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Manifest Destiny Adapted for 1990s' War Discourse: Mission and Destiny Intertwined

By Roberta L. Coles

Civil religious themes have long been integral to public discourse in America. Specifically the themes of mission and destiny best known in the form of Manifest Destiny, still carry the country through periods of foreign conflict. This paper analyzes the discourses of President George Bush during the Persian Gulf War and President Bill Clinton during the Kosovo conflict. I identify the themes of mission by example and mission by intervention and argue that these forms of mission are intertwined. The use of these themes by presidents of different political parties indicates that while they remain useful, they are adapting for a changing political and economic world system.

A nation is more than the land it encompasses, the number or kind of people residing in it, or the economy it generates. Rather it is, in the words of Benedict Anderson (1983), an "imagined community" constructed through selectively remembered and embellished events, myths of origin, heroic stories, and proclaimed values. These transcendent symbols constitute the nation's civil religion, a set of myths that seeks consensus, attempts to provide a sacred canopy to a diverse community, and gives meaning to the community's existence (Williams and Alexander 1994; Fairbanks 1981). Williams and Demerath (1991) suggest that America's civil religion no longer reflects an objective cultural cohesion (if it ever did), but rather they see it as a cultural interpretive resource, a discursive tool for connecting morality and policy.

While the various themes of America's civil religious repertoire can be found in many public settings, they are particularly well suited for contexts of conflict, where the narratives, sacred symbols, and ideals serve as more than priestly offerings of edification for the natives. They undergird a country's self-definition, explain why and how a society came to be, justify why its members do what they do, and -more importantly here -articulate the country's status, roles, and policies in relation to the world community (Dionisopoulous and Goldzwig 1992; Holsti 1962; Ivie 1974; Wellek and Warren 1966).

In foreign interventions, practical interests, such as securing oil supplies and military bases or building NATO, are often insufficient to arouse public compliance, let alone active support, for a risky military action, but the apparent truths conveyed in the country's civil religion serve to dress those interests in transcendent clothing. This is particularly necessary for war actions, where the potential for sacrifice must be outweighed by an emotive appeal to sympathy,

justice, duty, and mission. Consequently, a number of political strategists have suggested that while American foreign policy requires pragmatic consideration, legitimacy of such policy is inherently a moral task (Bostdorff and Goldzwig 1994; Crabb 1989; Williams 1999). Without at least the appearance of a worthwhile human purpose, the success of such policy would be doubtful.

Rapid response capabilities in place around the world today make it technologically possible for a U.S. president to implement his policy of bombing another country before anyone can stop him. Yet, most presidents choose to employ transcendent discursive frameworks to limit the political fallout of such actions by 1) embedding the action in strategic and moral justification and 2) using the opportunity to build a vision and identity for the country by weaving each war into the historical and mythological tapestries of America.

The discursive framework of Manifest Destiny, a 19th Century political doctrine, is aptly equipped for conflict. Indeed, many have argued that war is inherent in this doctrine. While not coined as a term until 1845, Manifest Destiny drew upon centuries old themes of American civil religion; it proffered America's superior and chosen nature and its duty to redeem the continent and perhaps the globe,¹ as justification to expand America's geographical and political boundaries. Relying on these tenets, Presidents Polk and Tyler added more than 800 million acres of Mexican land to the United States in the mid-1800s through war and confiscation. Later in the century, again relying overtly on Manifest Destiny in the Spanish-American war, President William McKinley annexed in one status or another the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Hawaii, and part of Samoa.

While some scholars argue that Manifest Destiny was supplanted by imperialism at the turn of the century, the distinctions between imperialism and Manifest Destiny are often nebulous.² If Manifest Destiny is approached only as an overt political doctrine limited to land expansion, then it was nearing its demise after the turn of the Twentieth Century. As a term, it now connotes arrogance and racism and is rarely openly invoked. Nevertheless, if we recognize the mythic and religious nature of Manifest Destiny, delineating its civil religion components, as a number of scholars have done (Baritz 1985; Bostdorff 1994, for instance), rather than treating it as a political doctrine tied to a particular historical era or to a particular form of expansion, we find that Manifest Destiny has remained embedded in America's civil religion as a resilient and robust narrative useful for justifying war, intervening on behalf of a ubiquitous national interest, and restoring America's self-image of exceptionalism. The discourses of President George Bush as he prepared for and executed the 1991 Persian Gulf War and President Bill Clinton as he approached and implemented a military campaign in Kosovo were replete with the tenets of

Manifest Destiny though neither ever invoked the term itself.

This essay analyzes the rhetoric of presidents George Bush and Bill Clinton during these two wars in respect to their reliance on one narrative of America's civil religion -Manifest Destiny -to conduct war and gain support. I use this case study to respond to two main debates currently occurring within the literature on civil religion. I argue that Bush presented a largely priestly mode of civil religion, while Clinton leaned more to a pastoral, and nearly prophetic mode. Bush relies more on the expansionist mode of Manifest Destiny, while Clinton relies on the example mode. In addition, the two presidents' war discourses differ on a number of theoretically noteworthy points, which suggest that while Manifest Destiny is an enduring myth, it may be changing to suit the globalizing world economy.

American Civil Religion – A View of the Theoretical Territory

The existence, nature, and shape of an American civil religion have been the foci of concern for a number of sociologists and culture scholars in recent years. Provoked Largely by Robert Bellah's 1967 essay in *Daedalus*, scholars have progressively delineated a number of debated areas within the field. In its basic form, Bellah argued that America's civil religion had as its underlying motivation the desire to carry out God's will on earth. While God's exact nature, gender, will, and existence remain a matter of some debate in this increasingly diverse and formally secularized country, Bellah concluded that America's civil religion appeased this diversity of interpretation by proffering a unitarian (rather than sectarian) and austere (rather than personal) God. (Of course, this would not satisfy atheists, but no one has addressed this aspect yet.)³

According to Bellah, this civil religion developed discursively through a number of "trials" that the United States has endured. Two of these trials and the civil religion doctrines that arise from them are integral to Manifest Destiny. From the time of American's first trial, the period of the colonial days through the war of independence, the origin of America was rhetorically explained as an act of providence – that is, God led people (white Europeans) to America to found a new and superior or exceptional social order that would be the light unto all nations. Establishing this country with religious liberties required the creation of a political framework that would support, though not immediately nor perfectly, diversity of many sorts. This had the effect, as Tiryakian (1982) points out, of "sacralizing political relations," thus opening the door for a civil religion.

