective was not used in the early nineteenth century as it is now, when Bolívar and Hidalgo called themselves Americans. But the dominant application of the term by the denizens of the United States to themselves and their own came to be accepted over time. It grew with the weight of the nation at the expense of Indians and Mexicans. It then reached global dimensions' (Casanova, 1999, p.12). 'America', rather than the more prosaic construct of the US, conjures a mythic identity and immediately places the nation to which it routinely refers within an embryonic post-national context, as a form of global nation. This nature of 'America' as a mythic idea, one capable of transforming the lives of individuals and nations through the provision of a replicable set of values and a model of political economy, is thus not bounded by geography in the same way as other national identities. Even the earliest observers of America observed this fact, with Thomas Payne (1776) remarking that 'the cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind.'

In coupling this idea of 'America' with meritocracy, the government by peoples selected on merit, 'Ameritocracy' grounds this mythic idea of the nation in the political practicalities of its system of government, frequently represented as the creedal basis of exceptionalist identity. Meritocracy is already a concept embedded with core American values and has an obvious relationship with the nebulous construct of the 'American Dream' – free and fair competition on a level playing field, democracy of the most egalitarian form, wherein the hard-working prosper and succeed. Over time, this political idea has developed into a cult of winning in America, of always striving to be number one, even if it's a case of first amongst equals. However, meritocracy pre-supposes notions of equality whilst being simultaneously troubled by them; in order to function effectively there must be equality of access to the

systems of social organisation and the machinery of government. Historically, this has proved easier to promise than to practically deliver. In fact, the cult of winning that meritocracy has unleashed in its American formation necessitates that the majority of people must 'lose' for the system to be sustained, so we should perhaps not be surprised at the recurrent centrality of the jeremiad, with its focus on disparity and inequality, as the most popular form of rhetorical protest in America.

Ameritocracy is thus a suitable fusion of terms that engages with the providential mission and alleged universal status of America, and the method of socio-political organisation by which that mission might be achieved. Furthermore, I contend that Ameritocracy allows for the secular as well as the religious aspects of American identity to maintain coherence - at times the inherited ideas and ideals of Puritanism and the Enlightenment will come into conflict, but at others they are mutually reinforcing, generating an extremely powerful and attractive resonance. The *idea* of America, for all its internal paradoxes and contradictions, appears as a remarkably coherent whole once projected onto the screens of the world, bound together by the flag, and by vague notions of liberty and equality, freedom and democracy. Thus, etymologically, Ameritocracy is the chimera of a mythic and religious notion of 'America', and the empirical, political construction of the United States as a meritocracy. American identity, whether thought of via Americanism or American exceptionalism, is as much a matter of faith as of reason, and interwoven with notions of both spiritual and material progress, both of which have senses of mission and purpose. As we shall see, this confluence of, and conflict between, spirituality and materiality, between America as idea and America as reality, is recurrent, both in American history, and in the popular culture industries and texts that export America overseas.

Ameritocracy begins with (and in) America: the 'city on a hill'.

The ideas of universality and terminality at the heart of Ameritocracy are by no means new to American thought or identity. There is a clearly discernible train of thought from Winthrop's conception of a 'city on a hill' and Tocqueville's belief in America as 'the last, best hope for humanity', through to Wilsonian Internationalism, Fukuyama's end of history thesis, and even President (then Senator) Obama's more recent assertion in a television interview that

> People outside of this country are expressing disappointment because they've got high expectations for America. And they want America to lead; they want America to lead through our values, and through our ideals and through our example. But they have high expectations of us because, I think, that this country is still the last, best hope on earth. (*Late Show with David Letterman*, CBS, April 9th 2007)

Obama's language is particularly telling: his claim that the peoples of the world 'want America to lead' through values, ideals and by example, firmly establishes the assumption of American hegemony, whilst his referencing of Tocqueville as a historical touchstone concerning the importance of America *for* the world, as both the 'last' (terminal) and 'best' (universal) 'hope' (providential) conveys the essence of Ameritocracy. However, Tocqueville's analysis of America in *Democracy in America*, whilst interested in how the 'habits of the mind' (Tocqueville 2000, p.275) necessary for democracy, liberty and equality could be preserved, does not mark the beginning of Ameritocratic thought in the US.

To discover the origins of Ameritocracy we must look back to 1630 and step aboard the 'Arbella' as she makes her perilous voyage to the new world. Before disembarkation, John Winthrop, the first Governor of Massachusetts, gave a sermon ('A Model of Christian Charity') in which he declaimed that 'we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us', a phrase that is widely regarded as the prototypical declaration of American exceptionalism. Winthrop was seeking to prepare those travelling with him for the harsh realities that awaited them, by suggesting that they were engaged in the establishment of a

society that could be a model for all others. Moreover, he contended that this society was predicated on the providential nature of their journey; they had formed a new covenant with God and must live up to their side of the deal to prove themselves worthy of being chosen, for theirs was to be a society prepared for parousia. So, as Huntington contends, 'the Protestant sense of mission has had enormous influence in structuring American perceptions of the world at large and in shaping the efforts both to transform the world and yet remain distinct from it. Many American evangelicals shared a widespread belief that the United States was part of a providential plan to prepare for the coming of Christ' (2005, p.70).

This sense of providentiality stemmed from the Calvinist belief of Winthrop and his compatriots, and its basis in covenantal theology, the idea that salvation stems exclusively from God's covenant of grace with his chosen people, characterised in Calvinism as the 'elect'. This providential identity is therefore in conflict with the meritocratic ideas that would develop later; you were either born as a member of the elect or you were not ('reprobate', in Calvinistic terms), and salvation was based on God's promise, not on personal hard work. This notion of the elect thus houses an uneasy tension; if salvation is pre-destined, what then for the meritocratic aspects of American identity that coalesce under the American Dream, which refute predestination, in favour of placing success under the aegis of free will, individual responsibility and diligent labour? The famous Puritan work ethic thus becomes not a method to gaining 'elect' status, but rather a method to prove that that status had already been conferred, and a means to building a terminal society with eschatological ends.

Calvinistic theology, in particular Calvin's Magnus Opus, the 1540 Institutes of the Christian Religion, would have been extremely familiar to Winthrop and provided the basis for his sense of profound providentiality. Moreover, this work also contained a justification for rebellion to tyrants; an argument implicated over two centuries later in the American Revolution, demonstrating the degree to which Calvinist theology had suffused American identity. Nineteenth century American historian George Bancroft even went so was as to

proclaim Calvin 'the father of America', stating that 'he who will not honor the memory and respect the influence of Calvin knows but little of the origin of American liberty.'

Calvinism also provided the proto-American nation with a rhetorical form of protest that would become key to the American project, and thus a means by which the contradictions of Ameritocracy could seemingly be resolved: the jeremiad. The contradictory proclamation of American uniqueness and universalism embodied by the city-on-a-hill paradigm introduced a dichotomy between rhetoric and reality, between the sacred destiny of America and how this might be fulfilled in a secular society grounded not in providence, but in the day-to-day practicalities of survival. 'The Puritans' concept of errand', argues Bercovitch, 'entailed a fusion of secular and sacred history. The purpose of their jeremiads was to direct an imperilled people of God toward the fulfilment of their destiny, to guide them individually toward salvation, and collectively toward the American city of God'[4] (1978, p.9). So, whilst the modern American jeremiad is usually constructed in less explicitly religious terms, drawing on the sacramental texts of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution rather than the bible, it still functions in the same way, by calling attention to any disparity, As such, the jeremiad has been repeatedly mobilised by various groups in myriad contexts (religious, social, economic, racial, class), each seeking to hold the republic up to its founding promises.

Winthrop also partially pre-dated the Founding Fathers in his outline of how his congregation (which would later expand itself into America, both mythic and geographical) could fulfil their covenant with God and not suffer his wrath:

> For this end, we must be knit together, in this work, as one man. We must entertain
>
> each other in brotherly affection. We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our
>
> superfluities, for the supply of others' necessities. We must uphold a familiar

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[4] Terrence Malick's *New World* (2005) begins in 1607, with the Jamestown colonists, and thus historically predates Winthrop. However, Captain Newport's speech to his crew upon touching ground in Virginia channels the 'city on a hill', and touches briefly on several key elements of the Ameritocratic underpinnings of America's founding mythology, particular with regard to universality and providentiality: 'Look beyond these gates; Eden lies about us still. We have escaped the old world and its bondage. Let us make a new beginning and create a fresh example for humanity. We are the pioneers of the world, the advanced guard sent on through the wilderness to break a new path.'

commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality. We must

delight in each other; make others' conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn

together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and

community in the work, as members of the same body.

His language here is redolent of the same universalism that manifests in the self-evident truths of the Declaration of Independence, albeit with what many modern Americans might perceive as a disconcerting socialistic slant. His references to 'brotherly affection', 'familiar commerce' and the repetition of 'together' certainly lack the focus on individualism that world develop in American identity over the coming centuries, but we can readily perceive in his words how Enlightenment philosophy principles (particularly those of freedom and personal responsibility) would find particularly fertile ground in the proto-American nation.

It is crucial to note that Winthrop, writing at a time long before there was a geo-political entity called the United States of America, was referring to the behaviour of his congregation and their church, not a nation. However, 'America', as a mythic land of abundance, a new world full of promise, provided by providence, was a fresh conception that seemingly offered an opportunity for all mankind. Winthrop's words demonstrate one of two arguments concerning the nature of this opportunity; that America should serve as a model to better the lot of humanity by focusing on herself in order to perfect her society. Brands (1998) terms this argument 'exemplarist', and counterposes it with that of the 'vindicators', those who believe that the fulfilment of the American mission can only be achieved by carrying the light of liberty, the beacon lit by the 'city on a hill', out into the rest of the world. Ameritocracy is concerned with this process of vindication, in terms of the universalisation of American values, the extension and application of the *American Way* beyond the geographical borders of the US.

Winthrop's 'city on a hill', the beginning of the American 'rhetoric of mission' (Bercovitch 1978, p.8), whilst sowing the seeds for almost four centuries of exceptionalist thought and providing the initial teleological thrust to American identity, also embedded tensions within

the nascent idea of 'America' which would inform its development and maturity. By establishing the proto-American Puritans as a chosen people, one with a mission to model society for all humanity, Winthrop established the Ameritocratic principles of providentiality, terminality and universality; simultaneously, he was also implicitly defining their new identity through antithesis and binarism, for to be chosen it follows axiomatically that others are not. How then could universality be reified? How could others follow their example, copy their model, if only the Puritans had a special covenant with the Lord? This particularity within the universalist idea is a problematic contradiction that lies at the heart of Ameritocracy and can be easily observed in the cultural output of American media[5].

The jeremiad, a frequent narrative form used in Hollywood blockbusters, reveals a similar conflict: 'The economy of the jeremiad is a closed one and it's essentially a conservative model of protest. You start from the principle that you're comparing the American reality against the American ideal, but the American ideal is guaranteed. America is good, America is right, and so patriotism is your starting point for protest and in that sense it means that if all these social groups are participating in the same economy, there's only so far critique can go' (Hartnell, 2011: *Ameritocracy*). As we will see, Hollywood blockbusters frequently invite global audiences to participate in this 'universal' form of protest, but via a universality that is paradoxically parochial, referring back to guaranteed American ideals and the light of liberty that emanates from the city on a hill.

Tellingly, the phrase 'city on a hill' has been used by various American politicians of the twentieth century. In 1961, when President-Elect, John F. Kennedy stated in an address to the

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[5] *Star Trek*, an American media franchise that has (to date) spawned six television series and eleven motion pictures over almost half a century, perfectly embodies this contradiction. As a galactic space series, the franchise appears to have obvious 'universal' connotations (the United Federation of Planets, central to the narrative, is seemingly an idealised version of the United Nations, extrapolated out to a galactic scale), but its details are particularly American in origin. Indeed, the whole origin of human (and other alien) life is linked directly to American mythology: in 'The Chase' (Season 6, Episode 20 of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*) a plotline is explored wherein a precursor race 'seeded' the galaxy with its genetic material, explaining why most life-forms encountered by the Enterprise are bipedal hominids. Captain Picard, analysing an archaeological artefact (which resembles a Russian doll) prior to this discovery, muses on the phrase 'from the one, many emerge': the entire *Star Trek* universe is thus built upon the premise of *E Pluribus Unum*, a central tenet of Ameritocracy.

General Court of Massachusetts that '...I have been guided by the standard John Winthrop set before his shipmates on the flagship Arbella three hundred and thirty-one years ago, as they, too, faced the task of building a new government on a perilous frontier… we are setting out upon a voyage in 1961 no less hazardous than that undertaken by the Arbella in 1630'. Similarly, President Ronald Reagan, in his farewell address, referenced the phrase, referring to Winthrop as 'an early freedom man'; two decades later, in 2008, Sarah Palin used the phrase again, via reference to Reagan. Almost four centuries on from its original enunciation, the 'city on a hill', and its Ameritocratic sentiments, still resonate profoundly in American national identity, and in the ways in which America presents this identity to the world.

Revolution and Independence: Crying Out for the Creed

Universality and terminality alone, however, cannot tell us about the content of American values, rather they only provide the structural foundations. The superstructure built upon these values is what we commonly regard as the 'American Creed', 'with its principles of liberty, equality, individualism, representative government, and private property' (Huntington 2005, p.41). So, whilst Winthrop's words may have sown the seeds of Ameritocracy, they are largely unfamiliar to the world. The language of the American Creed, however, is well known and, for many critics, though not all, constitutes the centre of American identity, culture and exceptionalism. Embodied in phrases with clear universalist pretensions like 'Life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness' and 'All men are created equal', and codified in the Declaration of Independence, Constitution and Bill of Rights, the American Creed is a powerful repository of precepts that generations of Americans, and arguably many peoples outside the United States, have benefitted from. Polls show that 'Americans are fiercely proud of their national experience and overwhelmingly convinced that their Constitution, free elections, and the free enterprise system are major reasons for the nation's political and economic success in the last century' (Kohut and Stokes 2006, p.122). The American Creed, however, is more than just a political document, and more than mere 'truth, justice and the American Way'[6]. Indeed, the Creed is more akin to a hallowed sacramental text, as handed down by the wise old prophets of the republic, the Founding Fathers, whose alliterative capitalisation suggests that these were not just mere men, but hagiographic figures. Again, the fusion of the sacred and the secular, which so typifies American identity, is made manifest.

For Ameritocracy, the Creed is the flesh around the bones of universality and terminality; Ameritocracy confirms the urge to universalise, the Creed largely supplies the content of that

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[6] Emerging in the Superman comic book series, this phrase is uttered in *Superman the Movie* (Donner, 1978) by the eponymous hero, only for Lois Lane (Margot Kidder) to retort that 'you're going to end up fighting every elected official in this country'. It was deployed with similar irony in *Superman Returns* (Singer, 2006), as 'truth, justice, and all that stuff', mocking the self-importance of the line and evading jingoistic interpretation.

universalisation, enshrining as it does an array of social, political, religious and economic freedoms. Whether or not the Creed truly is the centre of American identity is debatable; that the Creed forms the primary content of how America advertises, exports, sells and seeks to extend itself overseas, however, is not nearly as contentious. Whether conjugated politically as 'democracy promotion', economically in terms of expansion of free market capitalism, or through a myriad of cultural products that represent the American Way, the tenets of the American Creed (often boiled down to a triumvirate of liberty, equality and democracy) are central to the national narrative America tells itself and the world, particularly in regard of universality.

Huntington (2005, p.41) perceives the Creed as developing from the settlers (he is careful not to use the word 'immigrant') who founded the nation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with its primary elements fundamentally identical to Britain: Protestantism, a strong work ethic, the English language and British institutions of law and government. 'Out of this culture', Huntington argues, 'the settlers developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the American Creed with its principles of liberty, equality, individualism, representative government, and private property.' These principles arose as America broke from Britain, their unique civic and political character finally differentiating the new world from the old, in ways that the religious and racial aspects of American identity could not. Consequently, 'the creedal definition allows Americans to hold that theirs is an "exceptional" country because unlike other nations its identity is defined by principle rather than ascription and, at the same time, to claim that America is a 'universal' nation because its principles are applicable to all human societies' (Huntington 2005, p.48). Huntington suggests, therefore, that the alleged applicability of the tenets of the Creed to all peoples, led to claims of American universality, but he errs in his historical sequencing. The Creed merely made manifest the sense of universality God's providence had provided; offering a construct in the day-to-day practicalities of the American state that would mirror the longstanding spiritual convictions of the American soul.

Huntington is rightly wary of definitions of American identity that rely solely on the Creed; there are ethno-cultural, racial, economic and other socio-political factors that have also greatly influenced that identity. However, it is the Creed that predominantly constitutes the values that are exported to the world as universal; the aspects of America that are to be universalised are to be found in Creedal definitions of American identity, and it is these aspects (liberty, freedom, democracy and capitalism) that the rest of the world encounters during processes of Americanisation. The Creed originates from a range of diverse, sometimes conflicting, sources - the bible, 'settler' culture, Enlightenment thought, and broader myths of progress inherited from Western civilisation generally - that have embedded it with the potential to have a profound impact beyond America's shores, both in the old world of Europe and elsewhere. It's founding premise, that 'All men are created equal', has obvious universal appeal and application, even if the latter was, and is, considerably harder to enforce than the former is to argue. Indeed, the promise of America laid down in the Creed, acted as an invitation to countless immigrants to take part in the American experiment and bask in the light of the new Colossus: 'From her beacon-hand/Glows world-wide welcome', as it says below the Statue of Liberty. In this sense, the American Creed has come to function not only as the pre-eminent national narrative of the US, but also as a post-national declamation of America as a global nation. Needless to say, this dual function is problematic.

The Creed is paradoxical in its universality. If 'All men are created equal' is the central and self-evident tenet of the Creed, why has true equality proved so elusive in America, and the notion of 'American' more often exclusive than inclusive?[7] If, as many have argued, the Creed is at the centre of American exceptionalism, how then can it truly have universal application, if this universality is conditioned by geographic, civic and cultural particularity?

[7] Elements of American popular culture have openly mocked this paradox. The *Family Guy* episode 'Peter's Progress' has Griffin Peterson say the following words on arrival in America: 'We're going to build a new settlement. We'll have a happy new life, and we'll have equal rights for all – except blacks, Asians, Hispanics, Jews, gays, women, Muslims, um, everybody who's not a white man. And I mean *white* white, so no Italians, no Polish. Just people from Ireland, England and Scotland, but only certain parts of Scotland and Ireland. Just full-blooded whites. No, you know what, not even whites. Nobody gets any rights. Ah, America!'

And yet, the Creed, and Ameritocracy, also possesses an assimilatory prowess that seemingly resolves these paradoxes, or at least elides them within the American national narrative. In *Ameritocracy*, Neil Campbell (in reference to Paul Giles and an 'ever-widening circle of 'American-ness') discusses how 'America has traditionally overcome these critiques of its own identity politics by simply 'adding-in'... if we've left out the Hispanics, we add them in; and if we've left out the African-American, we add them in and we increase the circle. But the circle is still there, it's still this metaphor of closed-ness.' Like the jeremiad, the circle of American-ness is a closed economy; all resistance is reabsorbed into the American idea with a Whitmanesque shrug. In order to render 'America' into a coherent whole, it has been necessary to draw a tight boundary (which we could regard as a 'frontier') around the word, delineating what is and what is not 'America'. The Creed has functioned in part, therefore, as a gatekeeper to 'America', conferring rights and responsibilities to those inside its boundary, and helping to construct the fundamentals of American identity.

Clearly, there is more to American identity than the Creed. However, refutation of the centrality of the Creed to that identity is contradicted by its centrality to how America *represents* itself, domestically and internationally. Furthermore, such refutations underestimate the ability of the Enlightenment principles that underpin the Creed to constantly adapt, to renew its universalism, and thereby to allow 'for diverse ethnic groups to share common connections as Americans, without losing their links to older allegiances and identities' (Campbell and Kean 1997, p.47). The jeremiad is fundamental within this renewal process, and within the notion of creedal assimilatory prowess; by holding the nation up to its own principles, delineated by the Creed, and upon inevitably finding disparity, America can simultaneously renew the contract with the people and the covenant with God, the secular and the sacred aspects of universalism combined in an affirmation, anew, of American identity. The terms of 'liberty', 'equality' and 'democracy', therefore, are under constant negotiation as multifarious racial, religious and ethnic groups seek to hold the United States up to the word of 'America'. By consistently declaiming America as universal, terminal and

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providential, Ameritocracy thus reiterates the Creed in diffuse cultural forms, reinforcing American exceptionalism and continuing to offer the promise of America to successive generations of citizens, at home and abroad. America is under a constant process of renewal as she attempts to resolve the riddle of *E Pluribus Unum*, at home and abroad.

The Frontier and Manifest Destiny – Testing the Boundaries of the Universal

> American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character. (Turner, 1893)

Myths and notions of the frontier have proved central to American identity, and their persistent recurrence in American culture is well documented (Slotkin, 1973, 1985 and 1992, and King, 2000). The earliest settlers existed almost exclusively in a frontier, with the old world and the Atlantic ocean to the East, and the vast, sprawling continent with its wilderness and 'savage' inhabitants to the West. The frontier is the point at which American identity is renewed and regenerated, where universality can be tested, and is thus so fundamental to American identities that ubiquity almost renders it invisible. In this regard, elements of Turner's thesis still resonate today; 'the perennial rebirth' he discusses is crucial, for it enables the continuous processes of negotiation that Americanisation entails, sweeping away the corruption and distraction of the old world and beginning again in the new. Indeed, the very conception of the 'new world' embodied an idea of frontier, a *terra incognita* and *tabula rasa* at the extreme limit of the known. The frontier establishes a binary line between what is and what is not America (in both its geographic and mythic aspects), and thus functions as both a defensive and offensive concept, delineating where the boundary of 'civilisation' lies, whilst simultaneously urging its transgression and effacement. Consequently, the physical and conceptual frontier troubles notions of universality: how can America be truly universal and encompass all, when there is so much that lies beyond her boundaries?

As more territory was added to the early states (particularly the vast area of land that constituted the 1803 Louisiana Purchase), the geographic frontier was pushed back as American civilisation advanced. But this expansion was not perceived by Americans to be

aggressive colonial action, in the exploitative mould of the European powers, but merely the mapping of a Jeffersonian 'empire of liberty' on to territory, according to the providential mission of the nation. This process of expansion was supported by both the Monroe doctrine (that America should protect against further imperial incursions into the American hemisphere by European powers, inaugurated by President Monroe in 1823) and the doctrine of 'Manifest Destiny', coined in 1845 by John L. O'Sullivan. O'Sullivan, the editor of the Atlantic Review, wrote that it is 'our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly millions' (cited in Pratt, 1927). The doctrine was broadly accepted, as many 'sincerely believed that by enlarging the sphere of American sovereignty they were contributing to the betterment of the human race' (Brands 1998, p.11). Manifest Destiny, therefore, is an articulation of a prototypical American prime modernity: the testing of American universality in an increasingly broad geographical area. Eventually, once the United States had fully reified itself from 'sea to shining sea', the doctrine would culminate in America's short-lived Imperial manoeuvres in the Pacific at the end of the nineteenth century; empire in the traditional sense of extraterritorial expansion and colonisation proved *too* contradictory, even for a nation as fraught with internal paradox as the United States. The lessons learned from these imperial exercises would be applied in Wilsonian internationalism the broad doctrine which fundamentally still guides American foreign policy.

Manifest Destiny is a clear articulation of the Ameritocratic principles of universality and providentiality, and reveals similar contradictions as those expressed by the 'city on a hill' paradigm. Initially, the doctrine was deployed to justify the annexation of Texas from Mexico; its universal ideas, and its professed aim to improve the lot of others by extending the American sphere, was tempered by the racial overtones of the war that ensued. These are revealed in the comments of President Polk at the end of the war in 1848, who suggested that had the territory remained in Mexican hands it would have remained of 'little value to her or to any nation, whilst as part of our Union they will be productive of vast benefits to the

United States, to the commercial world, and to the general interests of mankind' (cited in Slater and Taylor 1999, p.21). The implication here is clear; Mexicans, like the Indians before them, are inferior to American Anglo-Saxons, and thus for the world to improve America must have a greater share of it, in both territory and influence. In this instance, as at many points in American history, we can see that American universality is paradoxically particular and exclusive.

American identity, as espoused by the 'city on a hill' paradigm and the American Creed, marks America out as a global nation from her inception; America is both an aspirational and invitational entity in ways that no other nation has ever been and, because America exists *in* and *for* the world, no longer needs to be. Even before the frontier was closed and the formal, physical boundaries of the nation had been established, America was using hard and soft power to psychologically extend the boundaries of Americanness to the rest of the world, extending the providential tenets of Manifest Destiny and its claims to 'a right such as that of the tree to the space of air and earth suitable for the full expansion of its principle and destiny of growth' (O'Sullivan, 1845, cited in Pratt 1927), adding additional meanings to, and versions of, Americanism and Americanisation.

However, though Manifest Destiny had material limitations, the concept of the frontier it entailed has proved to be extremely mobile, demonstrating a mythic propensity that liberated it from mere geography:

> The original frontier was defined in terms of the availability of allegedly 'free', open or 'empty' landscapes into which it was possible to keep moving. The closure of the domestic historical frontier, officially announced in 1890, led to the creation of new frontiers, both imaginary and real. (King 2000, p.6)

The closing of the frontier also brought to a head an ongoing argument in American culture, which we might think of as the crisis of exceptionalism. Should America merely model its universal status and be content to be a global nation in example only, or should America go

boldly forth into the world, carrying the beacon of liberty and bringing its light to all people? Should the American people be 'exemplars' or 'vindicators' (Brands, 1998)? Unequivocally, the geo-political events of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have seen the argument settled, thus far, in the vindicators favour. Moreover, the missionary heart of Ameritocracy, the profound urge to proselytise, would carried the concept of the frontier beyond the geographical boundaries of the United States, just as the name 'America' always suggested.

Ameritocracy and Wilsonian Internationalism: All Roads Lead to the New Rome

> If the United States counts on its military dominance to foster conditions conducive to the Wilsonian project, presidents have seldom viewed military power *per se* as the actual agent of transformation. In this regard, the second, or ideological component of U.S. strategy may capture fewer headlines, but is the more important. (Bacevich 2002, p.78).

Conceptually, Ameritocracy is also linked directly to what is commonly termed Wilsonian Internationalism, or the 'Wilsonian project'. The work of Andrew Bacevich in respect of the Wilsonian project, and its relationship to American primacy, has proved particularly pertinent to this study. The ideological component to which Bacevich refers above is contingent on a similar set of assumptions as those postulated to exist within Ameritocracy, although more tempered within the realm of socio-economics. All members of the U.S. foreign policy elite, argues Bacevich, have stuck steadfast to four basic convictions for almost a century. The first two precepts are interconnected: there are 'no practical alternatives' to capitalism and liberal democracy (implicitly understood to mean their specifically American-styles). The third follows on from these, stating that liberal-democratic capitalism is universally applicable. The final precept is that American 'security, prosperity and continued pre-eminence' can only be guaranteed by ensuring 'universal adherence to this American (or Western) model of political economy' (Ibid.)

Ameritocracy is clearly linked directly to these Wilsonian convictions, and can be conceived of as the soft power, cultural manifestation of them; through consistent advocacy, promotion and proselytizing of the universality of the American idea, Ameritocracy functions as the primary metanarrative of hegemony and as an agent of transformation that will ensure American 'security, prosperity and continued pre-eminence'. Its promises of terminality and universality serve as the moral and ideological compass that directs other nations to the

beacon of America – it says 'come, be like us'. However, it is also the contention of this thesis that, much like the Wilsonian project, the universality expressed by Ameritocracy is inherently contradictory; the admirable sentiments it embodies are tempered by and contrasted with American self-interest. 'Despite the frequent allusions to liberty in… justifying the use of American power,' Bacevich argues, 'the architects of U.S. policy in the 20th century never viewed empire as an exercise in altruism.' Similarly, Chomsky has outlined how a primary tenet of the Wilsonian worldview is to produce "open societies", which, 'in the true meaning of the term are societies that are open to U.S. economic penetration and political control. Preferably, these "open societies" should have parliamentary democratic forms, but this is a distinctly secondary consideration' (1987, p.6). Acquiescence to American hegemony is of far more importance than mimicry of the American model; for all its professed universality, Ameritocracy is ultimately self-interested and self-referential.

Furthermore, in keeping with the Chomskian logic concerning the precepts of the Wilsonian project, 'universal' is often therefore merely a euphemism for 'American', and vice versa. 'In the eyes of Wilson and his heirs, to distinguish between American ideals (assumed to be universal) and American interests (increasingly global in scope) was to make a distinction without difference' (Bacevich 2003, p.96). This obfuscation of definitions, between ideals and interests, between ends and means, and between the universal and the American, is a frequent theme in the proselytizing Hollywood texts that this thesis will engage with, but it is also a common element of American identity and self-perception. 'Americans believe,' argues Jedediah Purdy, 'somewhere below the level of articulation, that every human being is born as American, and that their upbringing in different cultures is an unfortunate, but reversible accident.' Ameritocracy establishes a sort of equation of euphemisms, wherein 'universal' equals 'American', and 'American' equals 'human', or at least fully, matured, human. Consequently, Americans 'have always been inclined to believe that they are the world's universal nation' (Purdy 2003, p.105), an attitude that Purdy configures as 'parochial

universalism', wherein full humanity is available to all through the American model. All that need be done is accept American primacy.

For some critics, the equivalence made between American and human is exceedingly disconcerting: 'to define the idea of America as *the* future, everyone's future, is an arrogant denial of the freedom of others, and of the potential of the present to create alternative futures in the complex image of the whole world and all its peoples' (Sardar and Davies 2003, p.10). So, whilst the Ameritocratic notion of universality may stem, in part, from admirable Enlightenment principles, and possibly even flourish within the extremely diverse society of America, there is an obvious tension at work: ostensibly America, and the capitalist system it promotes and promulgates, may welcome global variety, however 'in (the) faith that being American is humankind's natural condition, (Americans) have difficulty appreciating the intense attachment that people may feel to a very different nationality, language, or social order.' (Purdy 2003, p.110)

Prior to Wilson's Presidency, in 1898 (and therefore in the midst of America's turn-of-the-century imperial escapades), Senator Albert J. Beveridge famously declaimed that American 'institutions will follow our flag on the wings of commerce. And American law, American order, American civilization, and the American flag will plant themselves on shores hitherto bloody and benighted, but by those agencies of God henceforth to be made beautiful and bright.' The messianic fervour, 'jingoistic hyperbole' (Iriye, p.32) and colonial paternalism in Beveridge's words may seem inappropriate and anachronistic to modern ears, but the fundamental sentiment behind them has remained unchanged. American foreign policy rhetoric may not refer explicitly to American actions and institutions as 'agencies of God', but the profound sense of mission evoked by Beveridge is still much in evidence. The wings of commerce still flap and flutter, and the seeds of American institutions have been sown the world over. Materially, this has been accomplished through the consistent and often ruthless

application of American hard power, but the ground has also been prepared by the Ameritocratic value structures of American soft power.

Beveridge, on the cusp of the American Century, was at the start of the Wilsonian wave, a groundswell of belief in American values bulwarked by American industrial, commercial and social progress. At the turn of the twentieth century, 'American liberty received further vindication by the United States' emergence as the world's richest and most powerful nation. American freedom was now no longer to be a passive model, but an active force to emancipate peoples within their own borders. Instead of the world coming to the United States, America now took its military and moral standing to the world' (Foley 1991, p.13). As the American Century wore on, and two world wars had converted mere progress into superpower status, American global hegemony and primacy was finally and fully conferred with the end of the Cold War. The onset of the unipolar moment seemed to have brought the Wilsonian vision to reality, the creation of a global Pax Americana, a peace built on American military, economic and moral strength and leadership.

CHAPTER TWO

Ameritocracy, Hollywood and Americanisation

Introduction

Any thesis concerned with the potential universalisation of American values is, of course, talking primarily about processes of Americanisation. This term, however, is historically and culturally loaded, with numerous interpretations and associations stretching back over a century. Americanisation has a historically internal function, as a set of processes of assimilation in which 'all ethnic groups could be incorporated in a new American national identity, with specific shared beliefs and values, and that this would take preference over any previously held system of beliefs' (Campbell & Kean 1997, p.47). This traditional melting-pot conception of Americanisation has yielded to a more pluralist, multicultural conception of American identity, with hybridity not homogeneity at its centre, such that we should perhaps more properly refer to American *identities* in the plural. However, tensions between these two internal definitions of how an individual becomes American have proved persistent; how much of the old world should be retained upon arrival in the new? How much transformation is necessary? Such tensions also reveal that when Americanisation moves beyond America there are no singular definitions of the cultural encounters that ensue; Americanisation is rather a network of interconnected and polysemic possibilities. Americanisation, even for Americans, is a matter of constant negotiation.

Building and sustaining the Pax Americana of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has been contingent upon persuading other nations of a simple axiom: what is good for America is good for the world. Other nations should therefore acquiesce to American leadership; it is after all in their best interest. Such acquiescence is, however, more than a mere reluctant acceptance of American leadership; it ideally involves some acculturation of American values, an 'Americanisation' that involves the transformation, although not

necessarily the complete replacement, of indigenous values. This sense of a required or desirable change is the consistent element to any definition of Americanisation, intra-, inter- or extra-cultural. As such, it is possible to perceive 'the idea of Americanisation as transformation: an altered state of personal consciousness of national identity; or a change in the character and even structure of a nation's culture as it feels the effect of the "idea of America" projected abroad' (Melling and Roper 1996, p.1). However, if, on an intra-cultural level, 'Americanisation is the outcome of personal acculturation which involves the willing acceptance of a new national identity' (Ibid., p.6), what happens on the extra-cultural level, where such acculturation is not desired, where the people are unwilling? If, internally, 'to become an American involves regeneration: to become Americanised is to be utterly transformed' (Ibid: 6), how can external Americanisation succeed where transformation is openly, even violently, resisted? How can American universality be proved?

Rothkop (1997, p.5) outlines in general terms how the Pax Americana might be sustained through the establishment of commonalities:

> It is in the general interest of the United States to encourage the development of a world in which the fault lines separating nations are bridged by shared interests. And it is in the economic and political interests of the United States to ensure that if the world is moving towards common telecommunications, safety and quality standards, they be American; that if the world is becoming linked by television, radio and music, the programming be American; and that if common values are being developed, they be values with which Americans are comfortable.

Rothkop's suggestion of 'shared interests' and 'common values' in the construction of a Pax Americana 'in the general interest of the United States', hints at the universality within Ameritocracy. However, his argument here stops short of its logical inference: the most efficacious way to develop *common* values with which Americans are truly comfortable is to generate them from explicitly *American* values, rather than form them in communion with other national value systems. Ameritocracy thus has a primary role to play in making the

world comfortable with American values, rather than, as Rothkop suggests, making Americans comfortable with 'common values'. Ameritocracy suggests 'common values' already exist, and they are American. Equally telling is the sequencing of the types of commonalities that can, or should, be established; starting from a broad premise of political economy, Rothkop first outlines a technological and structural commonality (telecommunications) and its usage (the somewhat nebulous notion of 'safety and quality standards') before moving onto the content that such technology can transmit (programming). Finally, and most crucially, come the 'common values' that content contains. Rothkop's conflation of these processes masks the inherent Americanness that 'common' actually refers to; these commonalities then are in fact a series of Russian dolls, with American values nested inside larger 'common' or 'universal' structures that, seemingly deracinated from their national (American) specificities, are more palatable to other nations and thereby easier to adopt. In this way the United States can argue that what is occurring through the adoption of these common processes is not Americanisation, but globalisation; that America leads the charge of commonalities is merely historical happenstance, and a reflection of a benevolent Ameritocratic urge towards universalism, not the product of aggressive imperial desire.

For critics like Rothkop, the negotiations that constitute Americanisation are a benevolent force, progressing the world towards a mutually beneficent Pax Americana; a world governed by international law and transnational co-operation, marked by shared values and common purpose. For others, Americanisation concerns the gradual merging of indigenous national identities into a global American monoculture in which we all consume the multifarious products of American popular culture – music, movies, television, fast food – and exist in a bland, dumbed-down and homogenised cultural environment. 'An American monoculture would inflict a sad future on the world,' Regis Debray argues, 'one in which the planet is converted to a global supermarket where people have to choose between the local ayatollah and Coca-Cola' (cited in Fraser 2003, p.71), and in so doing runs the risk of mistaking ubiquity for aggressive monocultural universalism, whilst also possibly falling into the trap of

cultural imperialism (even as he tries to decry it) by insinuating that recipient cultures will be reduced to binaristic choices. However, cultural transfer is a complex and multi-layered process, not simple and uni-directional; it is not a case of either/or, but curious blendings of both. The duality that Debray rightly observes is rather a case of simultaneous, intertwined cultures, with American culture functioning as a form of lingua franca, such that whilst 'English is the world's second language… American culture is the other global second language – a shared patois' (Purdy 2003, pp.103-104).

Ameritocracy can be considered as both a specific aspect of the vast and nebulous set of processes that constitute Americanisation, but also as a metanarrative that drives those processes. So, if Americanisation is a set of processes, Ameritocracy is thus a rhetorical form that accompanies and infuses them, and is both the motivation for, and outcome of, Americanisation: absorption into the American universal. Ameritocracy is thus an ideological construct, the prevailing metanarrative that attempts to explain the efficacy of American values and legitimise their ubiquity, so that their accrual is normalised by the recipient individual or culture. All versions of Americanisation involve some sense of this accrual; the transmission of American values and their assimilation, emulation or utilisation. As we shall see, Hollywood blockbusters are perfect vehicles for these transmissions of American prime modernity; agents of Ameritocracy, blockbusters dress American stories in the rainbow robes of 'universal' narrative, projecting the desirability and inevitability of the American Way.

Forms of Americanisation

There are at least two forms of 'Americanisation' as encountered by other nations; one concerns structural change, which has historically come first, and the other cultural and moral transformation, which is a slower, cumulative process that follows (Garnham 2000). Any such division is of course somewhat illusory; each component inevitably involves the other, in some sense and degree. Indeed, in strict Wilsonian rhetoric these two aspects should accompany each other 'on the wings of commerce' (Beveridge, 1898, cited in Iriye, 2007, p.32). In reality, however, the particular value structures of individual groups and nations have often proved to be of less concern to American corporate and political interests; for these agencies, the acceptance of certain market principles, and of American hegemony, is of far more importance than the acceptance of American values, either in particular manifestation or in totality.

Consequently, freedom and democracy have proved to be flexible notions in regard to processes of Americanisation. Perhaps fittingly for a globalised capitalist-consumer marketplace, 'freedom' is not a one-size-fits-all generic concept, but rather something that can be tailored to suit specific manifestations. For example, the structural freedoms that underpin the American, now global, economic model of liberal democratic capitalism – free trade and free markets – do not necessarily require concomitant cultural freedoms for the individuals within societies seeking to integrate more fully into the globalised economy. Even though American leaders may pay frequent lip-service to the 'liberal' and 'democratic' aspects of liberal democratic capitalism as a general system or model, they have not been historically stringent in seeking their enactment through, for example, representative government or the application of the rule of law. Instead, American elites have remained more concerned with developing a world of nebulously titled 'open societies'. However, as Chomsky argues, even though such societies are preferably democratic, this is not essential (1987, p.6).

Similarly, whilst American leaders have long articulated that America stands for freedom, the concept itself has been left rather vague, more of a cipher for other notions than a specific value *per se*, a signifier whose signified content is not fixed, but variable. Indeed, 'as Americans continuously reinvent themselves and their society, they also reinvent - and in so doing radically transform - what they mean by freedom. They mean not just independence, or even democracy and the rule of law. Freedom as Americans understand it today encompasses at least two other broad imperatives: maximizing opportunities for the creation of wealth and removing whatever impediments remain to confine the sovereign self. Freedom has come to mean treating the market and market values as sacrosanct (the economic agenda of the Right) and celebrating individual autonomy (the cultural agenda of the Left)' (Bacevich 2003, p.101). 'Freedom', as Lucas and Kennedy (2005, p.325) further explain, carries an enormous weight of association and expectation: 'In the promotion of "freedom" to foreign audiences, public diplomacy is inextricably connected with the development and implementation of U.S. foreign policy, charged with the awkward task of reconciling interests and ideals. This reconciliation is always deferred, forever incomplete, yet it cannot be disavowed since it is the horizon of the imperial imaginary projected by the extension of the national security state.' And yet, even though reconciliation of ideals and interests is 'always deferred, forever incomplete', the persistent application of powerful symbology (language, flag, etc) enables 'America' to project a coherent, monolithic identity. Freedom and democracy are thus not specific altruistic objectives, fixed and sacrosanct; they are efficacious fictions for the achievement of other US foreign policy goals, namely the continuation of American primacy and hegemony.

So, freedom and democracy are left deliberately ambiguous, their meanings ever in flux; they are easy to repeat and argue for, but their manifestation and application varies wildly. When President Clinton proclaimed in his 1992 Inaugural Address that 'ambition for a better life is now universal' he was seemingly speaking with specific reference to the triumph of freedom

and democracy over Soviet communism. Nobody noticed the inherent ambiguity of his statement: surely all peoples, irrespective of historical moment, geographical location or ideological persuasion, have had 'ambition for a better life'? Which people do not, in some form, desire freedom? The ambiguousness of his assertion belies his true meaning: America's victory in the Cold War proves American universality, the efficacy of American global leadership and the inevitability of globalised capitalism. The appeal to universals, to banal cultural commonalities, masks the political-economic and structural dominance that American hegemonic leadership actually entails.