This chosen nation myth has been the oldest and most continuous creed in American civil religion. That America's selfdefinition, its myth of origin (Bulman 1991, Tillich 1933), would

emphasize these real or perceived virtues over its weaknesses should be no surprise. Various studies (Bass 1995; Bormann 1985; Dimont 1971; Galtung 1987; Hackett and Zhao 1994; Horseman 1981; Lewis 1987; Stephanson 1995) have noted that numerous peoples have held or continue to hold a selfimage as superior, unique, and/or chosen.

Bellah (1967) also argued that post-World War II America is currently embroiled in another trial, the struggle to act responsibly in a revolutionary world that seeks to secure many of the material and spiritual assets that America has realized. Bellah thought that successful negotiation of this trial would result in the attainment of some kind of viable and coherent world order in which American civil religion would become simply one part of a new world civil religion (Bellah 1967). While Bellah did not delineate the themes that would arise from this trial, his idea remains relevant here, as I speculate later that the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny may be evolving to fit this new world economy.

While Bellah (1967, 1998) acknowledges that civil religion has been used for expansion and oppression, he generally approaches American civil religion as a positive belief system that calls upon the nation to live up to a transcendent standard of morality and behavior. Others have been more cynical. Will Herberg (1960) argued that American civil religion essentially was idolatrous worship of itself, merely propagating an ethnocentric American way of life around the world. Likewise, Robert Jewett (1973) called American civil religion just another form of zealous nationalism.

This debate over the malignant or benign nature of civil religion has led to the development of two strands of dichotomous typologies in the study of civil religion in America. One strand has classified civil religion rhetoric as either conservative or liberal. According to Wuthnow (1988) [and others (Bulman 1991; Davis 1997; Kent and Spickard 1994)], conservative civil religion focuses on the concept of America as the chosen nation, tends to use the founding documents (the Constitution and Declaration of Independence) as religious texts, sanctifies the economic order, legitimates the system and actions of the government, and sees the American way of life as unique and desirable. Rhetors who fall into this category tend to be acting, according to Marty (1974), in a "priestly" role, celebrating the nation's roots.

Liberal civil religionists, on the other hand, de-emphasize the chosen nation concept, instead viewing all nations as warranting God's equal concern. These rhetors see America not so much as chosen, but rather as blessed. They tend to act more as prophets (Marty 1974), rather than priests, calling judgment on national idolatry, stressing global issues, peace and justice, and acting on behalf of all nations. Hence, several scholars (Bulman 1991; Williams and Alexander 1994) have argued that the country's civil religion can be used not only by the country's leaders

but also by individual dissenters, such as Martin Luther King or Cesar Chavez, or by social movements or interest groups that call the nation to judgment or challenge the status quo and governmental actions. This typology leads to the conclusion that conservative civil religion justifies American actions at any expense, while liberal civil religion takes into account the rights of others and calls upon America to better itself. However, because the terms "conservative" and "liberal" have other political meanings, to avoid confusion I will the terms – priestly and prophetic – to refer to these two strands.

The second typology speaks specifically to the myth of Manifest Destiny, which in scholarly literature is frequently separated into two forms of mission usually "mission by example" and "mission by intervention" or expansion. Several scholars have concurred on the existence of these rhetorical missions, which have political repercussions, throughout American history. Tiryakian (1982) identified three types of mission prevalent in American history. One was the establishment of a civil society based on religious liberty, essentially the chosen nation myth. A second was mastering the environment, and the third was a civilizing mission, to save the world and mold it in the image of America. Similarly, in his 1981 review of the literature on civil religion, Fairbanks also identified several themes of mission that have prevailed in America's civil religion. Two of those equate to Tiryakian's first and third missions: 1) a divine mission to establish a democratic system that would serve as an example to the rest of the world (that is, the chosen nation theme); and 2) a mission to lead other states toward freedom. It is those two themes we are interested in here.

The first theme focuses on the nature of "being." According to this theme, America is a providentially chosen nation, chosen to be exemplary among the world's nations for its moral and political uniqueness. Its mission was to be an example to the rest of the world. In today's secular terms, this exemplary status is often expressed as "American exceptionalism" or the "American experiment" (Upset 1996, Shafer 1991). Most scholars (Baritz 1964, 1985; Bostdorff 1994; Pierard and Linder 1988; Whitlock 1994) trace this theme to Puritan John Winthrop's "City upon the Hill" speech, by which Winthrop exhorted his fellow Puritans as they sailed across the Atlantic toward America. The second theme emphasizes action. According to Pierard and Linder, in their 1988 (pp. 54-56) book *Civil religion and the presidency*, the chosen nation concept gave rise to, and is itself encapsulated in, "civil millennialism," a concept in which the United States is perceived as the agent of God's activity. That concept became a political doctrine in the 1800s, hence moralizing international relations (Tiryakian 1982). Based upon the belief that America was chosen for its exceptional social and democratic order, Manifest Destiny summoned the United States to act as a redeemer nation, exerting its good influence upon other nations,

through their adoption of American ways or by their incorporation into America.

The trend to treat these two themes distinctly is exemplified in Frederick Merk's 1963 book *Manifest destiny and mission in American history*, where he argues that the theme of mission by example was occasionally used by some American rhetors to constrain intervention or expansion rather than further such policy. More recently, Leo Ribuffo (1998) argued similarly that from the beginning of the United States, some Americans defined the country's mission in terms of a more isolationist approach, that of benignly leading the world by moral example, while others favored direct intervention to spread America's virtuous ways. Many scholars of rhetoric (Baritz 1985 and Bostdorff 1994, for instance) have followed suit. However, I argue that the two themes so feed upon one another that in practice they are virtually one, particularly if intervention is defined more broadly than just war. Manifest Destiny is not mission by intervention alone; the intervention embodies, and would not exist without, mission by example.