The distinction between the structural and cultural aspects of Americanisation are roughly analogous to Nye's hard and soft power – the structural, which concerns the technological, industrial, military and economic transformations that are aspects of broader trends in globalisation (to be welcomed or imposed), and the cultural, which 'entails those symbols and practices that make sense of the foregoing by interpreting both "what is" and "what ought to be" at any given time' (Demerath 2007, p.83). However, the two processes are rarely in sync, with the structural changes that bring free markets and free trade often forging far ahead of the socio-political and cultural freedoms that liberal democracy appears to promise. Hollywood, in this regard, is precariously poised between representing 'what ought to be' through ideas of America and the positive processes of Americanisation they suggest, and being a concrete manifestation of 'what is' by embodying and modelling the power of globalisation.

The highly visible nature of American popular culture means that most debate concerning Americanisation occurs within a broad cultural realm, resulting in a tendency to see Americanisation as also synonymous with popular culture. It is worth noting that 'popular culture and Americanisation are neither mutually dependent nor interchangeable terms' (Melling and Roper 1996, p.15) and to see them as such obscures the operations of American hegemony in other areas, such that 'the focus on culture belies the significance of American

influence in economics, politics, and security, though it is less visible on the street' (Pieterse 2004, p.121). The cultural transfer and transformation suggested by 'Americanisation' is only one aspect of a nexus of American influence in all spheres of existence; simultaneously, Americanisation is only one of several similar networks in a global system, albeit the most powerful and dominant.

Such dominance has led some critics to view the term in its most pejorative senses, wherein Americanisation becomes a malevolent, imperial force that not only floods nations with products, but also with the capitalist ideology that will sustain their consumption, crushing and colonising indigenous lifestyles and modes of thought. Jameson famously declaimed that 'American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death and terror' (Jameson 1991, p.5). American media dominance, in this regard, could be perceived as just one manifestation of a broader American imperial domination; of course, such analysis does not factor in those who desire to derive pleasure from American products, who wish to reap the benefits of American prime modernity, and who, at least in some degree, actively want to be Americanised[8]. Furthermore, the degree to which consuming American products means assuming American values is extremely unclear. Demerath (2007, p.82) rightly observes that 'it is one thing for a cultural import to touch and exploit but quite another for it to be embraced and absorbed'. Moreover, as Kaplan (2004, p.15) has argued, 'the Americanisation of global culture is not a one way street, but a process of trans-national exchange, conflict and transformation.' Similarly, it is crucial 'not to interpret Americanization as a simple diffusion and imposition. Like any package of cultural attributes away from its origins, it interacted with existing patterns of thought and practice to create new mixtures' (Taylor, p.10), and thus 'a process such as Americanization does not run uniformly and is not imposed from above. It

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[8] Consequently, any structuralist analysis of American media which seeks to centre universalist ideas as part of a totalising system must be tempered by an acknowledgement that even texts perceived as carrying 'dominant' ideologies are read multifariously; in some cases this means that the dominant ideology of Ameritocracy is not just agreed with or acquiesced to, but is actively invited.

leads to heterogeneous answers and different accentuation' (Sznaider and Winter 2003, p.5). Consequently, when we begin to think about Hollywood blockbusters as bearers, in some form or another, of American cultural attributes we must be aware that their content (cultural, ideological, economic, etc) is not injected in a uniform and hypodermic fashion into recipient cultures, but is rather subject to processes of accentuation, concession and negotiation.

Americanisation and Globalisation

Problematically, 'Americanisation' has become further complicated by the term 'globalisation', with the two related concepts often regarded as synonymous. Consequently, it is worth briefly reflecting on the relationship between the two terms, given their mutual relationship to American popular culture generally and Hollywood specifically.

Unequivocally, there are myriad ways in which the two concepts overlap and intersect. With regard to their historical inception, Crockatt (2003, cited in Campbell and Kean 1997, p.288) notes that 'America stands for many as a symbol of globalisation', perhaps because 'the expansion of American power happened at the same time as the growth of international capitalism', with the American and the global thereby seeming ancillary of each other, if not identical.[9] However, if we 'view globalization as a long-term historical process of growing worldwide interconnectedness, far more diverse in nature and far longer in duration than modern American influences' (Pieterse 2004, p.122) then it is clear that globalisation predates Americanisation, and is qualitatively different from it, involving multiple origin points for transnational flows, of which Americanisation is but one.

Structurally, both terms refer to the systems, organisations, institutions and industries that have developed to support, sustain and constitute global capitalism. The fundamental difference between the two processes, however, is not material but abstract. Conventional definitions of globalisation in economic and political paradigms centre upon the transnational enlargement of free market capitalism. Americanisation, on the other hand, offers a different, participatory path to access and engage with American hegemony, implying a shift in values, not just a purchase of products within a global capitalist system; a process of acculturation to

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[9] It is also worth noting that these developments were contemporaneous with the advent of cinema and Hollywood's relatively swift development into a position of global industrial pre-eminence. Consequently, the conflation and confusion of 'Americanisation' with 'globalisation' has been further compounded by the role of 'Hollywood', a word frequently used as a cipher or metaphor for both terms.

a specifically American model that offers all the material benefits of liberal democratic capitalism that globalisation entails, but with the additional suggestion that such a process will also be socially, and even spiritually, enriching. Americanisation then, in its broadest sense, concerns not just the recognition of the self as citizen-consumer in a capitalist world, but the intimation that the transformations towards such an identification enable concomitant alterations to the nature of the self, and even the soul – with both positive and negative associations.

A further differentiation between the two terms is yielded by Mazlish (2006, p.6) who states that 'in studying globalization, we must always be aware that it is a process (not a thing) that is neither teleological nor deterministic. These are canards frequently leveled against it.' There are aspects of Americanisation, on the other hand, that can be regarded as both teleological and deterministic, a force that is above the control of the individual and driven by America's conception of its own destiny, namely, to be an exceptional city-on-a-hill that will guide the world to peace and prosperity. Ameritocracy helps provide Americanisation with this teleology and determinism by characterising American values as universal, terminal and providential. In part, this is the hegemonic privilege of prime modernity; as hegemon, America can easily claim that her values are universal, as primacy appears to prove the point. Previous empires, from the Roman to the British, have similarly attempted to universalise their values and to assume that the efficacy of such values was axiomatic, given their hegemonic status.

Iriye (2007, p.31) recognises that the interacting meanings of globalisation and Americanisation are also contingent on viewpoint:

> Globalization may mean for every person in the world to be able to say, "I have two countries: my native land and the United States of America" - except for those Americans who may identify with only one country, their own. There is a tension between those two positions. For the rest of the world, globalization involves

Americanization, but does not mean giving up their local identities, so the two terms are not interchangeable. For many Americans, on the other hand, to be globalized is to be Americanized, and Americanization *is* globalization, so it is not always clear how they will respond when globalization comes to entail more than Americanization.

This analysis is useful in revealing the complexities at work between the two terms, but underplays the transformative nature of both. Globalisation suggests the structural transformations that all nations will undergo, which is problematic from an American perspective of global leadership because leaders lead, they are not led. Americanisation on the other hand is problematic from the perspective of everyone else, wherein transformations are not just structural, but cultural too; some semblance of local identity may be retained, but in addition to an externalised American identity. Persuading nations to accept such transformation is difficult if represented in terms of Americanisation, with its associations of aggression and dominance. Again, Ameritocracy offers a reconciliatory rhetoric that aids acquiescence to American leadership, suggesting that nations are not being 'Americanised' *per se*, but rather merely joining a broader process of universalisation. 'America' cannot be provided to non-Americans as citizenship, but as access to the immigrant experience by cultural proxy and thus participation within a global American cultural space.

The assertion that Americans regard the two processes of Americanisation and globalisation as synonymous is also especially revealing; the conflation of the two terms has, at least in part, developed out of the idea of America promulgated by Ameritocracy: the American is already the global, the universal, the human. Iriye is also reiterating, therefore, the extremely long-standing conceptual construct of America as the world's 'global nation', a concept that has developed in relation to America's long history of diverse immigration. Richard Pells (2005, p.190) has even gone so far as to argue that

It is precisely these foreign influences that have made America's culture so popular for so long in so many places. American culture spread throughout the world because

it had habitually drawn on foreign styles and ideas. Americans have then reassembled and repackaged the cultural products they received from abroad, and retransmitted them to the rest of the planet. In effect, Americans have specialized in selling the fantasies and folklore of other people back to them.

Pells' argument suggests that 'America' functions only as a filter, as if the reassembly, repackaging and retransmission of others 'fantasies and folklore' is somehow neutral, and that these stories return to the world with their original value structures intact. However, Pells downplays the powerful political economy that lies behind these processes of Americanisation (he is careful to not even use the term), as if the popularity of American culture is disconnected from the ideological forces of American primacy. Whilst American culture unequivocally draws heavily from 'foreign styles and ideas', these are always modified, 'Americanised' and sent back out into the world with an agenda, which is often more than the mere pursuit of profit. Americanisation ultimately seeks to ensure that whatever else we are, we are also American, and that through the acculturation of American values we can unleash the 'American within'. Americanisation in the global sense thus becomes a modified and external replication of the Americanisation of the immigrant experience; but there is no Ellis Island for us, and frequently Americanisation is not a process we have necessarily chosen or invited. Our encounters with America, particularly with products that have a potential to Americanise, occur on the streets and screens of our own cultures.

This lack of choice, and sense of imposition and domination, has led many individuals, critics and indeed nations, to take a combative stance of anti-Americanisation, fearful of the effects its transformative powers will have on their cultural sovereignty, personal identities and national narratives. Historically, however, much of this fear has had more to do with economic protectionism and envy of America's commercial and industrial success, rather than the potential horrors of American monoculture, certainly when articulated by Western nations who appear to benefit most from American hegemony. However, whatever the motivations – financial, cultural, moral – behind the varying degrees of anti-Americanisation

exhibited by different peoples, the ubiquity of American products with the potential to Americanise, in some form or other, is unequivocal.

A Brief History of Hollywood

It is axiomatic to state that Hollywood is the world's most successful national film industry because it is the most popular; its products are seen by more people, in all formats, than those of any other national cinema and dominate the worldwide cinema marketplace. In cultural zones and economic marketplaces where Hollywood does not dominate, it penetrates, providing models for production, distribution and consumption, and, frequently, funding too. Indeed, if one word were to be chosen to sum up Americanisation, in all its hope and horror, surely that word would be 'Hollywood'[10]. Often seen as synonymous with processes of globalisation, the products of Hollywood are visually obvious and seemingly ubiquitous, the mimetic nature of the medium giving gravitas to their ability to carry the idea of America:

> the American cultural perspective is absorbed now not from the experience of immigrant struggle, but from the passive comfort of the cinema seat or a domestic arm-chair. The suspicion that there is a worldwide phenomenon, "the Americanisation of culture", is in part due to the sense that through the seductive images of Hollywood, the will to resist an American viewpoint is undermined.'
>
> (Melling and Roper, 3)

However, before going on to analyse the nature of the 'idea of America' as it manifests in the most popular of all Hollywood products, the blockbuster, and what might be meant by 'the Americanisation of culture', it is first important to contextualise how Hollywood came to achieve its position of global primacy. As we shall see, the early decades of the American cinema established both the commercial templates and narrative principles (which are not mutually exclusive properties) that would see Hollywood go on to experience an entire century of success.

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[10] The term 'Hollywood' carries a weight of contradictory meanings: a geographical location in southern California that was once the 'centre' of the American film industry; standing as representative term for the American film industry (although 'Hollywood' is at once less than the entirety of American film production – the American independent cinema market attempts to style itself in opposition to 'mainstream' Hollywood - and more, as a symbol for worldwide processes of Americanisation) and as a euphemism for the dominance and ubiquity of American capitalism; and as transnational nexus of production techniques and values, marketing and distribution strategies, which whilst being nominally and financially American, are also very much global.

Primacy and the Political Economy of Movie-Making

At the dawn of the twentieth century, as Fraser argues, 'America benefitted from tremendous historical good luck… A combination of technological changes, shifting demographic realities and cataclysmic wars provided America with powerful economic, military, and cultural advantages vis-à-vis Europe and the rest of the world' (2003, p.26). Technological developments of the nineteenth century had seen the American economy, as well as those of many other nations, shift from agrarian to industrial, changing the demography of the nation by drawing more and more people into cities. Moreover, the industrial age had brought many developments that had helped globalise world trade: mass transit, mass markets and mass production. The most pertinent development of the turn of the twentieth century for this thesis, however, was the advent of mass communication, in particular the medium of film, which would provide a means for American ideas and ideals to be transmitted far beyond her borders. Of course, America was not the only nation to perceive the potential of film as a universal language, or the capital than celluloid could conjure. Indeed, from the opening of Edison's first Kinetoscope parlours in 1894 until the start of the First World War, a large share of the American market was dominated by French producers like Pathé and Gaumont. The other European Great Powers also had booming indigenous film industries whose products, unhindered by the linguistic barriers that the 'talkies' would later establish, were often well received in the American marketplace.

The first decades of film were thus a transatlantic struggle for supremacy, fought with the weapons of talent and tariff, and for much of this period it was the French who could most plausibly lay claim to being the world's dominant national film industry. All this was to change, however, with the onset of the Great War. Unequivocally, the First World War had a catastrophic impact on European film producers. As the European film industry ground to a halt, the American film industry, which had migrated to California during the conflict, was able to develop and grow, achieving a position of global pre-eminence and hegemony in intercultural communication and entertainment that it would take the nation itself the rest of

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the century to attain. This position of pre-eminence was predominantly a product of the conflict in Europe, which enabled the American film industry to both dominate its domestic market for the first time and, as Sklar argues, to 'replace the Europeans as principal suppliers to the non-belligerent areas of the world, particularly Latin America and Japan' (1994, p.215). Wagnleitner further contends that 'analogous to the loss of political, military, and economic power, the European (film) powers also lost a part of their sovereignty in the production and distribution of movies after the First World War. They thereby forfeited control over a decisive channel of cultural self-interpretation and self-definition' (Wagnleitner, p.225), as well as the important commercial advantages that a successful film industry could bring. Movies functioned to generate profit in the first instance, but they could also serve as a place where audiences could window-shop for other products, lifestyles and systems of political economy – with the American examples shown by Hollywood presented as the most desirable, those that would (and will) provide the most pleasure. However, the opportunities for consolidation and expansion created by the war, and the lack of any meaningful competition, also exploited a confluence of factors within America, and Hollywood, itself – demographic, economic, institutional, and ideological, each of which had a direct effect on narrative content.

Appealing to Mass Markets

Movie-making, particularly in its early years, was an extremely expensive business, reliant on expensive technology. Consequently, it was crucial for all national film industries to seek to recoup some costs overseas, particularly in Europe where domestic markets were relatively small. In America, however, filmmakers could usually rely on the American domestic box office to cover the expensive production costs; much profit, therefore, was to be made abroad. In fact, 'since the 1920s between a third and half of Hollywood's earnings have come from audiences outside the United States' (Maltby 1995, p.12). Sklar (1994, p.216) argues that this quantitative demographic factor had qualitative effects such that 'American producers held an unbeatable advantage over their foreign competitors. They could pour money into "production values"… knowing that the more spectacular and expensive their pictures looked, the more they appealed to overseas audiences'. Contextual demographic factors thus directly influenced the filmic texts themselves; niche narratives could not recoup costs in a mass market, either domestically or internationally. In early cinema, as now, it made commercial sense to produce movies that were high on spectacle and broad on narrative appeal.

Moreover, and most pertinent to my analysis, 'since America's population was largely immigrant - especially in large urban centres such as New York and Chicago - Hollywood deliberately appealed to a lowest common denominator, with uncomplicated narratives that could be grasped by all audiences, whatever their nationality or level of education' (Fraser 2003, p.41). Again, the contextual factor of demography, the potential audience for a movie, had powerful narrative effects during the early years of American cinema. Wasser (1995, p.165) suggests that early Hollywood was 'an industry shaped by immigrants, both as producers and as audience, conveying a strong assimilatory message.' In the melting pot culture of early twentieth century America it was deemed important for movies to reflect positive images of assimilation into the American nation; in Europe, where national identities were longer standing and thus more stable, movies had no need to bolster identities in a

similar fashion. Hollywood narratives, therefore, tended towards the simplistic; or, more pertinently, they readily exploited Ameritocratic narratives concerning American universality in order to express positive notions relating to assimilation. The benefits of such a strategy were thus not only commercial, but also political and ideological.

This analysis is also supported by Maltby, who argues that 'Hollywood's notion of its audience has always had to remain very generalized, because of the size of a movie's market' (1995, p.12), with the 'lowest common denominator' therefore having international as well as domestic implications. As such, Hollywood films were perceived as the ideal vehicle for spreading American tastes, products, modes of living and values all over the world. This is not to say that Hollywood movies were not, and are not, pitched towards specific markets – with different genres marketed at different demographic groups, predominantly delineated along lines of age and gender. However, up until the Second World War such delineation of the audience was deemed largely unnecessary; the prevailing logic dictated that to target your product specifically, rather than generally, was to immediately reduce the potential size of your audience and thus limit your profit margin. Consequently, 'Audiences flooded into cinemas to see American movies whose simple plots and emphasis on emotion and action had widespread cross-cultural appeal' (Fraser, p.49). Almost a century later, this narrative model is still employed by Hollywood, finding its apotheosis in the Hollywood blockbuster, 'global' movies designed for the global marketplace of the unipolar age.

Hollywood and the Potential for Propaganda

The implications and applications of the film industry for the circulation of ideas was not lost on the American political establishment who, even prior to America's entry into the First World War, had focused in on the medium's potential for promotion and propaganda. The National Association of the Motion Picture Industry, a regulatory body founded by the Hollywood studios in 1916 to address issues of censorship, sent a memo to the White House that stated that "the motion picture can be the most wonderful system for spreading national propaganda at little or no cost" (cited in Fraser 2003, p.40). Bulwarked by such pronouncements, President Woodrow Wilson ordered the creation of a congressional Committee on Public Information (CPI) in April 1917, tasked with persuading the American public of the necessity of American involvement in the First World War. The Committee, headed by George Creel, had a broad sweeping mandate that covered all conceivable media, but it was cinema that held a particular power. On the formation of the Division of Films within the CPI, swiftly dubbed the 'Creel Committee', Wilson remarked that 'The film has come to rank as the very highest medium for the dissemination of public intelligence…it speaks a universal language, it lends itself importantly to the presentation of America's plans and purposes' (cited in Debauche 1997, p.109). Creel himself perceived the function of the CPI to be propaganda, but not 'as the Germans defined it, but propaganda in the true sense of the word, meaning the 'propagation of faith' (Creel 2008, p.158).

In the words of Creel and Wilson it is easy to perceive the workings of Ameritocracy. Film, as a 'universal language' could speak to diverse populations in diverse lands, spreading, in Creel's terms, the 'Gospel of Americanism' (Creel 2008) with its implicit and explicit references to the religiosity of the American idea and the requirement of proselytisation and, thereby, the universalisation of American values. Crucially, the power of Creel and the CPI also extended into the export conditions on Hollywood movies, insisting upon the inclusion of '20 percent of "educational material" – namely, propaganda footage' (Fraser, p.41),

dramatically increasing the propaganda power of any given film. If producers wanted to access the profit possibilities of foreign markets then they had little choice but to acquiesce to these conditions. Similarly, the CPI also sought to curtail the German film industry's efforts to spread its own propaganda by threatening to withhold all American movies from foreign exhibitors who screened German movies, whilst also threatening 'similar sanctions against those [domestic] theatres reluctant to show CPI newsreels' (Trumpbour 2002, p.63).

The CPI was exceptionally short-lived, and was abolished in 1919 having fulfilled its wartime function. Indeed, the explicit codification of the American cinema industry as a propaganda machine operating on behalf of the American state has only ever occurred during the two world wars, and even then the relationship between Hollywood and Washington was not always a happy one. During the Second World War, when Hollywood focused itself on helping the war effort by producing propaganda films that expressed the evils of the enemy and the virtues of America and her allies, it was suggested 'by Senator Ralph O. Brewster of the Truman Committee that "recent citizens" were not appropriate filmmakers for the war effort… that the moviemakers were insufficiently American in origin, intellect and character' (Sklar 1994, p.249). Ironically, the immigrant-heavy nature of Hollywood (that had produced such strong assimilatory, Americanising messages in the early years of the industry and helped solidify Hollywood's global domination of the market) was now inverted, and deemed a potential threat. Nonetheless, the requirement for propaganda during wartime was obvious: to direct and bolster public opinion on the home front, and to attempt to influence public opinion overseas. Hollywood was well placed to provide such functions and, as Elmer Davis, Director of the Office of War Information in World War Two stated, 'the easiest way to inject a propaganda idea into most people's minds is to let it go through the medium of an entertainment picture when they do not realize that they are being propagandized' (1942, cited in Koopes and Black 1977, p.88).