Political Context of the 1990s' Wars

In 1990, when the borders of the United States seemed unchangeable and the West's major enemy, the Soviet Union, was losing control of numerous East European countries and suffering its own demise, it might have been thought that myths of virtue and mission would not have been necessary. But, as Lance Bennett (1980:166) has said, "new political situations seem to fall quickly into old symbolic molds." While the disintegration of the "evil empire," appeared as a victory for western capitalism and its leader, the United States, it also entailed a decline in the need for a military giant. The Pentagon reluctantly embarked on the downsizing of its armed forces and bases. At the same time, the United States' status as an economic leader was precarious, stemming from strong competition from Japan and Germany.

A crisis in U.S. public mythology had developed over the past several decades as well (Slotkin 1992). The United States had suffered its first major military loss of the 20th Century in Vietnam, which gave rise to the supposed psychological paralysis that came to be called the "Vietnam Syndrome." The 1973 Arab oil boycott and the 1979-80 Iran hostage crisis seemed to prove that America no longer had a freehand in the world. The 1983 U.S. intervention in Lebanon resulted in an embarrassing military debacle in which about 250 U.S. soldiers were killed in a suicide bomb attack on their compound.

Although the Reagan and Bush administrations successfully conducted several foreign interventions, such as in Panama and Grenada, these paled in size to the Gulf crisis, which over a seven-month period entailed the deployment of 250,000 U.S. military personnel, the largest deployment since the Vietnam War. The former military escapades had been quick strategic

interventions; this was war.

Meanwhile, political pundits said the American public was experiencing a "malaise." Yale Historian Paul Kennedy's 1987 book *The rise and fall of great powers* contributed to this perception by concluding that America was experiencing grave and irreversible economic and military decline (Zagacki 1992). *Time* magazine (Cloud 1991) noted that Americans had been haunted by the ghosts of the Vietnam era: self-doubt, fear of power, divisiveness, and a fundamental uncertainty about America's purpose in the world. Moreover, according to Bruce Miroffs (1998) study of the presidential image during the latter half of the twentieth century, Bush took office during an era in which the presidential image had deteriorated in the eyes of the public, which was now less deferential and more cynical. Even Bush himself was occasionally portrayed as a postmodern president with little ability to shape global affairs (Rose 1991).

In August 1990, apparently heeding the above assessment of U.S. mood and capabilities, President Saddam Hussein of Iraq invaded its southerly neighbor Kuwait, a small but wealthy oil kingdom, and claimed ownership of disputed oil fields lying beneath the two countries' borders. During the next seven months President George Bush orchestrated the first large-scale war since Vietnam. This was more difficult in the Persian Gulf than it had been in the previous Central American interventions because the Gulf was farther from the United States, and the United States had few military bases in the region. Bush needed time to establish those bases and deploy the personnel and equipment to meet the military challenge. This lengthy military build-up meant there would be more potential for public awareness and debate of U.S. policy in the Gulf, so Bush's rhetorical strategy would require vigilance and transcendent emotional appeals. The six-week war finally started on January 16, 1991, and continued until February 27, 1991.

Coming on the heels of the Persian Gulf War was a series of ethnic-based conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. The Serbian-Croatian-Bosnian conflict that preceded Kosovo endured through the remainder of Bush's presidency and through Clinton's first term. Both administrations had vacillated between isolationist and interventionist strategies in what was often seen as Europe's problem. Thousands of deaths occurred before the United States used NATO in the summer of 1995 to intervene by bombing in Bosnia and orchestrating the Dayton Peace Agreement. Steps to "democratize" Bosnia were still underway when fighting between the Kosovar Albanian insurgents and the Serbian government broke out.

The conflict in Kosovo came to the public's awareness while Clinton was under investigation for what has become known as the "Lewinsky scandal." The first massacre to come to the public eye occurred in Racak in March 1998. Three months later in June, Clinton declared Kosovo a threat to America's national interest. While a few observers thought his decision to act

in Kosovo was a "wag-the-dog" strategy, there was relatively little opposition to U.S. intervention in Kosovo, and what little there was remained cloistered in the pages of alternative journals and newspapers, rather than on the street, as it had been for the Persian Gulf War. In addition, unlike the Persian Gulf crisis, economic or political interests in the Balkans appeared less evident. Serbia does have oil and the conflict did pose an opportunity for a rejuvenated NATO to flex its muscles, but the public was generally unaware of those pragmatic interests. Stopping another slaughter overshadowed other considerations. Clinton contributed to this humanitarian concern by tying Kosovo to his domestic race initiative in September 1998 (Coles 2001). When asked about the future of the race initiative by a reporter, Clinton (1998:1808) took his initiative abroad saying, "When you go back to World War II and you think about the part of the Nazi experience that was directed against the Jews, and you look all the way through the ensuing years, all the way down to the end of this century, down to what we've seen in Rwanda, the Middle East, Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Kosovo, you name it, it will be incumbent upon the United States to be a force for tolerance and racial reconciliation in the foreseeable future."

In addition to the apparent lack of obvious pragmatic concerns and, hence, lack of a noteworthy opposition to the war, several other situational characteristics distinguished Kosovo from the Persian Gulf. First, because the conflict followed shortly after the Persian Gulf crisis, the public now saw that the United States could fight a contained high-tech battle with relatively few human losses. And, just to be sure, Clinton decided there would be no use of U.S. ground forces in Kosovo, so this time around little to no public discussion about potential body bags ensued. Second, the economy was in the largest boom period in years, not in the recession of the Bush Administration, so funding the campaign was less of a concern than it had been in the Gulf. Related to cost, since the conflict was in Europe, the United States and NATO already had military bases, equipment, and some forces in place. The large deployment of military personnel and transport of equipment that was so visible, costly, and lengthy in the Persian Gulf crisis was nearly absent in Kosovo. Third, the war in the Persian Gulf, because it was an attack against an Arab Muslim country, always carried with it the concern of whether this was a religious war or at least a war of the West against the East. But in Kosovo, where the Kosovar Albanians were Muslims and the Serbs were Orthodox Christian, that question didn't arise and, in fact, made America's intervention appear more humanitarian. Finally, Bush had rejected attempts for the warring parties (Kuwait and Iraq) to hold regional or U.N. sponsored negotiations. Bush's extreme juxtaposition of American exceptional moral character against Hussein's vileness, and his use of vivid, emotive language left no room for negotiations (Coles 1998). Such a stance only irritated the opposition. Clinton, however, called upon the parties to negotiate. Serbian and

Kosovar Albanian representatives met in Rambouillet, France, in the spring of 1999. Although a few alternative journals criticized the negotiations as being manipulative or farcical, the mainstream press sometimes questioned Clinton's decision to allow more time for negotiations.⁴ Nevertheless, despite the additional negotiation time, the outcome was not suitable to the Clinton Administration and NATO. Air strikes began March 24, 1999, and continued until June 10, 1999.