In the years immediately following the Second World War, Hollywood found itself under attack ideologically, industrially and economically: the House Un-American Activities Committee sought to eradicate 'Communist' infiltration of the industry, television rapidly encroached on film's domestic dominance of entertainment and the Paramount Anti-Trust case of 1948 effectively brought an end to the vertically integrated studio system. Indeed, Hollywood has often been a convenient domestic villain for the American political elite; a high-profile target accused of moral laxity, ideological subversion and un-American activity. However, negative perceptions of Hollywood at home have always been balanced against its importance on the international stage, particularly the commercial possibilities that a hegemonic cultural industry could offer. In 1990, Gore Vidal suggested that,

> As we entered the world stage in the First World War, simultaneously we entered the world as conquerors through silent movies, something no one could have calculated or had ever happened before… It was a lucky coincidence that as we became number one in the world militarily, the movies were there for us to use, to make propaganda with, to express ourselves, to sell the world a lot of bills of goods. We're still doing it. (cited in Wagnleitner 1994, p.31)

Consequently, I contend that the CPI established a template for the relationship between the American state and American cinema, at least in its overseas operations: the marriage of financial muscle, ideological imperative and American value proselytisation. This union cemented Hollywood dominance of the international movie market in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, and established the general terms by which Hollywood production would operate from then until now. However, it must be noted that in the decades between the two world wars it was still plausible for America to retreat from internationalism and thus projections of 'America' overseas were evolving throughout this period. Newfound military dominance did not translate into the usage of cinema as a directly propagandistic medium on behalf of the American state, with Hollywood instead 'advertising' America in broader contexts. The explicit usage of Hollywood as a wartime propaganda machine has thus been limited, however its potential to propagate faith in the idea of America in more general

terms has been much farther reaching, particularly in regards to the American system of capitalist political economy. Hollywood could help sell the idea of 'America' to the world, by providing a shop window for American products and American modes of living. In 1947, Mayer articulated this potential:

> The modern American motion picture, almost beyond any possible comparison with other items of export, combines considerations of economic, cultural and political significance… No one has ever attempted to calculate - and it would probably be an impossible task - the indirect effect of American motion pictures on the sale of American products, not only on display, as it were, but in actual demonstrated use. Scenes laid in American kitchens, for example, have probably done as much to acquaint the people of foreign lands with American electric refrigerators, electric washing machines, eggbeaters, window screens, and so on, as any other medium…
>
> There has never been a more effective salesman for American products in foreign countries than the American motion picture.

Even as the Cold War was about to embrace the globe it was clear that Hollywood would not just be engaged in strictly propagandist pursuits of establishing and fighting the common enemy of communism. Its movies would not just carry combative ideological messages, but transformative power, aimed at establishing broader commercial commonalities. As early as 1925, it was suggested that 'trade follows the film' (cited in Fraser 2003, p.43), and other nations were already aware of what this implied: 'The film is to America what the flag was once to Britain. By its means Uncle Sam may hope one day, if he be not checked in time, to Americanize the world' (cited in Fraser 2003, p.44). Indeed, concerns about the potential for Americanisation afforded by Hollywood were a concern in the highest echelons of the British government. Lord Newton, in a House of Lords debate in May 1925 stated that Americans had 'realised almost instantaneously that the cinema was a heaven-sent method of advertising themselves, their country, their wares, their ideas and even their language, and they had seized on it as a method of persuading the whole world that America was really the only country that counted.' (cited in Jarvie 1992, p.111) Such responses perhaps spoke more to

British concerns about declining imperial power and America's seemingly inexorable rise to supplant their position, than to a specific fear of Hollywood. Hollywood, then as now, was merely the most obvious expression of the coming shift in geo-political domination. Such concerns, however, were not limited to Britain. The French, perhaps still reeling from the loss of power and pride that the Great War had entailed (including the crushing effect the war had had on their previously dominant film industry) were equally troubled: "Americans are trying to subject Europe to their ideas and they think, correctly, that motion picture propaganda - which enables putting American propaganda before the eyes of every public - is the best and least costly way of spreading their influence' (Le Matin, 1929, cited in Fraser 2003, p.47) Paranoid, perhaps, but prophetic nonetheless.

National Cinema and National Identity: Selling 'America'

The ubiquity of American cultural products has made it easy for critics to see Hollywood as the bastion of an aggressive American cultural imperialism; we must remember, however, that Hollywood, whatever else it may be, is also the American national cinema. The stories of America that we encounter internationally are, first and foremost, stories Americans tell to themselves and, perhaps unsurprisingly, such stories tend towards positive affirmations of national values. As President Reagan, in his 1989 Farewell Address, nicely surmised (and in surmising, explicitly linked the mission and meaning of America to the ability of the film industry to spread that message):

> An informed patriotism is what we want, and are we doing a good enough job teaching our children what America is and what she represents in the long history of the world? Those of us who are over 35 or so years of age grew up in a different America. We were taught very directly what it was to be an American, and we absorbed almost in the air a love of country and an appreciation of its institutions. If you didn't get these things from your family, you got them from the neighbourhood. From the father down the street who fought in Korea, or the family who lost someone at Anzio. Or you could get a sense of patriotism from school. And if all else failed you could get a sense of patriotism from the popular culture. The movies celebrated democratic values and implicitly reinforced the idea that America was special. TV was like that too. (President Reagan, Farewell Address: January 11, 1989)

Reagan's vision of an undivided America where good patriotic thoughts wafted about on the breeze is clearly somewhat nostalgic and unrealistic, but his conviction that patriotism meant a wholesome faith in the American idea in all its uniqueness ('the idea that America was special') and universality ('what America is and what she represents in the long history of the world') is consistent with Ameritocracy. In this sense, we can even begin to think of American cinema (domestically and internationally), and blockbusters in particular, as Althusserian Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), one of a whole panoply of patriotic

influences that help to reproduce the appropriate conditions for the social formation of 'America' to exist (reproduction of the 'existing relations of production'), by helping to teach successive generation of Americans how to be American. Cinema though, unlike other ISAs such as the family and the school, which operate within national boundaries, also operates across them, taking American values, not just patriotism, to cultures far and wide. The function of ISAs to attain 'a reproduction of submission to the ruling order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology' (Althusser 1971, p.132) thus has international implications, with 'the ruling order' therefore referring not just to a capitalist ideology within America, but also to American global hegemony externally. As a soft power cultural medium cinema uses pleasure and persuasion to achieve such submission, which in the first instance (internally and externally) is to guarantee the continued consumption of its products; in broader international contexts, 'submission' concerns itself instead with the generation of notions about American benevolence, uniqueness and universality that sustain the mythos of American global hegemony.

Moreover, whilst cultural products are axiomatically constructed from the national narratives of their country of origin, the types of stories told by Hollywood owe more to bottom-line economic considerations than to national culture *per se*[11]; the ideological conversions that 'Americanisation' suggests, both domestically and internationally, are the by-products of what Maltby (1983, 1995) refers to as Hollywood's 'commercial aesthetic', they are not necessarily an objective in themselves.

> 'Filmmakers, production companies, distributors and so on, they certainly don't have agendas to go and spread this kind of meaning or that kind of meaning. I think they would say it's something they do probably subconsciously. So, you're thinking you're going to make a big film that's going to have a huge audience – it's no great mystery that you're going to, in doing that, draw on some kind of resonance that's

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[11] Of course, it could be argued that in the American formation, economic interests are so interwoven into national culture as to be indistinguishable. Unfortunately, there is neither space nor scope for such an analysis here.

around in the culture in a particular place, in a particular time, to do that. I think that's a good way around any kind of conspiratorial view of filmmakers as being part of an ideological system in a more deliberate, intentional kind of way' (Geoff King, interview for *Ameritocracy*: 2011).

The vast majority of Hollywood movies, therefore, are not produced with propaganda in mind, certainly not in an official sense. They do not seek to directly push specific ideologies, although they may interact within ideological agendas that exist in the real world; a degree of verisimilitude, a relationship to the real, is a necessary component of narrative, even in the most escapist of entertainments. So, 'the producer… expresses ideology in a different way, not as a personal preference or artistic vision, but as mediated by mainstream institutions like banks and studios, which transmit ideology in the guise of market decisions… Hollywood is a business, and movies avoid antagonizing significant blocs of viewers; they have no incentive to be politically clear' (Biskind, 1983, cited in Maltby 1995, p.361).

In Hollywood, the commercial aesthetic is unequivocally the primary motivating factor in movie production; ideological posturing is a secondary consideration. That said, it is worth pointing out that the commercial aesthetic itself is also inevitably ideological; its placing of a profit motive over all other considerations of what a film could or should be perpetuates a capitalist ideology, and one grounded in an American model, which thus also includes the brands of liberalism and democracy with which American capitalism is infused. As such, it should not be surprising that 'the Hollywood film - with its emphasis on individualism, competition, the cleansing forces of the market, the freedom of choice, and especially the melting pot - became the most influential iconographic inventory of the capitalist ethos and U.S. democracy in the twentieth century' (Wagnleitner 1994, p.225).

Indeed, Hollywood has historically been able to pull off a remarkable Wilsonian legerdemain: fusing its commercial interests with particularly American ideals, leading to 'claims by Hollywood marketers and apologists that its films maintain global appeal through universal

narratives and the expression of American populist values' (Herbert 2006, p.30). One of the leading directors of early Hollywood, D. W. Griffith (himself a personal correspondent of President Wilson), expressed the potential for the union of American ideals with the 'universal language' of film in deliberately Wilsonian terms:

> 'Are we not making the world safe for democracy, American democracy, through motion pictures? The increase of knowledge, the shattering of old superstitions, the sense of beauty have all gone forward with the progress of the screen. Our heroes are always democratic. The ordinary virtues of American life triumph. No Toryism. No Socialism' (cited in May 1980, p.61).

Griffith's statement is poignantly Ameritocratic; democracy *is* American democracy and vice versa. Of course, we should remember that the sense of universal brotherhood invoked by Griffith did not manifest itself in his treatment of race relations in *Birth of a Nation* (1915), further revealing the particularity and partiality of American notions of universality. Even though 'democracy' was held up by Griffith and Wilson as an ideal form of government, the application of the term, even in America, did not necessarily equate to ideals of equality, fairness and freedom. What is clear, however, is that even in its earliest incarnations, there was a perception that Hollywood had the potential to have a profoundly positive effect on those who viewed its products; that beyond the financial benefits of movie production lay a value-based, soft power function that could take the idea of America and transplant it overseas, to the benefit of those who encountered it. Movies were seen not just as entertaining cultural objects, but also as shop windows for American goods, lifestyles and values; tools which could be subtly deployed to reinforce patriotism at home and encourage acquiescence abroad.

Will Hays, President of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) from 1922 to 1945, also believed that movies were more than mere entertainment, and that Hollywood sold more than pleasure: 'We are going to sell America to the world with American motion pictures' (1923, cited in Jarvie, 1988: 215). Most likely Hays was referring

to the capacity of movies to help sell American products, but it is easy to see how foreign governments could also perceive that what was additionally being sold was an idea of America itself. In a 1938 speech, Hays went on to elucidate what he perceived as the special relationship between America and movie-making:

> There is a special reason why America should have given birth and prosperous nurture to the motion picture and its worldwide entertainment. America in the very literal sense is truly the world-state. All races, all creeds, all men are to be found here – working, sharing, and developing, side by side in more friendship among greater diversities of tribes and men than all the previous history of the world discloses. Our country represents the greatest single unity of races, people, and culture. Is it not possible that very quality enabled America to express itself by the creation and development of the motion picture? (cited in Jarvie 1988, 216)

The historical inaccuracy of Hays' claims for America as the birthplace of the motion picture notwithstanding (although Americans, notably Edison, can probably be credited with converting the technology from scientific curio to a medium for commercial use), we can clearly see the link between Ameritocratic ideas of American universality ('all races, all creeds, all men') and film as universal language. Indeed, for Hays, the latter inevitably sprang from the former, and by the time he wrote his memoirs he conceived of cinema with a Winthropian glow: 'At the end of fifty years' journeying the American Motion Picture Industry stood on a mountaintop from which the beacon of its silver screen was sending rays of light and colour and joy into every corner of the earth' (Hays 1955, p.508). So, 'beyond bottom-line considerations, Hollywood conveys an enduring commitment to a core set of values and beliefs: individualism, capitalism, liberalism and democracy' (Fraser, p.111), and it has often been argued that Hollywood's position of global cultural hegemony represents a universal endorsement of these values. For example, Jack Valenti, President of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) from 1966 to 2004, triumphantly stated that

> It is a fact, blessedly confirmed, that the American movie is affectionately received by audiences of all races, cultures and creeds on all continents amid turmoil and

stress as well as hope and promise. This isn't happenstance. It's the confluent of creative reach, storytelling skill, decision making by top studio executives and the interlocking exertions of distribution and marketing artisans. (cited in Miller et al, 2001, p.4)

Valenti's argument seemingly confuses the empirical fact of Hollywood's global market dominance with universally affectionate reception. Of course, we cannot discount the fact that American values, embedded in the 'universal' narratives of Hollywood film, may have a broad appeal for audiences all over the world. That there is something extremely attractive in the idea of America is testified to by the nation's long history of mass immigration. Indeed, Richard Pells (2005, p.190) has argued that 'the United States has been a recipient as much as an exporter of global culture' and thus 'the conception of a harmonious and distinctively American culture – encircling the globe, implanting its values on foreign minds – has always been a myth'. Certainly, such a conception is overly simplistic, but myths must at least have elements of truth, or else they would not also have durability. American values may not be 'implanted' but they are presented and projected; America may well be internally diverse and disharmonious, but this does not preclude an international perception of America as monolithic. The intricate fabric of the stars and stripes appears worldwide as just one flag.

So, just as we cannot presuppose that Hollywood and its products are unwelcome, we similarly cannot account for the success of American movies based purely on Hollywood's overwhelming financial superiority; surely there must be something appealing in the movies themselves, beyond their ubiquity? After all, foreign governments 'would not have to regulate to limit their import unless there was sufficient domestic demand to warrant doing so' (Olson 2004, p.115). However, as Wasser (1995, p.376) argues, 'the point is not whether international viewers are actually seduced by such images but that film producers set for themselves the task of portraying an "America" that is a dreamscape for "universal" desires rather than a historic reality'. Again, such a universal dreamscape is a peculiar Wilsonian fusion of ideals and interests; commercial interests are satisfied in products that offer 'a

multiplicity of icons and viewpoints that have different meanings for different audiences at different times in different countries' (Straubhaar and Duarte 2005, p.220), often within singular texts. Simultaneously, national ideals are assuaged in the consistent projection that America, and only America, can offer the space from which such divergent meanings can be yielded, and in which such differences can be embraced and harmonised. The universality encouraged by Hollywood's commercial aesthetic is not merely the operation of that particular economic imperative, but also an embodiment of the Ameritocratic aspects of American national identity.

Universality, Polysemy and Narrative Transparency

Clearly, we must be wary of fearful pronouncements concerning the ability of Hollywood movies to produce a negative Americanisation in their audiences as if spectators were mere imbibers of ideology, but simultaneously aware that as the world's dominant cultural entity Hollywood does seek to have effects on its audiences and to tell particular stories concerning America. Wagnleitner's blanket contention, therefore, that 'seeing is believing… reel facts become real facts' (1994, p.226) is certainly contestable, as is the school of cultivation theory from which it springs. Indeed, 'in its most common manifestation, cultivation analysis assumes, and therefore discovers, that American media will render the world American, even when the evidence for that transformation is merely small effects.' (Olson 2004, p.116) The 'small effects' however, may well be cumulative, taking time before they can be identified in behaviour and attitude. Certainly, such 'Americanised' effects are but one of many in a globalised world of transnational flows and their effects should not be over-estimated; however, that they are the most powerful and dominant forces within the realm of transnational cultural exchange can also not be disputed.

Olson (2004, p.126) argues that

> there is an effect to the American media, but it is not to project American values; quite to the contrary, American media are now cleverly designed so as to reinforce existing values. This results in interstitial readings and polyglot cultures, but not monoculture. They no longer need to create a market for American products, because they can design products that act as though they are indigenous. Polysemy is built in. All that is ultimately necessary is selling the product and that is better accomplished without having the burden of transforming the culture first. "The Other" has become just another commodity to sell.

Olson conceives of the polysemic qualities of American media products as 'narrative transparency', 'defined as any textual apparatus that allows audiences to project indigenous

values, beliefs, rites, and rituals into imported media', thus enabling Hollywood narratives 'to become stealthy, to be foreign myths that surreptitiously act like indigenous ones, Greek gifts to Troy, but with Trojan citizens inside the horse' (2004, p.114). Olson's contention that something like transparency must exist is convincing - it is, after all, the ultimate expression of a commercial aesthetic. Moreover, his assessment that interstitial readings and polyglot cultures will emerge as a result of encounters with American media seems valid; evidence that audiences use American texts in surprising ways, decoding multiple and oppositional meanings, is plentiful. Indeed, the idea of narrative transparency is certainly useful in analysing Hollywood texts, particularly with regard to their utilisation of myth, and I shall return to Olson's theory in my discussion of blockbuster narratives in the next chapter. However, his contention that American values are not projected stretches the theory of narrative transparency too far; such values may be interpreted and used in different ways, but to suggest they are not present at all is not born out by textual analysis.

Furthermore, the additional suggestion that the interstitial effects of transparency do not result in some form of 'Americanisation' does not ring true; the polyglot cultures that emerge do not replace global American monoculture, but co-exist with it; Olson has seemingly mistaken the extensive use of mythic structures, and Ameritocratic rhetorical expressions of universality in American media, for transparency. Iriye's notion that global citizens can increasingly state that they have 'two countries' suggests that they can also have two cultures, one which is local (their own national culture) and one which is global (American, universal culture). Americanisation therefore becomes not an issue of cultural replacement, but of cultural simultaneity; American media clearly have a crucial role to play in establishing and continuing the notion of a global American culture that can co-exist with, and feed off and into, local cultures.

In his 1947 study Mayer noted that 'the motion picture is one product which is never completely consumed for the very good reason that it is never entirely forgotten by those who

see it. It leaves behind a residue, or deposit of imagery and association, and this fact makes it a product unique in our tremendous list of export items' (p.227). The impact of this 'deposit of imagery and association' on the sale of goods is difficult to quantify. However, if it did not exist at all then companies would not be as eager as they clearly are to associate themselves with Hollywood narratives through product placement, merchandising and other epiphenomena. What is considerably more intangible is the degree to which Hollywood products also leave behind a 'value residue', and, if so, to what uses this might be put. Notions of transparency suggest that the culture leaves a residue in the text, not vice versa, but, as Geoff King suggests (*Ameritocracy, 2011*) 'it's a reasonable hypothesis to say that it'd be pretty extraordinary if they [movies] had no influence, frankly'.

It is the contention of this thesis that Hollywood movies, particularly those from the blockbuster era of the last 30 years or so, do have an 'Americanising' (or universalising) effect; on a superficial, material level this manifests in the display of American products and lifestyles, which many audiences may find seductive. However, I contend that there is also a broader, cumulative effect that Hollywood has on other national narratives; by following the models and genres of Hollywood film, indigenous film industries become inevitably Americanised. On the commercial level, they take on generic (Americanised) narrative forms so that they might compete in the international movie marketplace. However, Hollywood's global dominance also means that the indigenous film industries of many nations find themselves greatly outnumbered and out-muscled in their domestic marketplaces. Consequently, Hollywood's cultural hegemony has led to an Americanisation of audience expectation, particularly in European markets. German filmmaker Wim Wenders explains that despite the relatively healthy position of European cinema in recent decades, 'it's losing touch with young audiences. They have a taste of a different kind of cinema and a lot of them don't know anymore that there is any other cinema than the blockbuster cinema'[12]

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[12] This statement, and its inclusion in *Ameritocracy*, must be balanced against the fact that Wenders is a filmmaker who has frequently worked in Hollywood, and has made several films which explore 'American' themes, from road movies to literary adaptations.

(*Ameritocracy* 2011). British film director Mike Leigh is considerably more emphatic: 'The audience is brainwashed into this notion that films… that films means American films, Hollywood films' (Ibid.). Hollywood's global cultural hegemony thus means that 'when we go to the cinema we kind of almost expect that it's going to be an American film, and therefore those underpinning values, those mythic values, are going to be American values' (Neil Campbell, *Ameritocracy* 2011).

The projections and uses of American values are multivalent, so much so that we can argue that there is not one uniform Americanisation, but many. However, the continued and consistent exposure to American narratives (and the values they contain), whether overtly jingoistic or covertly dressed in the rainbow robes of universalism, will inevitably have an Americanising effect on indigenous film narratives. If audiences increasingly associate the very notion of film itself with American film, then this powerful cultural medium will become increasingly hard for indigenous narratives to penetrate into the marketplace of their own cultures without assuming the narrative techniques, commercial imperatives and value structures of Hollywood.