While these geopolitical differences likely account for some of the distinguishing tenor between Bush and Clinton, the uncertainties of war and its enormous potential for repercussions at home and abroad impress upon any president taking such action the need to ascertain as much public support as he or she can. Hence, with some noteworthy discrepancies, both presidents embed their war rhetoric in the civil religion themes encased in Manifest Destiny.

The following analysis traces seven months of Bush's speeches to various small audiences around the nation, press conferences, and exchanges with reporters from August 2, 1990, the day Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, to March 1, 1991, three days after the Gulf War ended, and similarly for Clinton from September 1998 through the end of the war in June 1999. For both presidents, all speeches were obtained from the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*.

Manifest Destiny in the Two Wars

Mission by Example

Because Manifest Destiny relies on the chosen nation story for its foundation, it is what Bulman (1991) and Paul Tillich (1933) call a "myth of origin." Such narratives call a people back to a sense of their roots, their reason for being and the responsibilities that attend those purposes. They have the ability to paint an identity and define the important features of a people as they give meaning and motivation to their actions. Because the hero in Manifest Destiny is a nation, rather than an individual, and a nation is composed of individuals, every member of the nation can contribute to (or detract from) its superior character and its mission. According to Browne (1991), this speaker-hearer collaboration invites the audience in, saying, "Together we can redeem virtue." By doing so, a rhetorical community is built, the national identity is redefined or its individual members are reminded of the nation's superior character, and each member can gain some sense of personal significance from being a part of this nation and contributing to its mission.

Bush on the Persian Gulf Conflict

Bush's rhetoric during the Persian Gulf conflict did not address overtly the United States'

origin or *raison d'être*: nevertheless, he establishes the country's providential origins by his references to God or other transcendent purposes. For instance, Bush (1991:101) states several times "You know, America is a nation founded under God. And from our very beginnings we have relied upon His strength and guidance in war and in peace. And this is something we must never forget." Moreover, Bush (1990:1218, 12712, 1257, 1817; 1991:116) thanks God for America, invokes God's blessings, and repeatedly states (1990:1271; 1991:90, 113) that Americans are part of "something larger than themselves." Bush (1991:89) defines the Persian Gulf War as a "just war" and quotes from Abraham Lincoln's speeches to the effect that "we are on God's side" in the war.

Within Bush's narrative of a providential origin resides a national self-image that embodies only the highest character qualities. One of Bush's earliest speeches to the American public on the Gulf crisis epitomizes his priestly quality of celebrating America's supposedly unique and exceptional qualities, which have made America a shining example to the rest of the world.

Once again, our people, the people of our country, have come together to show the world our finest strengths: American optimism, unity, unselfishness, the wonderful values of family, and the will to stand up for what's right and good – strengths that form the very heart of America and that make possible the freedoms our brave service men and women are striving to defend ... I know that every American looks forward to the day when our extraordinary young men and women will return home to a nation proud of its ideals of freedom, integrity, and honor; a nation committed to its tradition of preserving, protecting, and defending those precious beliefs which have always made America a beacon of hope and freedom to the entire world (Bush 1990:1410).

The number of character qualities listed by Bush and exemplified in America seemed limitless. Bush's particular choice of virtues – "slow to raise our hand in anger and eager to explore every peaceful means of settling our disputes (1990:1390)," loyal and principled (1990:1218); brave (1990:1329); generous and optimistic (1990:1700) – serve to define for individual Americans what it means to be American in an increasingly diverse nation where the idea of a peculiarly American culture is in doubt. At the same time those particular virtues portray his policy toward Iraq as well considered, consistent, and one of last resort, but nevertheless mandated by loyalty to friends and values.

Among these many virtues, special emphasis was placed on those that reflect America's

political values and nature. Democratic values received some attention; for instance, he describes America as the "grand experiment" and he expresses concern for the emerging democracies in the former Soviet Union that might be hurt by Hussein's control of oil. But, by and large, freedom took the spotlight. On his Thanksgiving Day trip to the troops stationed in Saudi Arabia, Bush (1990:1903) describes America as the "manifestation of humanity's timeless yearning to be free," and to the Veterans of Foreign Wars at the beginning of the crisis, Bush (1990:1272) calls America the "hope of liberty-loving people everywhere."

Bush's choice to privilege freedom or liberty over democracy is probably not coincidental. Freedom is an ambiguous word that embodies a multitude of meanings (free markets, self-determination, territorial integrity, independence, personal freedoms, etc.), and, hence, can resonate to a wide audience. Also, Hinds and Windt (1991) assert, in their study of Cold War rhetoric, that terms such as independence, national integrity, and sovereignty are often substituted for democracy, when the country of focus is not democratic. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia could hardly be called democracies, and Bush was calling for the restoration of Kuwait's monarchy. Whenever he spoke of fighting for democracy, he was nearly always referring to the former countries of the Soviet bloc, not to Kuwait or Saudi Arabia.

Clinton on Kosovo

Clinton's discourse, on the other hand, reflects a much more pastoral style in general. He is more likely to use biblical imagery and verses. He exhorts his audiences to seek a balance between passion and humility, light and darkness, to see through a glass darkly, and to resist the dark recesses that exist even in the strongest souls. Despite that discursive style, however, Clinton is less likely than Bush to use those god-terms in regard to the country. For instance, he is more likely to say "God bless you" to the audience than he is to say "God bless America."

Nonetheless, Clinton adheres to the "chosen nation" concept by adopting the Promised Land story as an analogy for America. During the 1999 Passover holiday, shortly after air strikes on Kosovo had begun, Clinton gave a message on the observance of Passover. He recounted the story of God's liberation of the Jews, their exodus from Egypt, and their journey to build their own Promised Land. Then Clinton (1999:537-38) continued:

... all Americans can draw inspiration from the story of Passover. It reminds us of our ongoing journey to build our own Promised Land. where all people are free to worship according to their conscience and where our children can grow up safe from the shadows of intolerance and oppression.

Similar to Bush, Clinton also has kind words for America. Most frequently he mentions that America has the best military in the world (1999:354, 531, 909, 1008) and secondarily that the United States is a superpower or the strongest country in the world (1999:496, 591). Prodded by a radio interview question about what America has that would enable its enduring success, Clinton (1999:434) answers that America has "an infinite capacity for renewal, for change, anchored in a magnificent set of common values in our Constitution." Like Bush, Clinton upholds America's political system, which he also referred to as the great experiment, the "messy democracy," or as superior (1999:321, 663, 666, 773, 798).

However, two points distinguish Clinton's discourse from Bush's in this respect. First, unlike Bush, Clinton (1998:1953) at least once points out that America's fortunate economic status was linked to exploitation of other countries. Although not a strong theme in Clinton's discourse, its presence detracts from the sense of providentially supplied blessings advocated in Bush's discourse. Second, Clinton's rhetoric is imbued with a sense that America is falling short of the "promise," that the United States needs to work harder to be "more perfect." Pastoral Clinton sermonizes that America needs to purge its collective spirit (1999:505), that "we still have quite a little hill to climb" to fulfill the Founders' vision or to form a more perfect union (1998:1809; 1999:773, 868). He states (1999:692, 738, 869, 899, 920, 921) that the United States is still good and decent, but that description is frequently a preface to a list of social problems, such as violence, more at risk children, poverty, inequality, race issues, and workplace policies, that beg reform. Consequently, while Bush presents America as a shining example, Clinton, in his more humble style, presents a slightly tarnished example that nonetheless elicits the admiration of others.

Mission as Duty

From a state of blessedness and greatness, mission and destiny spring forth inevitably. To hoard such good fortune for one's self would be selfish. Both Bush and Clinton agree that the United States' exceptional political and material blessings impose inherent responsibilities and obligations to the rest of the world community. Situating the network and direction of responsibilities rhetorically helps to locate or position the United States as preeminent among countries. When Bush declared February 3, 1991, a national day of prayer for Operation Desert Storm, he (1991:116) reminded the public,

As one nation under God, we Americans are deeply mindful of both our dependence on the Almighty and our obligations as a people He has richly

blessed... Entrusted with the holy gift of freedom and allowed to prosper in its great light, we have a responsibility to serve as a beacon to the world – to use our strength and resources to help those suffering in the darkness of tyranny and repression.

Clinton also indicated that the United States' good fortune exacted obligations from America. While Bush had pointed more to the obligations of freedom, Clinton usually pointed to the responsibilities that attend prosperity or being a superpower. Speaking on American foreign policy to an audience in San Francisco about a month before the war, Clinton (1999:3 17) said

Because of ... the dramatic increase in our own prosperity and confidence in this, the longest peacetime economic expansion in our history, the United States has the opportunity and, I would argue, the solemn responsibility to shape a more peaceful, prosperous, democratic world in the 21st century.

After the war began, he (1999:591) spoke to the Institute of Peace, where he argued that

The United States, as the largest and strongest country in the world at this moment – largest in economic terms and military terms – has the unavoidable responsibility to lead in this increasingly interdependent world, to try to help meet the challenges of this new era. (See also 1999:842.)

Posing example and intervention as a responsibility, obligation, or duty of fortunate nations also frames American military action as a moral imperative, narrows the range of alternatives, and pricks the conscience of the nation, rendering intervention a must. Combining the reality of politics with a sense of "oughtness" creates a sense of duty to the collective (Williams 1999). The individual identity shrinks in deference to the national identity, and the need to act in transcendence of self-interest for the sake of some public good is foremost.

At the same time, this discursive strategy redistributes the responsibility for success or failure from the agent to God, to some unnamed but nonetheless irresistible force, or to the members of the hero-nation whose inaction or non compliance would threaten national victory. The commander-in-chief may act, but his acts are simply obedience to transcendent standards or commands from above. He acts because he must. He chooses, but his choice is only between good or evil.

Mission as Intervention

As discussed earlier, a number of scholars have distinguished between mission and

destiny. Recently Bostdorff (1994:177, 185) defined "mission" as originating with the Puritans and being the moral duty to model spiritual and political virtue, while she defined "destiny" as having its roots in the 1840s and being the duty to expand continentally (Manifest Destiny). While mission and destiny both have similar belief structures (i.e., the United States is divinely blessed, freedom is the goal, and the world would be better if it were more like the United States), the two terms, according to Bostdorff, are distinct in strategy. Mission is passive and inspires the world by its example. According to Bostdorff (and Merk 1963 and Ribuffo 1998), the rhetoric of mission by example has sometimes been used to limit American interventions, while destiny actively intervenes around the world to spread American virtues. Academically, the two may be distinct, but in most discursive situations, particularly those related to foreign affairs, they are intertwined.