CHAPTER THREE

A Brief History of the Blockbuster

This chapter will make a number of claims for the Hollywood blockbuster, and will particularly attempt to establish that the Hollywood blockbuster functions as a chiasmic intersection of commercial and ideological notions of universality, wherein 'universal' stories are sold to 'universal' audiences, reinforcing the efficacy of American global hegemony (via cultural universality) and the legitimacy of American values to represent all peoples. Consequently, it is important at this point to provide a more specific definition of the term 'blockbuster', which already comes loaded with a range of shifting and overlapping associations and interpretations, depending on whether it is being deployed by producers, critics, academics or audiences. In its simplest and earliest incarnation we can think of a blockbuster as any film that achieves vast commercial success, and in this regard we should note that the blockbuster is not a phenomenon unique to Hollywood, nor one that can be explicitly pigeonholed to a specific historical era. The blockbuster is primarily understood with regard to size or scale: out-sized spectacular cinematic experiences, expensively produced and marketed 'event' movies advertised through superlative language which assures the would-be viewer that they will be thrilled and entertained. Blockbusters frequently suggest that they will offer the audience something they have never seen before, and establish themselves as 'must see' movies whose appeals are universal, excluding no-one. In this regard, Hollywood has always produced blockbusters, expensively-produced "prestige" pictures designed to appeal to mass audiences and garner maximum profits, such as *Birth of a Nation* (Griffith, 1915), *Gone With the Wind* (Fleming, 1939), and *The Ten Commandments* (DeMille, 1956), amongst myriad others.

However, such productions were nonetheless exceptional for much of the twentieth century, in which Hollywood moved through several distinct, but overlapping phases: the 'classical'

era, which established certain narrative conventions and was structured around the vertically-integrated studio model, and which loosely ran from the first nickelodeons up to World War Two; the post-war period, in which the narrative techniques of 'classical' Hollywood remained largely the same, but the political-economic organisation of the industry changed as the studio system was dismantled and cinema was forced into a competitive market with television; and the short-lived 'New Hollywood'[13] era of the 1960s and early 1970s, in which younger directors experimented with new techniques of filmmaking and funding in the absence of a dominant studio system. As Sklar argues, 'Hollywood's collapse in the late 1960s was real, but not permanent. It marked the nadir of a long transformation, one that stretched from the demise of the old studio system in the 1950s to the advent of effective new distribution strategies in the mid-1970s' (1994, p.321). These strategies – utilising expensive production values, extensive advertising and marketing, and commercial synergy - meant that

> 1975 witnessed the phasing out of the New Hollywood in favor of the blockbuster era, a politically conservative, neoclassical style of filmmaking. Of course, blockbusters constituted an integral part of classical Hollywood, but as exceptional productions that ran counter to the regular output of routine movies. From 1975, blockbusters increasingly became Hollywood's standard or dominant practice of filmmaking. (Buckland 2006, p.11)[14]

The blockbuster era, therefore, did not invent the blockbuster, but rather systematised the calculated production, marketing and distribution of 'must-see' event spectacles on a global level. Stringer (2003, p.3) suggests that 'as a loose, evolving system of claims and counterclaims – or an influential and multifaceted idea – the blockbuster circulates diverse kinds of knowledge concerning titles deemed to be social events. Such discursive activity

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[13] The phrase 'New Hollywood' is also disputed, with different theorists using the term to refer to different periods of Hollywood history. Schatz (1993, p.9), for example, argues that 'post-1975 era best warrants the term "the New Hollywood"' for its utilisation of new production, marketing and distribution techniques. I have referred to the same period here as the 'blockbuster era', and instead follow the critical line of Jacobs (1977) and Buckland (2006) that aligns the term 'New Hollywood' with the 'Hollywood Renaissance' (Jacobs, 1977) which marked the late 1960s and early 1970s of Hollywood production.

[14] Schatz (1993, pp.10-11) provides a similar analysis in his contention that whilst 'In terms of budgets, production values, and market strategy, Hollywood has been increasingly hit-driven since the early 1950s', the 'blockbuster syndrome went into high gear in the mid-1970s… the first period of sustained economic vitality and industrial stability since the classical era'.

takes place on both textual and extra-textual levels…[and thus the blockbuster can be placed within] a wide variety of interpretative frames', making it extremely difficult to ascribe any essential characteristics. However, above all other considerations, the blockbuster prioritises a commercial aesthetic, a 'bums-on-seats' imperative that equates notions of universality with profitability.

Indeed, in the globalised, transnational world of late capitalism, Hollywood's urge towards universality is nowhere more prevalent than in the blockbuster movie; global films for global audiences, which, with massive production and advertising budgets to recoup and redouble, must appeal 'universally'. This appeal is as old as the American cinema itself, and relates both to the specifics of demographic diversity in early twentieth century America and to ideas of film as a universal language and mass medium more generally. As such, the notions of universality (which we can think of as a fusion of *American notions* of universality and notions of *American universality*) that Hollywood now embodies in the blockbuster continue to perform both commercial and cultural functions; in the era of unipolarity that has followed the end of the Cold War, this means that Hollywood (and the blockbuster), has a crucial role to play in extending and exemplifying American cultural universality (prime modernity), not as an official function (propaganda or otherwise) of America as a nation state, but as part of a national state of mind that is both internalised and projected – the belief in the universality of an 'America' that is 'desired by all, beneficial to all and attainable by all'. (Flint & Falah 2004, p. 1380).

For more than three decades the blockbuster has formed the core of Hollywood's global business, the 'tent-pole picture' that costs more and reaches further than any other cultural object and is Hollywood's primary, although not predominant, product. Furthermore, because blockbusters have a putative global reach, they are also the focal point for additional commercial activities that exist beyond the profits yielded by cinematic distribution (which is, of course, in itself an enormously profitable endeavour). Naturally, these include an

increasingly diverse variety of distribution channels, including television, DVD and online viewing, but which also extend into a panoply of synergetic activities: product placement within films, computer games, toys, foodstuffs, theme park rides, novelisations, board games, etc. In this way, our encounters with blockbusters are not singular viewings, but multifarious interactions that occur both within and beyond the multiplex. Without delving too far into the murky waters of 'postmodernism', we can see that the blockbuster is but one of myriad means to encounter diffuse notions of 'America' out in the world. As the dominant cultural product of the world's dominant nation, blockbusters are therefore natural objects of study for anyone seeking to understand American global hegemony in the era of unipolarity or the operation of global market relations in Late Capitalism. Ameritocracy forms part of the rationale for the former of these spheres of concern and is implicated in the American leadership of the latter.

The soft power persuasions of American cinema offer a means to access the American universal, seemingly away from the harsh realities and structural limitations of geo-politics and economic globalisation, which Nye would define as the actions of American hard power. Of course, we cannot watch blockbuster movies without, in some way or another, paying for the entertainment we are about to receive and thus engaging with the commercial and structural political economy of Hollywood. However, encountering 'America' on screen (whether in the cinema or through other media) is a hyper-real experience, an engagement with a superstructural simulacrum of an 'America' that does not really exist, but which is nonetheless ubiquitous and potentially transformative. However, unlike the structural factors of American primacy, in which engagement with 'America' is enforced and whose transformative effects are measured in more quantifiable terms, American cinema is persuasive; with its promise of pleasure, the blockbuster demonstrates domination not by arms, but by desire. Indeed, whilst accusations of cultural imperialism may sometimes holds true in particular periods, policies and movies, we cannot rely entirely on the theory to sufficiently explain the global domination of American cinema.

Ultimately, 'Hollywood sells pleasure to people, of one type or another' (Geoff King: Ameritocracy 2011), and so suggests that audiences are simply buying a myth of America ('false consciousness') fail to account for the fact that Hollywood must be selling something that audiences want. Superficially, this is the experience of pleasure that derives from spectacle, the suspension of disbelief and narrative resolution (happy endings). However, as an expression of, and agent for, American prime modernity, the blockbuster is also exporting ideas concerning American hegemony and its globally beneficial effects. Indeed, because the 'need to export economic practice, political ideology and cultural ideals across the whole of the globe rests upon a visible assumption that these models are universally desired' (Flint and Falah 2004, p.1380) the Hollywood blockbuster serves an important function in maintaining American hegemony by both embodying (commercial dominance) and expressing (mythic narrative content) American universality. The political economy of the medium isn't the message *per se*, but ideas of universality are implicit to both and are thus intertwined and mutually fortifying, further reinforcing the universality of American prime modernity and fulfilling the nation's providential destiny.

Examining late twentieth and early twenty-first century blockbusters reveals that even as they express seemingly universal themes, ethics and values, they are also implicated in expounding parochial ideas concerning American identity. As such, Hollywood blockbusters are exemplars of Ameritocratic ideas of universality, which manifests in their political economy, mythic narrative structures, and ideological intentions. The 'commercial aesthetic' of Hollywood production suggests that films and filmmakers do not have explicit ideologies that they wish to promote, certainly not beyond the primary objective of perpetuating their profits and the capitalist system that generates them. It is not in the commercial interests of film producers to alienate sections of their potential audience with excessively political or ideological films. However, as we can observe in the oeuvre of Roland Emmerich, Hollywood blockbusters nonetheless do demonstrate an almost uniform commitment to certain principles that are implicitly connected to American conceptions of global destiny:

that America is a benevolent force in the world, that the individual is the primary agent of history, that liberal democratic capitalism is the best form of social organisation and political economy, and that America's unique historical development, value structures and global position allow her to speak and act on behalf of all peoples as natural universal hegemon.

Ameritocracy on Screen

In the era of unipolarity, the Hollywood blockbuster has become the ultimate exemplar of Ameritocracy; the global scope and scale of its political economy enables the blockbuster to function as the primary channel through which the mythos of American universality is projected and exemplified to the world. Hollywood itself is, of course, but one medium through which the phenomenon of American primacy is made manifest (and through which Ameritocracy can be expressed), and thus its global success and dominance is sometimes cited as evidence of the efficacy of American hegemony and as proof of America's universal status. However, despite global reach and universal pretensions, the version of universality presented in the Hollywood blockbuster is often troublingly parochial, speaking more to specific American concerns and historical influences than to genuinely universal values. Indeed, the Ameritocratic processes of universalisation and Americanisation in which Hollywood is implicated are inherently contradictory, embodying what we might refer to as the 'crisis of exceptionalism': the simultaneous, yet paradoxical, claims that America is both unique and universal. Such a paradox inevitably generates a range of challenging and long-standing questions. Can one nation function as model for all nations? How can the individual ideals and values of liberty, freedom and democracy – so fundamental to American conceptions of their exceptional national character – be applicable to all peoples, particularly when their meanings are seemingly not fixed (universally standard, but uniquely occurring in America) but flexible (unique in application and thus universally adaptable)? The riddle of American uniqueness and universality inherent to Ameritocracy naturally yields a riddling answer: America's true uniqueness lies in her universality, the two ideas part of the same Ameritocratic continuum, an ideological ouroborus that feeds on itself in an unending conceptual loop.

Ameritocracy, the profound belief in American universality, terminality and providentiality, has led successive generations of American leaders to 'vindicate' (Brands, 1998) the

American idea abroad; reifying the universality of American values, and thereby proving America's providential mission to improve humanity's lot. The twentieth century produced the conditions through which the American mission might be brought to fruition; rather than just modelling her unique universality, America now had the industrial, economic and military might to make changes to the structure of global governance that could prove it. With the advent of cinema, and Hollywood's relatively swift global domination of the medium, America also had access to a powerful cultural tool that could present American values (alongside or within American products, modes of living, political culture, etc) as the transformative cultural force to accompany (and even inspire) the structural changes of American-led globalisation. The message of America's special mission could now be spread throughout the world, with the universality of the medium seen as the perfect conduit for expounding the universality of the nation. Consequently, from its earliest years, universality was a central concern for Hollywood:

> 'That the cinema was a universal medium was a specially handy counter-argument against those wishing either to use film to represent national/local interests or to erect import barriers. And it also served to naturalize Hollywood's own nationality by equating Hollywood cinema's undeniable American 'accent' with a universal language. Given Hollywood's worldwide prominence and the rhetoric of universality, the style and practice of film-making developed by Hollywood in the late 1910s and 1920s became international norms: studio-based production, expensive production values, rapid cutting, shot variety, continuity editing.' (López, 2000, p.423)

The Hollywood blockbuster, often too readily dismissed as harmless entertainment, is the apotheosis of the 'rhetoric of universality' established by Hollywood in its earliest years, expressing both the commercial prerogative of the American national film industry and the ideological and hegemonic imperatives of the nation itself. The filmmaking techniques developed in the classical era, as suggested above, produced an Americanising effect on other national cinemas, which has persisted into the present day. The blockbuster continues to establish international norms for filmmaking, so much so that for some international

audiences, 'films means American films, Hollywood films' (Mike Leigh, *Ameritocracy*: 2011), with the shift in definition of 'film' itself a perfect example of Ameritocracy: an American iteration transformed into a universal model.

What will we find when we look at the filmic texts themselves? Can we observe a genuine, if mythic, universalism that can speak to all peoples and thus transcend national specificities? The answer to this question is an unsatisfactory 'partly', insofar as the commercial aesthetics of filmmaking, particularly those of the Hollywood blockbuster, dictate the application of a broad narrative that might have universal appeal. Consequently, It has been convincingly argued (Ang 1985, Kaplan 2004, Olson 2004, Demerath 2007) that American media texts are deliberately polysemic: audiences (domestic and foreign) are offered a space into which they can project their own myths and ideals, and are encouraged to negotiate the meaning of a text from a range of possible interpretive positions. However, Hollywood's focus on polysemy actually (and ironically) generates homogeny, such that we can observe 'a standardisation, a blandness, in a lot of Hollywood films, that would allow them to lend themselves to everybody' (Neil Campbell, *Ameritocracy*: 2011). This leads us in turn to an obvious question – if the universality of Hollywood films makes them bland, why watch them at all? Surely we must come to the counter-intuitive conclusion that the 'blandness' of generic spectacle, universal themes and predictable outcomes provides pleasure?

Notions of universality have often been limited to the commercial imperatives of the American cinema, with critics variously mobilising notions of transparency, deracination and polysemy to explain Hollywood's global cultural dominance. Each of these terms also resonates in some degree with notions of universality, usually with regard to a rationalisation of why Hollywood narratives have tended, in recent decades, towards homogenised blockbuster products: the summation of such analyses has been, in short, that universality equals maximum profitability. What then of universality as represented within, not by, the blockbuster? When Hollywood blockbusters refer to 'universal' values such as freedom and

democracy they do so in Ameritocratic terms; what is being referred to is not a genuinely universal value, but its American iteration. However, the specific (American) historical and cultural references to which these terms speak are unreadable; the signified content of the concepts are left deliberately vague and variable, heightening their 'universal' nature. Over half a century ago, as America assumed her leading role on the world stage, Louis Hartz (cited in Paul Roazen introduction to Hartz 1990, p.21) sounded a warning against the conflation of unique aspects of America with universal applications:

> What we have to do is disentangle our faith in the norm of freedom from the particular historical experience in which it has been cast in the United States. We have to be able to distinguish the universality of an ethic from the peculiar framework in which we have received it.

Hollywood blockbusters have consistently failed to heed this warning, unable or unwilling to disentangle American uniqueness from American universality, obfuscating the boundary between the American and the global, and thus projecting the 'peculiar framework' of America as a global inheritance. The assumption, espoused by American Presidents of both the filmic and factual worlds, that all peoples desire freedom and independence may well be true, but the universality of these ethics is rarely presented in a paradigm that does not reference America as the ultimate expression of them. Nonetheless, it may also be true that audiences *do* see something universal in Hollywood movies, and that representations of freedom and democracy, trite as they may be, can offer inspiration and hope: 'probably a lot of people who suffer from all sorts of oppression can project into that situation of the embattled central figure who fights against oppression and wins through' (Geoff King, *Ameritocracy*: 2011).

Through analysis of Roland Emmerich's blockbuster movies, I will expand upon and draw together ideas concerning the universalisation of American values that have already been developed and explored, focusing on the ways in which they integrate and employ Ameritocracy. It is not within the scope of this thesis to quantify, qualify or analyse what

effects, if any, Ameritocracy might have *through* these texts. Rather, my analysis is upon identifying Ameritocracy *within* the text as desirable outcome, preferred subject position and dominant metanarrative in terms of the conflation of American values and universal values. Indeed, it may be philosophically contentious to even argue whether such things as 'universal' values do or can exist, and although mono-myths and mythotypes will be discussed in reference to specific texts, it is not my purpose here to digress excessively into such deep waters. However, it should suffice to say that generations of Americans have been educated to believe that such universal values do exist, and that they are American. Partly because of the worldwide dominance of Hollywood, we too have received the same lessons.

Case Study: The Universality of Roland Emmerich

> The whole Western world is obsessed with entertainment. I don't know about the third world really; maybe they are too. It's like everybody is obsessed with Hollywood movies worldwide. And even though everybody hates the Americans, they're still watching American movies. So, in that way, entertainment can do much more than, probably, a book or article. (Gilchrist, 2004).

The dominance of the blockbuster in global markets is based around a political economy that seeks to promptly and profitably return investments. With blockbuster budgets usually in excess of one hundred million dollars, it is unsurprising therefore that Hollywood studios tend to utilise a limited range of low-risk strategies in the production of a blockbuster, designed to maximise their 'universal' appeal. Blockbusters usually come from a handful of loose genres (science fiction, fantasy, action, cartoon), frequently derive from 'pre-sold' intellectual properties (comic books, novels, etc) and have reasonably predictable narrative outcomes. Additionally, part of a blockbuster's unique selling point is that it has a star director to match the star cast; consequently, there are only ever a handful of directors at any given time that can be considered as 'blockbuster' directors, and therefore only a limited number of 'bankable' directors who studios will trust with the gargantuan sums at their disposal. For the purposes of this case study I have honed in on the work of one such director, Roland Emmerich. Whilst there are several other blockbuster directors whose films could similarly be used to interrogate Ameritocracy, there are several reasons that make Emmerich's oeuvre particularly pertinent.

Emmerich's Hollywood theatrical releases, beginning with *Universal Soldie*r (1992) through to *2012* (2010) neatly span the post-Cold War era of American unipolarity and hegemony with which this thesis has been largely concerned. During this era, without the easily identifiable 'Other' of Soviet communism against which America could define itself,

Hollywood has constructed a range of enemies for its heroes that have scattered and unspecific origins and motivations. However, much like the universal aspirations of the Soviet Union, these diffuse enemies are also perceived to hold the potential for universal threat; in attacking America, these enemies attack us all. Emmerich's movies are full of such universal threats and the 'universal' (American-led) responses that can resolve them, and, similarly, can be said to belong to a broad apocalypse genre, which, with its themes of global crisis, destruction and rebirth, lends itself particularly well to Ameritocratic themes and content.

In selecting sources for his blockbusters, Emmerich has largely strayed away from the pre-sold properties (including sequels) that dominate the blockbuster marketplace (*Godzilla*, 1998, being the sole exception to date) preferring free-standing texts that only connect indirectly to other cultural products or mythologies (with which they may share commercial synergy or branding). Consequently, as one-off event movies, we can analyse and interrogate Ameritocratic themes in Emmerich's films without excessive recourse to additional meanings generated by the brand or property being utilised. Of course, Emmerich's movies still come with pre-existing mythological baggage, but they draw instead from other sources which are less obviously commercial (novel, comic books, television shows, etc) such as Ancient Egypt (*Stargate*, *10, 000 BC*), American history (*The Patriot*), or catastrophic Climate Change (*The Day After Tomorrow*, *2012*), and are thus more self-contained as objects of study. Similarly, Emmerich's use of historical setting and narrative scenario is particularly fantastic. For example, Emmerich does not make 'history' films in the way that, for example, Spielberg has (*Schindler's List*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Munich*), but rather merely references history as part of plot content, not to explore the meanings of the narrative within a broader historical context. Even *The Patriot*, Emmerich's sole 'history' film, takes the facts of the War of American Independence very loosely: the film is not a film 'about' the war as such, but rather uses the structure of the war as a backdrop for the more universal themes of freedom, democracy and individual heroism. So, whether the narrative crisis is pre-historic, parochial

or planetary, Emmerich consistently returns to Ameritocratic ideas, and positions positive notions of 'America' as just and right, as unique and universal, and as a true hegemon. Any critique of America in Emmerich's films only occurs by means of the closed economy of the jeremiad, which, as the most patriotic form of protest, only circles back in to the same positive notions of American universality.