Bush on the Persian Gulf Conflict

In the Gulf crisis, Bush let the public know that America still bore the burden of being the moral example to the world. He frequently discussed America's moral obligations and occasionally closed his speech with invocations similar to this one: "We're here today to say a prayer for the United States and all the people around the world that are supporting us in our bid to provide a moral compass for the rest of the world (1990:1276; similarly see 1990:1409)." Note that the moral compass that is being provided and supported around the world is the deployment. Hence, the speech that epitomizes a mission by example mode simultaneously interweaves mission by intervention motifs through objective actions. Shortly after the start of the war, Bush's speech (1991:91) combines example and intervention in the same breath as he states to Congress:

We in the Union enter the last decade of the 20th century thankful for our blessings, steadfast in our purpose, aware of our difficulties, and responsive to our duties at home and around the world. For two centuries, America has served the world as an inspiring example of freedom and democracy. For generations, America has led the struggle to preserve and extend the blessings of liberty. And today, in a rapidly changing world, American leadership is indispensable. Americans know that leadership brings burdens and sacrifices. But we also know why the hopes of humanity turn to us. We are Americans. We have a unique responsibility to do the hard work of freedom. And when we do, freedom works ... The conviction and courage we see in the Persian Gulf today is simply the American character in action. [Emphases mine]

Later in the same speech, Bush does narrow the territorial scope of example to the home front and indicates that the United States needs to make some improvements in order to be the shining example.

America has always led by example. So, who among us will set this example? Which of our citizens will lead us in this next American century? Everyone who steps forward today -to get one addict off drugs, to convince one troubled teenager not to give up on life, to comfort one AIDS patient, to help one hungry child (1991:91).

The purpose of this statement, however, is not to constrain intervention in the Gulf, but rather to build support for his Thousand Points of Light program, in which the individual, not government, is the key to success. During this period, exhortations to be the example at home remain few in Bush's discourse (1991:139 and 222), and these are confined to speeches intended to gain support for an upcoming budget proposal, not to argue against intervention. Much more frequent in Bush's discourse are specific exhortations to intervene internationally to safeguard the world's freedom (1990:1256), to do the hard work of freedom (1991 :90), to be the protector of others around the world (1990: 1269), to stand against aggression (1990:1301), to stand for civilization (1990:1601), to build democracy (1990:156465), to guard the sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations, and to stand up for international law and the rule of law (1990:125556, 1269).

In fact, according to Bush, the ability of the United States to remain a credible example is, in fact, dependent on the world seeing its intervention on behalf of friends. "In the face of tyranny," charges Bush (1990:1360) , "let no one doubt American credibility and reliability. Let no one doubt our staying power. We will stand by our friends." To do otherwise would render dubious the American example and bring under question the exceptional nature of the United States.

Classic Manifest Destiny poses the United States as the exceptional, chosen, and unique country. While this narrative allows for a paternalistic sharing of those blessings with other less fortunate nations, it does not propose redistribution of America's eminent stature within the world community. Therefore, while Bush stresses the importance of the coalition he built in support of the war and refers to the "partnership of nations" and to burden sharing among the allies, he adamantly points out that this leadership role fell solely to the United States. (Eventually that belief became encapsulated in the slogan "There is no substitute for American leadership." See, for example, Bush 1990: 1331, 1360, 1664, 1908.) His speech in California on behalf of the gubernatorial candidate reflects that belief.

It is only the United States that can lead the entire world for this moral purpose. We're the only ones. Countries look to us, and that's the beautiful thing about the heritage groups represented here today. Every single one of them recognizes that this is the country that stands for freedom, stands against aggression (1990: 1749. See also 1990: 1601).

To Iowans in October (1990:1601) , Bush's rhetorical question establishes America's singular position, "We have the responsibility to lead -the United States does. If we don't stand up against aggression around the world when it's naked and brutal ... who will?" Similarly, after the war begins, Bush reiterates that thought in his State of the Union address, but in this context Bush notes that a moral exemplar cannot rely on the strength of its convictions alone; military prowess is a necessity.

Among the nations of the world, only the United States of America has both the moral standing and the means to back it up. We're the only nation on this Earth that could assemble the forces of peace. This is the burden of leadership and the strength that has made America the beacon of freedom in a searching world (1991 :95).

Clinton on Kosovo

Clinton's discourse concurs with Bush's in that part of America's mission is to be an example, as his speech (1999:776) to the armed forces and the country's volunteers in his Loyalty Day proclamation, indicates:

Throughout the decades, they have worked to expand America's promise of justice and equality to all our people, promoting civil rights, economic and educational opportunity, and political empowerment ... In so doing, they have strengthened our Nation from within and provided a symbol of hope around the world for those who seek refuge in a land where individual rights are revered and where their children can grow up in peace and freedom.

However, as mentioned earlier, Clinton implies that America's example needs work. Hence, more frequently than Bush, Clinton points out the country's weaknesses and areas needing improvement. Speaking to a Democratic audience, Clinton (1999:505) argues that

... it falls now to America not to be a wild-eyed idealist but just to remind the people that we are trying to set a model for the world. And we're not perfect, but

we're trying to say that any responsible citizen can be part of our community.

Eventually, Clinton's concern with both the foreign front and needed improvements on the domestic front becomes summed up in the motto "if we want to be a force for good abroad, we must be good at home (1999:353, 675, 877, 918, 920, 927, 1042)," which has a much different tenor than Bush's "There is no substitute for American leadership."

Nonetheless, as with Bush, Clinton's discourse clearly indicates that being an example is more than merely existing as a visual symbol of virtue; rather, the task of signifying political virtue requires intervention in the affairs of countries that supposedly look to us as an example. Clinton's discourse suggests that people around the world trust and expect America to intervene on their behalf. America's credibility as a moral leader relies on its willingness to defend others.

It's also clear that if there is a real peace, American participation in the force can provide such confidence, particularly for Kosovo's Albanians. For them, as for so many people around the world, America symbolizes hope and resolve (1999:229; see also 1999:356-7, 586).

In the war in Kosovo, Clinton's discourse deviates from Bush's on America's leadership role as well. While Clinton recognizes the United States as a great nation with unique leadership obligations, he is more likely to speak of sharing that status and those responsibilities with other nations. First, Clinton sees America's abilities to lead and effect change around the world as limited. [See, for example, his speech on U.S. foreign policy (1999:319) and remarks at Norfolk Naval station (1999:566 and 568) and a radio address (1999:579).] Second, Clinton's discourse poses the NATO allies and Japan as great nations that have responsibilities similar to America's. For instance, speaking to President Obuchi of Japan, Clinton (1999:787) said

First, the United States and Japan have common ideals, common interests, a common purpose in the world. Second, as the world's two largest industrial democracies, with less than 10 percent of the world's people, we produce about 40 percent of the world's wealth. We have unique responsibilities.

Finally, recognizing the rise and fall of nations throughout history, Clinton, quite unlike his predecessor, occasionally describes America's destiny as humanly created and very likely temporary.

Destiny ... is what people make for themselves, with a decent respect for the legitimate interests and rights of others [W]e have to act responsibly, recognizing this unique and, if history is any guide, fleeting position the United

States now enjoys of remarkable military, political, and economic, influence (1999:633 and 632).

Clinton's statement reflects the reality that the Manifest Destiny myth, developed during an era when America (or pre-America) was expanding exponentially and winning wars, is a narrative best suited for times of prosperity and strength. The past two centuries have virtually been "American centuries," and for those living now, it may be impossible to imagine it any other way. However, Clinton's discourse also takes the long view of human history, acknowledging the rise and fall of "chosen nations."

Conclusions and Discussion

In sum, Bush and Clinton both use civil religion, specifically the themes integral to Manifest Destiny, to fight their wars. Bush leans to the priestly mode because he elaborates on the superior nature and sole leadership qualities of the United States. He calls for the maintenance of a pivotal role for the United States in the world community and the return to the status quo monarchy in Kuwait. Clinton recognizes America's status as a blessed and great nation; however, in most other respects, he leans toward the prophetic conception of civil religion. His views of an exceptional America are qualified. While Bush rarely sees need for reform, Clinton calls for reforms and delineates the ways America could improve by becoming a community, addressing inequality, confronting racism. Clinton believes America has been blessed, but he acknowledges the human role in garnering that prosperity. Both Clinton and Bush claim to be fighting for the rights of other countries (Bush for the emerging democracies of eastern Europe and the territorial integrity of the Gulf states and Clinton for self-government for Kosovo and for unity and economic prosperity for Europe), but Clinton's discourse is more willing to share the privilege and responsibilities of mission and destiny with other countries. Nevertheless, neither discourse falls neatly into ideal typologies.

Together, Clinton's and Bush's rhetoric illustrates the problematic nature of the debate over America's mission as a passive example or an active agent. In the cases here, it was noted that when Bush and Clinton used the example mode they were discussing domestic issues, such as the budget bill or social problems. This may indicate that the context (domestic or foreign) more than the speaker accounts for the distinction between mission as example and mission as intervention. For instance, many scholars (Bellah 1967; Fairbanks 1981; Linder 1996) have chosen presidential inaugural addresses to study the content and form of civil religion. Others (Ribuffo 1998; Ungar 1996) have looked at discourse during times of conflict and have found that

civil religion can be used as a set of maxims to legitimate presidential authority and policies, to justify intervention in other countries. Further research would help to articulate the role that context plays in the form civil religion, or Manifest Destiny in particular, takes.

In matters of foreign affairs, the two are intertwined. "Mission" implies a task orientation. Once the chosen nation was established, being an example implies communicating that example to others. When communication technology was rudimentary, others could not view America's example unless America took it to them. A political mission entailed placing an embassy in another country. A religious mission meant sending missionaries to other countries to convert the natives and spread Christian norms of behavior.

Even Winthrop's 1630 concept of a "city on the hill," cited by many as the point of origin for mission by example, was itself an extreme act of intervention and expansion. Baritz (1985:27) assumes that the small group of early Puritans emphasized mission by example because they could not foresee that America would later own the continent and have great power; they were too weak to even consider "foreign" adventures. But Baritz and others fail to recognize that the Puritans were on a foreign adventure. Winthrop gave that now classic speech while the Puritans were perilously leaving their own country, crossing the Atlantic Ocean, and settling in an already inhabited continent. This was not a passive example; it involved danger, movement from one continent to another, genocide, subjugation of the rights of the indigenous people, and then mythically forgetting these facets of the city on the hill. Ignoring those processes in the building of the example turns the birth of America into the immaculate conception.

Even Frederick Merk (1963:262), heavily quoted by scholars who uphold the distinction between mission by example and destiny by intervention, stated, "Mission [by example] was a force that fought to curb expansion of the *aggressive* variety [emphasis mine]." He also goes on to define the following as illustrations of mission by example: the U.S. entrance into World War I, President Wilson's formation of the League of Nations and later the formation of the United Nations, the U.S.'s "good neighbor policy," and aid to Britain (1983:262-5). In retrospect, many observers would cite these as acts of intervention, some more nefarious than others.

As several earlier quotations from Bush and Clinton indicate, being a moral example by definition frequently necessitates intervention. To fail to act in favor of "good" or to fail to share one's bounteous blessings is selfish and, hence, not an example of a moral virtue. To fail to take action (in Bush's words "to appease the enemy;" in Clinton's words "to fail to contain the enemy") is to allow evil to triumph, to guarantee a more costly disaster, and to bring into question the veracity and credibility of the "beacon of hope." Trite though true, actions often speak louder than words. The intervention may not always be military; it may be economic or political or cultural but

the outcome is often the same -the spread (or imposition) of American ways of life, which may or may not have beneficial consequences for the recipient but nearly always intends benefits for U.S. national interests (however defined).

American leaders are not content to offer the world merely an example of virtue. On the contrary, mission thrives on action, on intervention of some ilk. America may be the hope, as Bush and Clinton said, of people everywhere, but it is not just a hope that they can be like the United States; in American political discourse it is also the hope that America will come to their rescue. By envisioning foreign affairs as a rescue, as an act of public good, America rescues itself. By framing mission as a duty and contribution to the world's well-being, the United States renovates its own well-being (Tiryakian 1982), objectively in economic, political, and military terms but also culturally in terms of a rejuvenation of its own sense of national identity. And Americans, though perhaps more sophisticated and more cynical of war, still respond to these centuries old discursive myths.