By any standards, Emmerich's films perfectly fit the 'blockbuster' mould. High on budget, spectacle and production values, his films are visually impressive products capable of generating vast profits. However, unlike some of his colleagues such as Steven Spielberg or Christopher Nolan, Emmerich is not regarded as a director of 'serious', 'artistic' or 'challenging' films but rather as a proclaimed director of 'popcorn' movies - films which do not have pretensions to wider social significance or the development of ideas, but focus solely on the provision of pleasure through escapist entertainment. The 'popcorn' moniker is suggestive of a 'pure' entertainment, and of an emphasis on visual spectacle over character development, plot structure or general profundity, which means that Emmerich's films are rarely analysed for ideological motivation; however, they are at the cutting edge of the commercial aesthetic – vast, 'global' stories, seemingly transparent and un-antagonistic, and maximising universal appeal – and as such are particularly pertinent to the analysis of Ameritocracy. Moreover, Emmerich's admittance in the epigraph to this section that 'even though everybody hates the Americans, they're still watching American movies. So, in that way, entertainment can do much more than, probably, a book or article' demonstrates an awareness that Hollywood films, even 'popcorn' ones, have a transformative potential, even if we accept that the nature of that transformation is polyvalent and unpredictable.

In the following sections I will analyse the Ameritocratic content and intent of Emmerich's films thematically, analysing how his usage of certain shots, expositionary strategies, filmic techniques, genres, and monomythic narrative content all contribute to an Ameritocratic message, which, whilst seemingly concerned with universal aspirations and values, often

extols particular virtues and parochial concerns through a persistent conflation of the American with the universal. Emmerich's blockbusters, like those of other big budget directors, may appear to demonstrate global concerns in their appeals to audiences beyond the domestic market of the United States, but analysis of his films shows that these 'tent-pole pictures' are not really deracinated – they still speak to specifically American ideals and interests, and root themselves in Ameritocratic notions of universality[15].

My analysis of Emmerich's films will take a broadly structuralist approach, seeing his blockbuster narratives as pleasure-producing and meaning-making mechanisms that seek, in some small degree, to make sense of the world; his movies project universal mythic structures (conveying meaning through the use of particular monomythic story tropes, character types and narrative arcs), which endorse the dominant ideology of American universality and hegemony through the projection of Ameritocracy as part of a totalising and underlying universal system. Emmerich is not so much an 'auteur' with an instantly recognisable visual style or a self-conscious agenda, nor a director engaged in the projection of ideological messages in a conspiratorial or propagandist sense, but rather a filmmaker whose practice utilises and assembles an array of cinematic codes and conventions which are particularly well suited to the commercial success required by the blockbuster marketplace. As Maltby (1995, p.436) suggests, the 'cinematic author may now be understood, in theory, as the name of a sign, a matrix of textual devices, or "merely a term in the process of reading and spectating;"' in this sense, 'Emmerich' refers not just to the director and his creative idiosyncrasies, but to a particular mode for the assemblage of what Lévi-Strauss referred to as 'bundles of relations' (1963, p.211), the constituents of mythic narratives.

Indeed, as Olson (2004, p.125) suggests,

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[15] Of course, not all blockbuster films are as explicitly Ameritocratic as I will suggest Roland Emmerich's are. However, by their very nature, all blockbusters must make some appeals to universality – commercial success hinges upon it – and thus they tend therefore to return to familiar themes, genres, and re-constitutions of monomythic elements with proven 'universal' status.

Although authorial intention does not define the nature of a literary act, it is clear that some of the leading Hollywood media producers believe they distill, displace, and display mythic archetypes. Steven Spielberg and George Lucas are perhaps the best examples. Their use of mythic displacement ranges narrowly from the overtly manifest to the slightly less manifest, particularly in their work together, which explicitly mine Western mythology.

We could easily add Roland Emmerich to a long list of blockbuster directors who 'believe they distill, displace, and display mythic archetypes', frequently utilising elements of Campbell's 'monomyth'[16] of the 'hero's journey' (1968), which, through its tale of tests and thresholds, endeavours and enemies, rewards and resurrection, makes claims for its universal applicability. It is not within the scope of this thesis to address whether the world shares a single myth system (or a set of universal values), or to extensively test the academic validity and usability of Campbell's ideas[17]; however, we can acknowledge, as Olson does above, that many Hollywood filmmakers (particularly blockbuster directors) extensively utilise monomythic forms and archetypes (on both conscious and unconscious levels) as part of a creative and commercial strategy. In arguing that such forms and archetypes constitute a 'narrative transparency' onto which non-American cultures can superimpose their own mythic meanings, Olson even goes so far as to argue that the

global intercultural success [of American media] can best be attributed to their ability to reduce myth to its prior elements, elements that like those on the periodic table are recombinant and universal. Their success does not lie in regenerating a particular myth, but in transgenerating a new, elemental one. This can best be called a *mythotype* because it transcends any particular myth. (2004, p.126)

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[16]I use the terms 'monomyth' and 'monomythic' here in their most generic senses, without a slavish devotion to Campbell's work, and the stages of the 'hero's journey' (1968), or to other monomyths. However, Jewett and Shelton's constructions of *The American Monomyth* (1977) and *The Myth of The American Superhero* (2002) are both pertinent to my analysis (although I do not analyse Emmerich through the specifics of their arguments), because of the ways in which they concentrate on American iterations of universality and on an exceptionalist desire to lead humanity to salvation.

[17] Campbell's conception of the monomyth has been criticised for excessive abstraction and Western ethnocentrism (Crespi, 1990), for male bias (Weigle, 1998), and for operating in terms which are too general to be of academic credibility in the study of mythology.

Olson's transparency theory implies universality, which feeds back into an idea of America as the 'universal nation': it attributes universal status to American media production (via its usage of archetypes and common myth structures), one so complete that even monomyths are preceded by 'mythotypes'. Olson is suggesting that audiences desire Hollywood texts because they know, from experience, that they will offer them transparency, thus generating an association between 'America' and mythotypical forms. Hollywood therefore functions as a supplier of transgenerational templates, spaces that say 'Your Myth Here'. Yet those spaces, the framework onto which the projection of indigenous values can occur, are nonetheless unequivocally American – referring to them as transparent simply obscures the Americanness of the process. In constructing such mythotypes or monomyths, Hollywood directors do not simply select morsels at random from the mythotypical smorgasbord, they regularly return to elements that speak directly to values and behaviours valourised in American culture. The 'hero's journey', for example, endorses the endeavours of male individualism as the driving force of history, truth and justice. Similarly, the monomythic elements utilised by Emmerich relate not to global myths (although they are frequently presented as such) but to elements of American mythology: the tabula rasa, the frontier, the jeremiad, the happy ending, renewal, and a sense of moral mission and providential purpose. Such monomythic recombinations in blockbuster movies may seem neutral, and, as 'popcorn' products, fundamentally irrelevant and ideologically insignificant; however, as Mackay (1999, p.65) states in reference to *Star Wars* (1977), 'we are instructed that these films have cultural capital; they are relevant to a "timeless" audience *because* of their mythological themes.'

Naturally, readings of blockbuster texts are not uniform, as the broad nature of monomythic elements generate an interpretive variance. Where appropriate I will signal possible counter-hegemonic interpretations in footnotes, but it has not been possible here to engage in a fully open poststructuralist analysis in which 'criticism should not only critique dominant ideologies but should also specify any utopian, oppositional, counter-ideological, subversive,

and even, if possible, emancipatory moments which are then turned against existing forms of domination' (Kellner, p.80). The assumptions of a poststructuralist analysis, 'that no text takes a position that it does not at the same time undermine, the idea that all texts are constitutively contradictory' (Stam, p.182), are certainly applicable to Emmerich's oeuvre and to blockbuster cinema more generally. The blockbuster's urge towards commercial universality opens each text up to polysemic possibilities, to the potential for negotiated and oppositional readings to those that support the dominant and hegemonic ideology. However, just because the now normative poststructuralist mode of criticism tends to reach 'the familiar conclusion that the "text" under analysis is full of contradictory tensions, requires active readers and produces a variety of pleasures' (Willemen, p.227) we should not ignore the fact that *dominant* codes, conventions and ideologies can still be located in individual texts, and across Hollywood blockbuster cinema generally. That said, it should also be noted that it is generally easier to locate mythic or ideological elements in films than to work out what this means, to what ends they might be deployed, how they get there and what we 'do' with them in our viewing. Furthermore, simply because the dominant code is the most obvious, this does not necessarily make it the most influential; as Stringer argues (2003, p.3) 'the social stature of movie blockbusters is never guaranteed', so we cannot easily equate the size, scale and success of the blockbuster with lasting cultural significance. Consequently, 'we cannot read directly from the hit status of texts to argue that they plug directly into contemporary cultural concerns' (King, p.7); however, to suggest no connection between success and wider cultural and ideological currents would be, at best, implausible.

Conveying Universality: Symbolic Signposting

One of Roland Emmerich's preferred techniques for expressing the global nature of a particular narrative is exceedingly simple, involving little more than the appearance of an on-screen graphic displaying the place and date of the following scene. Ostensibly, the purpose of these graphics is obvious. They function as simple geographic and temporal signposts, enabling the audience to immediately understand where and when the ensuing 'action' is to occur. In helping to establish a 'world' for the narrative that is ground in the familiar, such signposting is an element of a standard exposition that 'introduces the characters, shows some of their interrelationships, and places them within a believable time and place' (Boggs, 40). Expositionary graphics are used at least once in the introductory scenes of every Emmerich directed theatrical release apart from *10,000 BC*, which uses its title to achieve the same ends. In *The Patriot*, these graphics are limited to specific locations in America during the revolutionary era, which itself is referenced in the first graphic 'West Virginia, 1776'. *Universal Soldier*, *Stargate* and *2012* foreground their narratives with scenes set in earlier historical periods that contain important plot information about the past, informing the present day narrative that constitutes the body of the film: 'Vietnam, 1969' (*Universal Soldier*), 'North African Desert, 8,000 BC' and 'Giza, Egypt, 1926' (*Stargate*) and a series of graphics that lead us from 2009 to the titular date of 2012 via a series of locations around the world (*2012*). Exposition of this sort is, of course, certainly not limited to Roland Emmerich or to blockbuster filmmaking, however its deployment by Emmerich suggests that as well as providing temporal and geographic orientation, such graphics also function as part of a broader symbolic signposting that relates to Ameritocracy. Emmerich is able to convey a sense of universality to the narrative using this form of expositionary signposting (the universality of the commercial aesthetic), implicating all peoples, not just Americans, in the unfolding story.

Indeed, as Stringer suggests, it is difficult to conceive of the Hollywood blockbuster in purely 'American' terms:

> the Hollywood blockbuster is very frequently a transnational product… The very production and narrative concerns of *Around The World in 80 Days, Bridge on the River Kwai, Khartoum* (1966), and others, prioritize issues of cross-cultural contact and understanding. Similarly, the recurring fetishization of "exotic" overseas locations in many contemporary box-office hits, as well as the projection of anthropological themes in action-adventure titles such as *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) and *The Mummy* (1999), both suggest that the Hollywood blockbuster continues to enjoy close and ongoing relations with the global culture that spawns and sustains it. (2003, p.10)

Stringer's argument here is particularly applicable to Emmerich's work, which similarly draws upon the disciplines of anthropology, archaeology (including Egyptology), climate science and astronomy for its plots and themes. With transnational, global or 'human' concerns centred in their narratives, Emmerich's films unsurprisingly 'visit' and graphically signpost diverse range of locations. However, closer inspection reveals that this crude universalism is Ameritocratic, with American myths, ideas and heroes at its centre. The signposts, whatever their practical expositionary function, point back to America.

Let us take *Godzilla* as an example. The opening credits form the first part of the film's exposition and provide a representation of the genesis of the eponymous monster; a long sequence of shots - a map of the South Pacific ocean, nuclear testing, a lizard with her eggs - are overlaid and intercut, all washed in a sepia tint that informs that these events are not current, but historic. The sequence is accompanied by a muted version of 'La Marseillaise', so that along with the geographic and temporal markers, the audience is provided with sonic symbolic signposting that informs us that the crisis that is about to ensue is not one that America is culpable for. The first scene takes us to Chernobyl (another site of nuclear catastrophe in which America bears no responsibility), where the film will collect its hero, a

scientist studying the effects of radiation on earthworms. From there the expositionary graphics continue apace over the following scenes as the audience tracks Godzilla from the South Pacific to New York via Tahiti, Panama, Jamaica, and the Eastern Seaboard of the United States. So, before the narrative moves beyond the exposition into the complication or crisis section of the film (the monster's destructive arrival in New York) we have already travelled halfway around the world, and the audience is aware of the global scale and scope of the narrative.

However, the apparent universality of this geographic signposting symbolically leads us, inexorably, to the United States: in the Emmerichian apocalypse blockbuster, all roads lead to the New Rome. The introduction to *The Day After Tomorrow* is a similar case in point, centring an American response to a universal crisis. Following a long computer-generated shot that carries the viewer in over an Antarctic ice-scape (constituting the opening credits of the film), the very first shot of the movie introduces the scene: a text graphic of 'Larsen B Ice Shelf, Antarctica', overlaid on a fluttering, full-screen stars and stripes. The inference is clear; America will be at the heart of the ensuing narrative, even though the plot locations will be dispersed throughout the world and the impacts of the coming catastrophe will be universal. Moreover, the signified content of the flag (freedom, democracy, etc) is seemingly transposed onto the blank Antarctic landscape, a continent whose official territoriality is shared and contested by several nations, of which America is not one. The specific national content of the flag, however, is elided in favour of a universal context; Antarctica is presented as a vast, virginal and universal territory, a terra incognita and tabula rasa onto which America will map itself, evoking peculiarly American iterations of new world and frontier mythology. Of the fifty-one shots that comprise the rest of the introductory sequence, the flag appears in ten of them. So, if *The Day After Tomorrow* is a deracinated text which does not privilege the US domestic market and 'no longer addresses a national audience' (Wasser 1995, p.365), or if it is a 'transparent' text (Olson, 2004), what then is the purpose of the heavy-handed inclusion

of the American flag in its introductory sequence if not to assert the universality of American identity?[18]

Other locations are merely plot points, satellites orbiting on the periphery of a global America, not nations on a par with America; the threat may well be universal, but the solution is ultimately and inevitably always American – a perfect expression of Ameritocracy. *Independence Day*, perhaps the Ameritocratic text par excellence, demonstrates this point directly. Following the first devastating wave of alien attacks, a plan is hatched for a retaliatory strike; cut to the 'Iraqi Desert' where Israeli, Arab, French and British air forces have mustered; a Morse code message comes through: 'It's from the Americans, they want to organise a counter-offensive' chirps a British officer, 'It's about bloody time', his commander replies, 'what do they plan to do?'. The plan is spread to Russia and the Far East, who are equally eager to receive the news of America's solution: at last, the Americans have a plan to save us all. Only American leadership is logical in the face of such a global crisis; only American ideas and ingenuity can bring together the previously warring nations of the world and offer truly universal answers.

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[18] This interpretation is, of course, just that – a singular interpretation of what I perceive to be the dominant reading of this scene. However, one could easily argue that the flag here is merely an accurate representation of how an American scientific mission in Antarctica would conduct and represent itself. Alternatively, one could even make an extreme oppositional reading of this scene and suggest that the heavy-handed inclusion of the flag by Emmerich is actually a deeply ironic commentary on American jingoism through the hyperbolic deployment of this powerful national symbol.

Conveying Universality: One World

Based on the "earthrise" photographs taken by the crew of Apollo VIII, no other single image conveys a sense of a unified world more than an image of the earth as seen from space. It reveals our planet in all its grandeur and vulnerability, as just a small blue orb in the vast blackness of the cosmos and the one world that all humans can call home. Emmerich has used this shot in three films - *Independence Day*, *The Day After Tomorrow* and *2012* (interestingly, and perhaps not coincidentally, these three films are Emmerich's highest grossing, with each featuring global apocalypse) – each time extending the logic of the graphic signposting (expositionary and symbolic) of universality, by literalising the idea of one world in a single shot. Each usage, however, has a nuanced symbolic meaning and function in its expression of Ameritocracy. In Science Fiction films, a genre in which all three films can broadly be placed, such a shot is not unusual; indeed, for films whose plot occurs in space, or which feature extra-terrestrial beings, such a shot is relatively commonplace and has been used in the introductory sequences of many recent sci-fi blockbusters, including *Contact* (Robert Zemeckis: 1997), *Armageddon* (Michael Bay: 1998), *War of The Worlds* (Steven Spielberg: 2005) and *Transformers* (Michael Bay: 2007).

In *Independence Day* this 'earthrise' shot is used in the film's introduction and functions as a simple visualisation of the fact that the impending alien apocalypse will be global in nature. However, the shot comes at the end of a sequence that centres America as the nation that will be tasked with leading a planetary (universal) response to the invasion. The sequence begins with a shot of the American flag planted by Apollo XI astronauts on the moon, and pans down to reveal the plaque set down to accompany it, zooming in on the words as Neil Armstrong annunciates what we can read on the screen: 'Here men from the planet earth first set foot upon the moon. We came in peace for all mankind.' A shadow passes over the plaque, and the subsequent shots track the shadow as it moves over the surface of the moon, before panning up to reveal planet Earth, small and vulnerable. Immediately, the audience is

asked to make a link between the American flag, the voice of America's most famous explorer and the Earth itself. To be American is to be global, bound to lead as representative of all humanity, and destined to be the bearer of the light that will cast out the alien shadow. To be American is to be *already* universal – the only nation with the universal aspiration and ambition to put a man on the moon, and the only power capable of responding to a universal threat. From its very first frames, *Independence Day* positions Ameritocracy, the union of the American and the universal, at the centre of its world.

Emmerich returns to the 'earthrise' shot at the end of two other movies, *The Day After Tomorrow* and *2012*, using this iconic image to evoke a literal 'new world' to replace those swept away by environmental apocalypse. As these shots end both films (fade to black), they are not expositionary, but rather form the final part of the denouement and, as such, have different symbolic relationships to Ameritocracy to that expressed at the beginning of *Independence Day*. In *The Day After Tomorrow*, the film's final sequence shows us the rescue of survivors from a frozen New York, before cutting to the American astronauts who have watched events unfold from the International Space Station. Peering out of a porthole, one astronaut asks his colleague 'have you ever seen the air so clear?' The camera pans round, revealing the earth below and a North America almost entirely covered in ice. The air is clear, the earth is cleansed, and a new era awaits humanity. That the United States no longer exists as a functioning geo-political entity and that millions of people have died in the rapid onset of a new ice age is inconsequential; the 'earthrise' shot enables the film to end with a profound, and global, sense of hope. 'America' survives and endures, even in the absence of the geographic nation; again, 'America' is not so much a state as a state of mind, enduring, immutable, terminal.

The ending of *2012* is extremely similar, but rather than the terminal aspects of Ameritocracy, the shot focuses more explicitly on American mythology of the 'new world', and its sense of hope and possibility. As the arks that contain the remnants of humanity head symbolically

towards Africa, the cradle of civilisation, the camera zooms out, slowly revealing a changed and new world. The old world, with its decadent civilisation, has been swept away; the 'earthview' shot dramatises the founding myth of America, renewing 'America' again on a new continent. However, like its usage in *The Day After Tomorrow*, the use of 'earthrise' ends the film with a problematic post-nationality. Indeed, the arks themselves (a name with biblical origins, thus also conveying Ameritocratic notions of providentiality to the new world) evidence the poly- and transnational nature of the film and offer a reasonable, if crude reflection of geo-political reality: American and Indian scientists discover the world is doomed; the American government leads other nations to plan for the worst and fill the arks; but it is the stereotypically industrious and secretive Chinese that manufacture and host them. The Chinese make things, America safeguards culture and universal values[19].

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[19] 'Leave it to the Chinese', says Carl Anheuser, 'in the time we had I didn't think it could be done.'

Conveying Universality through Genre: It's The End of the World, As We Know It.

> Emotionally, the end of the world is actually a renewal, a transition to a new beginning and a better life to come. In religious narratives, God smites sinners and resurrects the virtuous. For secularists, the sins of humanity are atoned through a change in our political, economic or ideological system. Environmental prognostications of calamity are usually followed with reproaches and recommendations for how we can save the planet. Marxists projected communism as the liberating climax of a multistage process that requires the collapse of capitalism. Proponents of liberal democracy proclaimed the end of history when the cold war was won by democracy and liberty (Michael Shermer, 2011).

Apocalypse movies have always been attractive to Hollywood; they demand heavy use of spectacle to achieve verisimilitude, which whilst a costly endeavour, helps to establish them as 'must-see' events with universal appeal (such spectacular narratives also naturally inhibit dialogue, helping films to 'translate' well overseas) and potentially vast commercial rewards. Indeed, the appeal of apocalypse may even be genuinely universal (as argued by Shermer) hard-wired into our evolutionary psychology. The perennial recurrence of prophecies of doom, in both religious and secular contexts, suggests that as humans we fear the worst, but hope for the best; a sense of apocalypse, and the rebirth it might bring, is an enduring fascination that is not unique to Americans. However, the centrality of renewal inherent to ideas of apocalypse, wherein each destruction promises redemption, means that such stories have a particular resonance with American identity, which thrives upon rituals of renewal.