This is not to say that Manifest Destiny myth has remained the same throughout the years. All enduring myths must remain relevant to their historical context. As Kenneth Burke (1954:21) has written, "if the conditions of living have undergone radical changes since the time when the scheme of duties and virtues was crystallized, the serviceability of the orientation may be impaired." To survive, Manifest Destiny has endured minor modifications to adapt to the changing geopolitical and demographic nature of the world and the United States in particular. I would point to three modifications salient in these two cases. First, territorial expansion has expanded to include resources, military bases, markets, and political power. In the Gulf War, expansion occurred through attainment of additional U.S. military bases on foreign land, through control of a currently vital resource – oil – located in other so-called sovereign territories.⁵ Clinton's expansion aimed at European markets. This has been a long-term change, occurring over the past century. That is not to say that territorial expansion won't become a goal of expansion/intervention again. Space exploration may lead us back in that direction. Second, democracy has taken a backseat to freedom and prosperity as the gifts the great experiment has to offer to the world. The market system has supplanted the political system in American exceptionalism. A longitudinal study over the next few presidencies would help clarify the sustainability of this change, though a perusal of the current President Bush's discourse indicates that he similarly uses destiny to advance freedom over democracy (see below). Finally, in contrast to Bush's concept of the United States, Clinton views America as a great nation, but one that falls short of the vision of its founders. The country's role as world leader is limited, and its duration as a world power may be short-lived. Destiny, and the leadership role that comes

with it, occasionally appear to be human-made and are perhaps -especially in Clinton rhetoric -increasingly better off shared with other nations. This study alone does not clarify whether the differences between Bush and Clinton on this point are due to their partisan or ideological differences, to a more jaundiced American public that won't be moved by effusive statements about America's superior role in the world, to the inexorable logic of a globalizing world economy, or to the inability of a declining world power to maintain the myth of sole leadership.

However, according to Russakoff and Gellman (2000), presidential candidate Bill Bradley's discourse also contributed to a change in perception of America. Bradley called upon a friend and Princeton psychiatrist to hold a symposium in order to think about which myths Americans draw on to cope with uncertainty. He wanted to move away from the hero myths and toward one that conveys that the people, not their leaders, are creative individuals who can work cooperatively to solve problems. I cannot speak with certainty as to whether such concern with myth modification was widespread among other presidential candidates, but this study suggests a need for longitudinal research over the next few presidencies and/or that correlates presidential rhetoric with American economic status. Such research may determine whether there is a sustained movement away from the America-as-hero mythology toward what Bellah called a world civil religion.

In fact, as this paper was in progress, President George Bush Jr. was similarly embedding the American response to the September 11th attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in a rhetoric of mission and destiny, indicating that the themes of Manifest Destiny will not soon be obsolete. On the evening of September 11th, in his first speech to the nation regarding the attack, Bush (2001a) calls upon the chosen nation theme of Manifest Destiny when he describes America as the example of freedom to the world. However, a noteworthy distinction arises from the political context. In this case, the United States itself has been attacked, and Bush Jr., unlike his predecessors, points out a negative consequence of being a chosen nation. While Bush Sr. and Clinton argue that America's blessedness and America's political example create desires for the same in other nations and that other nations purportedly look to the United States to help establish such conditions in their countries, Bush Jr. (2001a) initially argues that America's shining example is the cause of the attack. "America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining." In other words, the downside of being a chosen nation is the jealousy and hatred it elicits. However, within 24 hours Bush Jr. (2001b) turns the attack into an attack on "all freedom-loving people everywhere in the world, so that eventually U.S. military action transforms from revenge to an act of public good, an act of a chosen nation advancing human freedom

(2001c)."

While the current and numerous interstate and identity-based conflicts around the world indicate that there is no imminent end to the force of nationalism (of which Manifest Destiny is one cultural artifact), the new global forces of transnational corporations, telecommunications, labor migrations, etc. will have long-term homogenizing effects that are cultural as well as economic and political (Smith 1999). America's Manifest Destiny may eventually have to defer to a more universal civil religion in this post-modern world.

In the end, perhaps both Bushes and Clinton utilized this myth not because it has proven measurably successful, but simply that, like the mythic mountain, it was there. The discursive elements of Manifest Destiny have remained an integral part of presidential rhetoric into the late the Twentieth Century, supplying even a lazy speechwriter with voluminous verbiage and rose-colored lenses. It seems unlikely that the main tenets of this particular civil religion frame will lose their utility in the near future. Some of its elements have been modified or de-emphasized to accommodate a changing America, but such modifications only illustrate its strength and adaptability.

Notes

1. The territorial boundaries of Manifest Destiny are another aspect debated by historians. Some felt advocates of Manifest Destiny had in mind only the North American continent, while others thought such advocates had in mind the whole Western Hemisphere (see Merk 1963, for instance).
2. In this case, the argument is that imperialism, with its emphasis on economic resources, reliance on trade and other non-coercive forms of intervention to spread American influence, and willingness to forego the institutionalization of democracy in new lands, was a departure from Manifest Destiny. However, see Bass and Cherwitz (1978), who treat Manifest Destiny essentially the same as imperialism. See also Adams 1913; Graebner 1968; Hietala 1985; Merk 1963; Namikas 1998; Sanford 1974; and Zwelling 1970 for more discussion on this aspect.
3. Pierard and Linder (1988:24) address this only to the extent of questioning whether an atheist, or even an agnostic for that matter, could possibly become president in this country. Interestingly, several times during the Persian Gulf crisis, President Bush (1991:101) also mentions that no one can be President of the United States without faith in God.
4. For instance, see the commentary "Bill Clinton's War" in the May 99 issue of *The*

Progressive 64(5):8-9, and the editorial "Dark Victory," in *The Nation* 268(24):8-9, both of which charge Clinton and NATO with sabotaging the negotiations. But the mainstream press questioned Clinton's strategy to allow the parties more time – see "Remarks Prior to a Meeting with Congressional Leaders and an Exchange with Reporters," February 23, 1999, *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 35(8):283-84, and "The President's News Conference with President Rawlings," February 24, 1999, *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 35(8):292-93.

5. Although Bush never talked about the troops that had been deployed to countries other than Saudi Arabia, Secretary of Defense Cheney had reached a base access agreement with the United Arab Emirates on August 20th, after troops had already been there a week. French troops joined them on the 22nd, and the British sent jets to Bahrain. By August 28th, all of the GCC countries had agreed to make their military facilities available to the allied forces. Today troops remain stationed in the Gulf.

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