Similarly, apocalypse films also make appeals to audiences based on 'the thought that if none shall survive, then, at least, all class, social, and racial boundaries will have been erased. No more slavery, no more sweatshops, no more prejudice, and no more inequality' (Dixon, 2003, p.3). This erasure of boundaries has a natural resonance with American myths and ideologies

of egalitarianism, feeding into and out of Ameritocratic notions of universality: in the face of universal threat, we all become equal. Apocalypse thereby offers resolution to the riddle of *E Pluribus Unum*: as *2012*'s fictional American President (Danny Glover) states, 'Today, none of us are strangers. Today we are one family, stepping into the darkness together.' Moreover, apocalypse also enables reference to ideas of America as the terminal society, providentially prepared for its universal destiny: at the end of the world it is America that leads the world back into the light. Of course, if apocalypse is a recurrent human theme then the end is always posited, always nigh; paradoxically, American terminality must therefore always be deferred, with each ending functioning as the next beginning.

Many blockbusters, of course, fall into a broad apocalypse genre, which may manifest in a superhero or spy story, a biblical or historical epic, or most likely – as here – in science fiction: those of Roland Emmerich herald almost exclusively from this genre. Only his first theatrical release, Universal Soldier, does not directly relate to apocalypse. *Stargate*, his first major success, has a narrative that mostly occurs off-world, but Earth is threatened with destruction by nuclear attack in the film's climax. *Independence Day*, *The Day after Tomorrow* and *2012* all visualise the apocalypse, whilst *Godzilla* sees the catastrophe focused only on New York (although there is also the potential for global crisis if the monster's eggs hatch). Even *The Patriot* and *10,000 BC* have themes of civilisational peril; the former, a historically inaccurate recreation of the American Revolutionary war, and the latter, a picaresque adventure tale of early human society, both see their heroes fighting against tyranny so that they may build a new, and more hopeful world. The Patriot is a direct representation of one of America's founding mythologies, whereas *10,000 BC*, which is ostensibly a narrative deracinated from national identities, merely relocates the same mythology to a pre-historic moment. The tale of liberty versus tyranny, and the triumph of unity from diversity, so quintessential to American identity, are perceived as perennial and applicable to any human era. Indeed, this type of superimposition of the specific experiences of American freedom and democracy onto notions of 'freedom' and 'democracy' in their

broadest, most abstract sense, can be perceived of as an example of the universalisation of American values (or perhaps even the Americanisation of universal values – the two processes seemingly synonymous) with which the rhetoric of Ameritocracy is concerned.

Conveying Universality: New Worlds, New Frontiers

If apocalypse movies enable the American mythology of the new world, they do so by dramatising that other most cherished of American myths, the frontier:

> 'What you've got in most cases is some kind of monstrous intervention, whether it's a monster or not, that comes in and sweeps away the supposedly complacent, cosy, corrupt world and forces a re-engagement with this more primal kind of thing, which is again a re-enactment of that kind of frontier dynamic' (Geoff King, *Ameritocracy*: 2011).

In analysing films, it is tempting to constrain the frontier to the Western genre and the nineteenth century, to moments when a physical frontier was being stretched to the boundaries of the American continent. However, as discussed in chapter one, philosophical ideas of the frontier are deeply rooted in American identity, prefiguring the founding of the United States. Yet, the frontier is also the most elusive of locations, existing to be transgressed, a line drawn so that it can be effaced, redrawn and effaced again; indeed, the frontier, certainly since the formal closure of the geographical western frontier at the end of the nineteenth century, is now not so much a physical location, but a psychological site in which to enact 'the mystery of American renewal' (a phrase used by President Clinton in his 1992 Inaugural address), the point at which American universality can be tested, and the 'place' where the ideological ouroborus of Ameritocracy is most at home.

Similarly, the frontier also engages with contradictory notions of American terminality in its establishment of a boundary that must be pushed against and extended; in constant pursuit of an abstract concept of 'progress', the frontier is an end point that can never be reached, but rather endlessly renewed. Each renewal, like apocalypse, generates a new world. Nonetheless, for all its abstraction and insubstantiality, the frontier still functions as a boundary, the border between us (US) and them (everything that is not 'America'), and thus inevitably therefore has a difficult relationship with inclusive notions of American universality. Emmerich

engages the mythology of the frontier in a range of nuanced ways: as cultural contact zone, as site of renewal, as symbol of masculine adventure, as battleground for heroes who fight both external enemies and internal bureaucracy, and as escape from technological civilisation. Each iteration, however, seems to reinforce ideas of American hegemony in the unipolar era, even as they postulate a universal erasure of national boundaries and the generation of a new world.

The idea of the new world (often linked directly to the 'earthview' shot), and the new frontier it provides, is quite common to science fiction films. In *Blade Runner*, neon blimps float through the skies of a dystopian future Los Angeles, claiming that 'a new life awaits you in the off-world colonies. The chance to begin again in a land of opportunity and adventure'. We never see these colonies, with the plot located in the decaying streets of the old world, but we do know that the hard work of establishing them is performed through the slave labour of 'replicants'. The redeployment of American founding mythology is clear. Similarly, in *Avatar*, Jake Sully is offered 'a fresh start, on a new world'; an opportunity he seizes, eventually joining forces in rebellion with the indigenous population. This idea of 'going native' is fundamental to the process of renewal that the frontier offers; as Slotkin argues, 'the American must cross the border into 'Indian country' and experience a 'regression' to a more primitive and natural condition of life so that the false values of the 'metropolis' can be purged and a new, purified social contract enacted' (1992, p.14). But this is not a radical proposition: 'has there ever been a more banal and obvious manifestation of frontier mythology [than *Avatar*]? The message is a huge grab-bag of clichés from American culture and ideology' (Geoff King, *Ameritocracy*: 2011).

Emmerich dramatises this border crossing most effectively in *Stargate*. The Stargate itself, a device for travelling between worlds, embodies the threshold to be transgressed; the portal takes our frontier adventurers to a literal new world, where they engage with the natives and help them overthrow the yoke of their tyrannical alien overlords. The experiences the

characters have in the new world will change them irrevocably and positively; the geeky archaeologist Daniel Jackson (James Spader), has had his most outlandish theories proved correct and is given a chance to stay with the natives (to do research), but it is Colonel Jack O'Neil (Kurt Russell) who benefits most from his encounter with the primitive culture. When we first meet O'Neil he is contemplating suicide, toying with the same gun his young son had accidentally shot himself with. He accepts his assignment to the new world as a suicide mission, taking with him a tactical nuclear weapon to destroy any signs of danger. By the end of the film he has been born again, regenerated, purged of his melancholy through his experience with the primitive world. This is the frontier as a contact zone between primitive and civilised cultures, but one in which the Stargate team arrive as liberators, not oppressors (the historically more likely turn of events). They bring the people of the alien world writing, weaponry and tactics with which they can rebel; most importantly, however, they bring the gift of American leadership and example.

Emmerich's movies are suffused with frontier mythology, in both small details and, as in *Stargate*, in broad brush strokes. In *Independence Day*, 'the original westward frontier movement [is] echoed in the image of a caravan of motor homes moving across the empty expanse of Nevada' (King, p.19); in *2012* characters flee an earthquake-ravaged Los Angeles in an airplane named 'Western Spirit'. In *The Day After Tomorrow*, we can observe multiple manifestations of frontier mythology. Television announcements tell us that 'in a dramatic reversal of illegal immigration, thousands of people are crossing the Rio Grande into Mexico' as the snow-storm descends on the United States'. Mexico closes its borders until 'the President was able to negotiate a deal to forgive all Latin American debt in exchange for opening the border'. Political boundaries are broken down as Western (northern hemisphere) civilisation is crushed below the weight on a new ice age. It could be argued that the film offers a critique of technological American civilisation, counterposed to a frontier dynamic which offers a more finely-nuanced relationship with 'nature'. However,

> 'The opposition between 'the frontier' and 'civilization' or the technocratic state is a false one that can be given imaginary reconciliation – and thus the emotional satisfaction derived from creating the impression of taking on problems and resolving them – without addressing the underlying contradictions (of class, race, gender, and so on) that characterize contemporary American society'(King: 10).

The reconciliation (and renewal) King suggests, is demonstrated by the final words of the film, delivered by the new American President (the old President having been symbolically sacrificed in the storm):

> 'These past few weeks have left us all with a sense of humility in the face of nature's destructive power. For years, we operated under the belief that we could continue consuming our planet's natural resources without consequence. We were wrong. I was wrong. The fact that my first address to you comes from a consulate on foreign soil is a testament to our changed reality. Not only Americans, but people all around the globe are guests in the nations we once called the third world. In our time of need they have taken us in and sheltered us and I am deeply grateful for their hospitality.'

In the new world that has dawned, there is no line between the first and third worlds, all nations are now equal in front of nature's awesome power. However, the unlikely act of an American President apologising for America offers an illusory resolution to the narrative; America is presented as a new nation, one reduced in geographical size, population, political clout and, crucially, hubris, and yet, despite American culpability in the catastrophe – briefly explored in the film in a scene featuring an intergovernmental meeting on climate change in which the then Vice President of America cites the vast economic costs involved in countermeasures – America still retains the agency of hegemony. The third world, even though it may no longer be referred to as such, is reduced to a stereotypical hospitality, the agency it briefly possessed trumped by a renewed American mythology. Indeed, the humility and gratitude of the President's speech almost make it fit for thanksgiving, the first great experience of hospitality in the new world: a frontier experience that, ultimately, did not work out well for the hosts.

The happy, hopeful ending to *The Day After Tomorrow* also sees a father (Dennis Quaid) reunited with his son (Jake Gyllenhall), their relationship now defined on new terms. More commonly, Emmerich uses the reunion of a separated man and woman: whether they are star-crossed lovers separated by force (*10,000 BC*), estranged husband and wife (*Independence Day*), ex-lovers (*Godzilla*) or divorced couple (*2012*), their re-union is presented with an air of inevitability, 'a return to an essential unity that has only temporarily been blocked' (King: p.26). Superficially, such familial reconciliations can be regarded as universal themes, myths to which all audiences can relate. Indeed, what could be more elemental and basic than the relationships between father and son, and between husband and wife? However, we can see that such structures of familial reconciliation, despite their universality (and in part because of it) are tinged with a specifically American mythology; they symbolically represent the renewal of the covenant between America and the people, providing an imaginary resolution for problems that are not so easily remedied in reality. As Maltby (1995, p.8) argues, movies 'have happy endings because part of their cultural function is to affirm and maintain the culture of which they are a part', and the happy ending, the most basic facet of a Hollywood narrative (blockbuster or otherwise), thus sustains a quintessentially American conception of what the new world promises: a new and happy beginning[20]. Of course, producers and distributors are not necessarily concerned with the ideological imperative of a happy ending, but rather the all important commercial aspect: 'there has been a tendency in Hollywood movies over the years to have an upbeat, happy ending, and there's something to be said for that, in that when you leave the cinema, if you leave with a spring in your step, you're more likely to go and tell a friend about it (Hugo Grumbar, *Ameritocracy*: 2011). Ultimately,

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[20] The final renewal of the happy ending thus has implications for internal and external processes of Americanisation: 'Americanisation is the outcome of personal acculturation which involves the willing acceptance of a new national identity… Americanisation erases the past and begins things anew. To become an American involves regeneration: to become Americanised is to be utterly transformed.' (Melling and Roper, p.6) In some senses then, each Hollywood happy ending enacts a small process of Americanisation; active readers can of course resist or reject this happy renewal and seek to transgress the norms established. Such a resistance, however, is also likely to circumvent the pleasures derived from Hollywood's traditional mode of narrative resolution; the dominant and hegemonic ideology projected by the happy ending is, at least in part, what people pay their money for.

Hollywood movies package pleasure, and so it is unsurprising that audiences generally respond well to positive, hopeful endings; 'you might not want to remove yourself from your daily life in order to watch a story that does not have some degree of hope at the end of it' (Joe Cardazzo, *Ameritocracy*: 2011).

The logic of Ameritocracy (which is heavily imbued with the hope of the happy ending) eventually reaches its apotheosis in *Independence Day*'s most jingoistic, and ironically universal, scene in which the American President delivers a rousing speech to a gathered crowd of nervous pilots:

> Mankind. That word should have new meaning for all of us today. We can't be consumed by our petty differences anymore. We will be united in our common interest. Perhaps it is fate that today is the fourth of July, and you will once again be fighting for our freedom… and should we win the day, the fourth of July will no longer be known as an American holiday, but as the day when the world declared in one voice "we will not go quietly into the night, we will not vanish without a fight", we're going to live on, we're going to survive. Today we celebrate our Independence Day!

If, as Wasser claims, 'the American film industry no longer addresses a national audience. Hollywood's domination of international trade has altered its relationship with the domestic market', such that 'deracinated transnational media now dominate all national audiences' (1995, p.364), it is extremely difficult to account for the intense nationalism of this scene.[21] Upon analysis, blockbusters are not as fully deracinated as Wasser would have us believe – again, the notions of mythic universality they frequently employ are not decentred from national narratives, but are Ameritocratic, speaking (sometimes directly, sometimes obliquely) to specifically American concerns. The President's inspirational words, just like the scene set on the moon in the film's introduction, deliberately conflate the American with

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[21] Of course, the hyperbolic jingoism that this speech seemingly expresses can be read in multiple ways. A viewer can agree with the post-national, universal sentiment it engenders in varying degrees, from a general nodding concurrence to a wholehearted emotional outpouring of cheering and whooping like that enacted by the crowd who hear the speech in the film. In contrast, a viewer may view the hyperbole of the scene with humour and irony, and see as preposterous its attempts at profundity.

the universal ('Mankind… united in our common interest)'; Ameritocracy, and the profound belief that America has a universal and providential purpose and destiny ('perhaps it is fate that today is the 4th of July'), is finally and fully confirmed.

Crucially, this rhetoric is not merely the product of a filmic fantasy, but has a real-life analogue. President Reagan confessed to having mooted the notion of an alien threat to General Secretary Gorbachev during private discussions held in 1985, stating how easy it would be to 'forget all the little local differences that we have between our countries' in the face of such a universal crisis. He later referenced the same hypothetical idea, in terms that are remarkably similar to Bill Pullman's fictional leader, during an address to the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1987:

> I occasionally think how quickly our differences worldwide would vanish if we were facing an alien threat from outside this world. And yet, I ask is not an alien force already among us? What could be more alien to the universal aspirations of our peoples than war and the threat of war?

His Ameritocratic conviction that there could be such a thing as 'universal aspirations' that are impeded by 'war and the threat of war' seems noble, and brims with a 'one world' rhetoric of peace appropriate for the forum of the United Nations. However, it is unclear as to precisely what such aspirations might be and who would define them, although it is probably safe to assume that he is speaking of generic notions of peace, freedom and prosperity. After all, which people would not want these things? *Independence Day* takes the same rhetoric, but is explicit in outlining who will model such universal aspirations, and even provides a date when we might annually celebrate them.

Narrative transparency theory suggests that blockbusters will tend towards simple, mythic ideas in their narratives (which speak to 'universal aspirations'), as producers seek out scripts that can provide pleasure to as many people as possible, maximising worldwide profits. The very diversity of the American box office, even prior to consideration of the diverse desires of

overseas territories, therefore leads producers to naturally tend towards a more generalized and homogenized product. Moreover, Emmerich's blockbusters, and perhaps many more by other directors, are also not truly mythotypical (and thus transparent) as Olson (2004) argues; global audiences may be able to project their own myths onto the narrative, but only through interacting with the peculiarly American ideas and ideologies that are being presented. Similarly, the narrative scope and target audience of Emmerich's blockbusters may be global in proportion, but its underpinning structure is specifically American. This returns us to Purdy's 'parochial universalism', which is at the core of Ameritocracy, and it is worth re-stating his contention that Americans have 'always been inclined to believe that they are the world's universal nation... Americans believe, somewhere below the level of articulation, that every human being is born as American, and that their upbringing in different cultures is an unfortunate, but reversible accident' (Purdy 2003, p.105). Hollywood blockbusters therefore have a crucial role to play in helping to expound the obviousness of American universality and the efficacy of American global hegemony, and in so doing help to ameliorate the misfortune of not being born American by helping the world to unite in our common interest, and unleash the 'American' within us all.

Conveying Universality: Deploying the Jeremiad.

The nearly ubiquitous presence of frontier mythology in Emmerich's oeuvre is matched by the occurrence of the jeremiad, a rhetorical form which the frontier helps engender. Inherited from the Puritans, the jeremiad embodies concepts of social renewal and revitalisation, and a recommitment to the originary myth of the sacred covenant between the government and the people, transposed from the covenant between the Israelites and God[22]. Emmerich frequently utilises the jeremiad in the form of seemingly universal character and narrative archetypes, deploying it (as other filmmakers do) as an important constitutive element of the blockbuster's monomythic lexicon. Of course, the origin of the jeremiad in the Old Testament establishes its rhetorical structure as a central tenet of Judaeo-Christian theology[23], so we can in some sense think of it as a universal form of protest. Indeed, stripped of its theological and religious underpinnings, some version of the jeremiad is probably universal: as basic conflict between government and people, and as calling attention to the almost inevitable disparity between rhetoric (ideals) and action (interests) manifest in political institutions and ideologies. However, no other nation centres the jeremiad at the heart of her political life and mythic origin story with the same intensity and ubiquity as America; the projection of the jeremiad as a 'universal' form of protest therefore obscures the fact that in its American iteration the jeremiad is implicitly and intimately connected to American exceptionalism. This sense of specialness, the idea of America as a chosen nation with special universal values, suffuses the American jeremiad and thus feeds directly into notions of America as natural global hegemon.

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[22] It is important to note here that, as Bercovitch explains, the *American* jeremiad is different from its old world predecessors, suffused with a more intense religiosity and sense of providentiality: 'The traditional mode, the European jeremiad, was a lament over the ways of the world. It decried the sins of "the people" – a community, a nation, a civilization, mankind in general – and warned of God's wrath to follow… But from the start [the Puritans] sounded a different note. Theirs was a peculiar mission, for the they were a 'peculiar people', a company of Christians not only called but chosen, and chosen not only for heaven but as instruments of a sacred historical design. Their church-state was to be at once a model to the world of Reformed Christianity and a prefiguration of New Jerusalem to come.' (1978, pp.7-8)
[23] Jeremiah is considered a prophet in Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

A scene towards the end of *2012* exemplifies Emmerich's usage of the jeremiad as both a universal story trope and archetypal character. As giant tidal waves race towards the Himalayan plateau in the film's climactic scenes, ticket-holders wait to board the arks that will lead them to safety. Dr. Adrian Helmsley (Chewitel Ejiofor) discovers that the waves will arrive earlier than previously predicted and the decision is taken by Carl Anheuser (Oliver Platt, the President's Chief of Staff who is the acting Commander-in-Chief once the incumbent decides to remain in Washington) to close the bow doors, leaving thousands of people (including ticket-holders and the Chinese workers who constructed the vessels) exposed to certain death outside. Helmsley is appalled by this act and delivers the following words to those on the bridge of his ship and, via video, to the heads of state on board the other arks:

> I know we've all been forced to make difficult decisions to save our human civilization, but to be human means to care for each other and civilization means to work together to create a better life. If that's true, then there's nothing human and nothing civilised about what we're doing here… Everybody out there has died in vain if we start our future with an act of cruelty. What will you tell your children?'

Helmsley makes his plea for compassion by way of the jeremiad, a form of protest where 'prophets narrate conduct as a decline from origins' (Shulman 2008, 8), which are defined here as the basic, universal standard of 'human civilisation'. In the conflict of ideals and interests that ensues Anheuser argues against Helmsley, 'Dr. Helmsley's passion is admirable, but I would remind you that we have very limited resources and extremely limited time'. This contrary position is typical of an American jeremiad in which the ideals of the nation ('life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness', reduced in this scene to only 'life') are opposed by government bureaucrats who exchange cherished values for exigency and expedience, thus breaking the sacred trust between leaders and their people.

The two other arks respond to Helmsley's words with a recommitment to the universal ideals he has espoused: 'The people of Russia, along with China and Japan agree to open the gates',

followed by 'The United Kingdom, Spain, France, Canada, Germany and I believe that I may also speak for the Italian Prime Minister, we vote to let these people come in'. The conflict of ideals and interests, which lends perennial verisimilitude to blockbuster narratives, is given the imaginary resolution of ideals winning through; however, it is Helmsley, the American Jeremiah, who puts forth the solution and offers the necessary leadership to guide the other nations out of their acquiescent stupor. At this moment of crisis and choice, American leadership and alliance with the universal values of all of humanity proves the efficacy of American hegemony. Yes, Helmsley has been opposed by forces within his own society, but in bemoaning Anheuser's commitment to interests over ideals, this internal conflict only serves to further demonstrate that the American ideal is morally right and just. Suitably convinced of the efficacy of American leadership, the other nations agree to let the people in, with the Western nations pointedly using the language of democracy ('we vote') as they do so.

Emmerich deploys Jeremiah figures in many of his films (notably his apocalyptic movies, - *Independence Day*, *Godzilla, The Day After Tomorrow* and *2012* - in which warnings of calamity are most apposite), with a character archetype: the morally and environmentally responsible scientist, who prophesies and warns against catastrophe, fights against conspiracy and bureaucracy, and who keeps alive the 'universal' ideals of individualism, freedom and democracy. In each case the Jeremiah figure is opposed not just by the external enemy (aliens, a mutated monster, and extreme climate change), but also by a bureaucratic and secretive governmental figure, so that in each film we can observe, as Geoff King suggests, 'a split between those two things: the ideas of conspiracy, dishonesty and deceit, and the unveiling of that by these figures who do have some of this frontier heritage' (Ameritocracy, 2011). Helmsley may not be a traditional frontier figure, but his character traits – bravery, resourcefulness, soulfulness, intelligence and integrity – and performance of the jeremiadplace him squarely in that heroic tradition.

Similarly, the character of the prophet-hero or scientist-Jeremiah appears in *The Day After Tomorrow* (Jack Hall – Dennis Quaid), *Godzilla* (Dr. Niko Tatopoulus - Matthew Broderick) *Independence Day* (David Levinson - Jeff Goldblum) and *Stargate* (Daniel Jackson – James Spader). In each case the scientist discovers the impending apocalypse[24] , informs the government and is resisted by a bureaucratic figure. Interestingly, as scientists, each is also engaged in transnational research (apart from Levinson, who works as a satellite scientist for a media network), providing additional credence to their assumed universality. In *The Day After Tomorrow* the conflict between ideals and interests is played out at the UN Conference on Global Warming in New Delhi (notably a 'global' forum), where Hall explains his ice core findings to the assembled international delegates. After fielding concerned enquiries, Hall summarises his beliefs with the idealistic statement that 'if we do nothing it will be our children and our children's children who will have to pay the price'. The United States delegate, Vice President Becker (Kenneth Walsh) swiftly retorts, 'and who's going to pay the price of the Kyoto accord. It would cost the world's economy hundreds of billions of dollars… our economy is every bit as fragile as the environment', placing national interests over post-national ideals. As events unfold it is Hall, our Jeremiah, whose predictions come true, leaving Becker contrite and apologetic by the movie's conclusion.

Godzilla's jeremiad is more complex, insofar as it is divided between two characters of different nationalities, Dr. Niko Tatopoulus, the American scientist-prophet who realises the scale of the threat posed by the eponymous monster and its potential progeny, and Phillippe Roaché (Jean Reno), a French secret service operative dispatched to clean up the damage done by French nuclear testing: 'I am a patriot, I love my country. You understand that? It is my job to protect my country. Sometimes I must even protect it from itself'. Although Roaché is in some sense an embodiment of the institutionalised vested interests of his government, this statement (and his bravery throughout the film) also renders him as an agent of his

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[24] Such prescience is fundamental to the Jeremiah story, and is also fulfilled by Helmsley in *2012*: he discovers the coming calamity and warns his superiors, becoming the lead scientific advisor to the President.

nation's ideals; his actions enable the renewal that his jeremiad implies. Tatopolus meanwhile is plagued by a variety of obstructive and self-serving internal forces that will not listen to his entreaties: the New York mayor who is concerned about how damage to the city will effect his election prospects; the US Army generals who, in aggressively pursuing Godzilla, are blind to the exponentially worse problem posed by the creature's eggs; the manipulative ex-girlfriend who steals from him in order to forward her media career. In each case, Tatopoulus's predictions come true and his ability to remain right and just is never in doubt. Both Tatopoulus and Roaché demonstrate a particularly American aspect of the jeremiad, namely the distrust of federal and governmental authority[25], but they also embody the mission of the American jeremiad, that through the combined power of word and deed an individual and national renewal can be enacted.

Emmerich's use of the jeremiad appears to partly align with the European, exclusively civic usage outlined by Bercovitch (1978, pp.7-8), insofar as they seemingly lack the specific religiosity fundamental to the American iteration. However, the sense of being 'chosen' for a 'peculiar mission' (providentiality), of 'sacred historical design' (terminality), and of being 'a model to the world' (universality) are retained, each expressing an aspect of Ameritocracy[26]. Universal and terminal ideals, expressed by white male scientist-prophet characters, win out over short-term interests. Emmerich's jeremiads thus function to reinforce the idea of America as the universally hegemonic nation with global responsibilities: on the eve of the final battle in *Independence Day* David Levinson (Jeff Goldblum) says to his wife, 'you know how I'm always trying to save the world?', throwing an empty can of Coca-Cola into a

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[25] *The Patriot* (2000), concerns part of the founding myth of the American civic jeremiad, and its eventual codification in the covenant of the constitution. But even here, the natural distrust of federal authority emerges before the War of Independence begins: 'Why should I', asks Benjamin Martin (Mel Gibson), 'trade one tyrant three thousand miles away, for three thousand tyrants one mile away?'

[26] Ellis (1993, p.170) also argues that 'For Bercovitch, the Puritans provide the key to the "astonishing cultural hegemony" of competitive individualist vales – free enterprise, laissez-faire, self-reliance, social mobility - in America. Not only was there an "elective affinity" between Puritanism and capitalism, but the Puritans bequeathed a rhetorical form - the jeremiad - that functioned to sustain the cultural hegemony of competitive capitalism. It was the Puritan jeremiad, Bercovitch argues, that "gave contract the sanctity of covenant, free enterprise the halo of grace, [and] progress the assurance of the chiliad."' (Ellis, p.170)

conveniently placed recycling bin, 'well, here's my chance'. The American rhetoric of global mission, delivered here as a throwaway line, suffuses Emmerich's blockbuster texts; his deployment of the jeremiad takes all opposition and re-assimilates it into the universal consensus of 'America', functioning to re-affirm the apparent interchangeability of the terms 'American', 'global', 'universal' and even 'human'.

CONCLUSION

This thesis and accompanying documentary film has demonstrated the centrality of Ameritocracy to American identity, thought and action. A sense of the universal example set by American government and political economy has been interwoven in the American national fabric from the earliest settlers to the present day. Furthermore, the projection of this universality has become increasingly important throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, as America sought to rationalise her position as global hegemon, and establish American prime modernity as globally desirable, beneficial and attainable. Consequently, Ameritocracy has also served as a rationale for the justification of American primacy, and is integrated into the nation's primary *modus operandi* and *raison d'être*: who else should lead the world if not the world's global nation, the nation which best represents the 'universal' values of freedom, liberty and democracy and thus operates as the last, best hope for humanity?

Ameritocracy functions as a useful conceptual prism through which we can analyse 'America' and American cultural products; its application is not unique to Hollywood cinema, although the global scale and scope of blockbusters does make them an ideal home for universalist ideas. The conception of Ameritocracy has potentially broad applications across the field of American studies, with particular relevance to cultural industries such as television, or to other cultural media that are exported from the United States. Moreover, the ability of Ameritocracy to provide a bridge between culture, history and politics also suggests that the concept could be deployed in reference to the various arenas in which universalist rhetoric finds a home beyond culture, whether in the explicitly political language of inaugural addresses and other presidential pronouncements, or in the more oblique fields of military power, economic endeavour or technological progress. Finally, because notions of universality are fundamentally inclusive, Ameritocracy offers a means by which the exclusive

myth of American exceptionalism, which to a great degree drives the discipline of American studies, can be challenged and interrogated. There are, of course, fields and texts that counter Ameritocratic thought, and thus there is also much potential scholarship in an analysis of films, or other texts, which refute, resist and oppose American universality. Furthermore, it has unfortunately not been possible here to engage with notions of a 'post 9/11' cinema and it particular usage of universalist rhetoric; to do so would have constituted an entire thesis unto itself and so, in the interests of clarity, no reference has been made to those calamitous events.

The Hollywood blockbuster, with its industrial power, global reach and universal language, has proved to be an ideal vehicle for projecting Ameritocratic thought, providing the perfect outlet through which American values can be demonstrated to be universal. The universality of Hollywood blockbusters (which functions to both satisfy American commercial interests and express American ideals), which obfuscates the boundary between the American and the universal, and conflates American iterations of particular ideals with universal values, is also beset by a parochial perspective - the profound conviction that America (and the ideals of freedom, liberty and democracy) is exceptional, a special and sacred idea that is more than a mere nation. Consequently, American universality has always been challenged and contradicted by exclusive notions of American uniqueness; the crisis of exceptionalism, of how America can be simultaneously unique and universal, is perennial. Ideas of renewal have therefore been central to American national narratives, so that universality can be redefined, terminality re-deferred, and providentiality re-conferred. Ameritocracy is thus an ideological ouroborus, endlessly feeding on itself and beginning again, reconstructing new worlds in which the American idea can be reborn, and the American story retold. Where better for this story to be told, to American citizens and citizens of the world, than through the myth machine of Hollywood? Through Hollywood blockbusters, which are but one conduit for Ameritocratic thought, we can engage in an American global culture and share in American prime modernity, so that whatever else we might be, we can also be American.

Not all Hollywood films are as aggressively Ameritocratic as Roland Emmerich's, and there are of course films which attempt to critical engage with America's primacy, hegemony and universal status. However, the importance of maintaining cultural universality is central to hegemonic survival and so it is unlikely that mainstream Hollywood cinema (of which the blockbuster is the central text) will ever stray too far from the Ameritocratic assumptions of American universality, terminality and providentiality that provide the rationale for American global dominance and leadership. What is unclear is what happens when American hegemony is not just challenged, but supplanted by the primacy of another nation? As the BRIC economies continue to grow and develop American primacy and hegemony will, inevitably, be threatened, and the unipolar era we currently find ourselves in will most likely be brief. To paraphrase Twain, reports of the end of history have been greatly exaggerated.

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FILMOGRAPHY

Feature Films

Film Title	Year	Director	Studio / Company
Birth of a Nation	1915	D.W. Griffith	David W. Griffith Corp. / Epoch Producing Corporation
All Quiet on the Western Front	1930	Lewis Milestone	Universal Pictures
Modern Times	1936	Charles Chaplin	Charles Chaplin Productions
Gentleman's Agreement	1947	Elia Kazan	Twentieth Century Fox
Plymouth Adventure	1952	Clarence Brown	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM)
Paths of Glory	1957	Stanley Kubrick	Bryna Productions
North by Northwest	1959	Alfred Hitchcock	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM)
The Manchurian Candidate	1962	John Frankenheimer	M.C. Productions
Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb	1964	Stanley Kubrick	Columbia Pictures / Hawk Films
Planet of the Apes	1968	Franklin J. Schaffner	APJAC Productions / Twentieth Century Fox
Easy Rider	1969	Dennis Hopper	Columbia Pictures Corporation / Pando Company Inc. / Raybert Productions
Patton	1970	Franklin J. Schaffner	Twentieth Century Fox

1776	1972	Peter H. Hunt	Columbia Pictures
F for Fake	1973	Orson Welles	Janus Films
Jaws	1975	Steven Spielberg	Zanuck/Brown Productions / Universal Pictures
Close Encounters of the Third Kind	1977	Steven Spielberg	Columbia Pictures Corporation / EMI Films / Julia Phillips and Michael Phillips Productions
Star Wars: episode IV – A New Hope	1977	George Lucas	Lucasfilm / Twentieth Century Fox
Superman the Movie	1978	Richard Donner	Warner Bros. Pictures
Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back	1980	Irvin Kershner	Lucasfilm
Conan the Barbarian	1982	John Milius	Universal Pictures / Dino De Laurentiis Company
Blade Runner	1982	Ridley Scott	The Ladd Company / Shaw Brothers / Warner Bros. Pictures
E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial	1982	Steven Spielberg	Universal Pictures / Amblin Entertainment
First Blood	1982	Ted Kotcheff	Anabasis N.V. / Elcajo Productions
Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi	1983	Richard Marquand	Lucasfilm
The Noah's Ark Principle (Das Noah's Arch Prinzip)	1984	Roland Emmerich	Student Film
Ferris Bueller's Day Off	1986	John Hughes	Paramount Pictures
Top Gun	1986	Tony Scott	Paramount Pictures

Rambo III	1988	Peter MacDonald	Carolco Pictures
Batman	1989	Tim Burton	Warner Bros. Pictures / The Guber-Peters Company / Polygram Filmed Entertainment
The Abyss	1989	James Cameron	Twentieth Century Fox / Pacific Western / Lightstorm Entertainment
Glory	1989	Edward Zwick	Tristar Pictures
Barton Fink	1991	Joel Coen	Circle Films / Working Title Films
Aladdin	1992	Ron Clements / John Musker	Walt Disney Pictures / Walt Disney Feature Animation
Universal Soldier	1992	Roland Emmerich	Studio Canal / Carolco Productions / IndieProd Company Productions
Apollo 13	1995	Ron Howard	Universal Pictures / Imagine Entertainment
Braveheart	1995	Mel Gibson	Icon Entertainment International / The Ladd Company / B.H. Finance C.V.
The American President	1995	Rob Reiner	Universal Pictures / Castle Rock Entertainment / Wildwood Enterprises
Toy Story	1995	John Lasseter	Pixar Animation Studios / Walt Disney Pictures
Independence Day	1996	Roland Emmerich	Centropolis Entertainment / Twentieth Century Fox
Air Force One	1997	Wolfgang Petersen	Columbia Pictures Corporation / Beacon

			Communications / Radiant Productions
Contact	1997	Robert Zemeckis	Warner Bros. Pictures / South Side Amusement Company
Titanic	1997	James Cameron	Twentieth Century Fox / Paramount Pictures / Lightstorm Entertainment
Armageddon	1998	Michael Bay	Touchstone Pictures / Jerry Bruckheimer Films / Valhalla Motion Pictures
Godzilla	1998	Roland Emmerich	Centropolis Film Productions / Fried Films / Independent Pictures (II)
American Beauty	1999	Sam Mendes	Dreamworks SKG / Jinks/Cohen Company
Fight Club	1999	David Fincher	Fox 2000 Pictures / Regency Enterprises / Linson Films
Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace	1999	George Lucas	Lucasfilm
The Matrix	1999	Andy Wachowski and Lana Wachowski	Warner Bros. Pictures / Village Roadshow Pictures
Gladiator	2000	Ridley Scott	Dreamworks SKG / Universal Pictures / Scott Free Productions
The Patriot	2000	Roland Emmerich	Columbia Pictures / Centropolis Entertainment / Mutual Film Company
X-Men	2000	Bryan Singer	Twentieth Century Fox / Marvel Enterprises / Donners' Company
	2001	Ridley Scott	Revolution Studios / Jerry

Black Hawk Down			Bruckheimer Films / Scott Free Productions
Monsters Inc.	2001	Pete Docter, David Silverman and Lee Unkrich	Pixar Animation Studios / Walt Disney Pictures
Spiderman	2002	Sam Raimi	Columbia Pictures / Marvel Enterprises / Laura Ziskin Productions
Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones	2002	George Lucas	Lucasfilm
The Sum of All Fears	2002	Phil Alden Robinson	Paramount Pictures
Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl	2003	Gore Verbinski	Walt Disney Pictures / Jerry Bruckheimer Films
The Matix Reloaded	2003	Andy Wachowski and Lana Wachowski	Warner Bros. Pictures / Village Roadshow Pictures / Silver Pictures
The Matrix Revolutions	2003	Andy Wachowski and Lana Wachowski	Warner Bros. Pictures / Village Roadshow Pictures / NPV entertainment
X2	2003	Bryan Singer	Twentieth Century Fox / Marvel Enterprises / Donners' Company
National Treasure	2004	Jon Turtletaub	Walt Disney Pictures / Jerry Bruckheimer Films / Junction Entertainment
Team America	2004	Trey Parker	Paramount Pictures / Scott Rudin Productions / MMDP Munich Movie Development & Production GmbH & Co.
The Stepford Wives	2004	Frank Oz	Paramount Pictures / Dreamworks SKG / Scott Rudin Productions
Troy	2004	Wolfgang Petersen	Warner Bros. Pictures /

			Helena Productions / Latina Pictures
The Day After Tomorrow	2004	Roland Emmerich	Centropolis Entertainment / Twentieth Century Fox / Lions Gate Films
Kingdom of Heaven	2005	Ridley Scott	Twentieth Century Fox / Scott Free Productions
Lord of War	2005	Andrew Niccol	Entertainment Manufacturing Company / Lions Gate Films
Mr. and Mrs. Smith	2005	Doug Liman	Regency Enterprises / New Regency Pictures / Summit Entertainment
Syriana	2005	Stephen Gaghan	Warner Bros. Pictures / Participant Productions
The New World	2005	Terence Malick	New Line Cinema / Sunflower Productions / Sarah Green Film
300	2006	Zack Snyder	Warner Bros. Pictures / Legendary Pictures / Virtual Studios
War of the Worlds	2005	Steven Spielberg	Paramount Pictures / Dreamworks SKG / Amblin Entertainment
American Dreamz	2006	Paul Weitz	Universal Pictures / Depth of Field
Casino Royale	2006	Martin Campbell	Columbia Productions / Eon Productions / Casino Royale Productions
Mission Impossible III	2006	J.J Abrams	Paramount Pictures / Cruise/Wagner Productions / MI3 Film
Superman Returns	2006	Bryan Singer	Warner Bros. Pictures / Legendary Pictures / Peters Entertainment

V for Vendetta	2006	James McTeigue	Warner Bros. Pictures / Virtual Studios / Silver Pictures
Epic Movie	2007	Jason Friedburg and Aaron Seltzer	Regency Enterprises / New Regency Pictures / Paul Schiff Productions
Ocean's Thirteen	2007	Steven Soderbergh	Warner Bros. Pictures / Village Roadshow Pictures / Jerry Weintraub Productions
Transformers	2007	Michael Bay	Dreamworks SKG / Paramount Pictures / Hasbro
10,000 BC	2008	Roland Emmerich	Warner Bros. Pictures / Legendary Pictures / Centropolis Entertainment
Burn After Reading	2008	Ethan Coen and Joel Coen	Mike Zoss Productions / Relativity Media / Studio Canal
Iron Man	2008	Jon Favreau	Paramount Pictures / Marvel Enterprises / Marvel Studios
Quantum of Solace	2008	Marc Foster	Metro-Goldwyn Mayer (MGM) / Columbia Pictures / Eon Productions
Wall-E	2008	Andrew Stanton	Pixar Animation Studios / Walt Disney Pictures
2012	2009	Roland Emmerich	Columbia Pictures / Centropolis Entertainment / Farewell Productions
Avatar	2009	James Cameron	Twentieth Century Fox / Dune Entertainment / Ingenious Film Partners
Up	2009	Pete Docter and Bob Peterson	Pixar Animation Studios / Walt Disney Pictures

Megamind	2010	Tom McGrath	Dreamworks Animation / Pacific Data Images (PDI) / Red Hour Films
Skyline	2010	Colin Strause and Greg Strause	Rogue / Hydralux / Transmission Pictures

Documentary Films

Film Title	Year	Director	Studio / Company
Bowling for Columbine	2002	Michael Moore	Alliance Atlantis Communications / Dog Eat Dog Films / Iconlatry Productions Inc.
The Corporation	2003	Mark Achbar and Jennifer Abbott	Big Picture Media Corporation
Fahrenheit 9/11	2004	Michael Moore	Fellowship Adventure Group / Dog Eat Dog Films / Miramax Films

Television

Show Title	Year	Director	Producer / Channel
Dallas	1978 - 1991	David Jacobs (Creator)	Lorimar Productions / Lorimar Television
Star Trek: The Next Generation.	1993, 26th April	Jonathan Frakes	Paramount Television

Season 6, Episode 20, 'The Chase.'			
The Century of the Self	2002	Adam Curtis	BBC (UK)
The Power of Nightmares: The Rise of the Politics of Fear	2004	Adam Curtis	BBC (UK)
The Trap: What Happened to Out Dream of Freedom	2007	Adam Curtis	BBC (UK)
Late Show with David Letterman	April 9th, 2007		CBS
Family Guy, "Peter's Progress"	May 17, 2009	Glen Winter	Fox Broadcasting Company
The Great British Film Industry	Aug 19, 2009	Michael Buckman	Film24 (UK)
Smallville, "Shield"	Oct 1, 2010	Brian Iles	The CW Television Network
The American Dream, "One Nation Under God"	December 14, 2010	Peter Molloy (Producer)	BBC (UK)

Video Websites

www.stockfootageforfree.com

www.vimeo.com

www.whitehouse.gov

www.youtube.com