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## Abstract

American exceptionalism is a concept that denotes America's unique status in the world. America's history It includes a sense of mission to spread essentially American values, freedom and democracy, around the world. In doing so, it is an example for the world to follow, a America comes in fact close to being God's Chosen Land. This concept has been the subject of debate, resulting in an immense body of literature about the truthfulness and the relevance of this concept for American society and history. Much less has been written about how politicians, in this case, presidential candidates, actually invoke this concept in their political rhetoric. This thesis aims to fill that lacuna. The focus of this research is on the campaign speeches by Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton in the 2016 elections, which were compared to see how they both fit in the American exceptionalist framework. The research question was: How do Trump and Clinton compare in the way they use rhetoric concerning American exceptionalism in their 2016 election campaign speeches?It is shown that although Clinton actively emphasizes America's exceptionalism, as is normal in political discourse, she does not fit the traditional exceptionalist framework per se. Trump also reverts traditions in the sense that he argues how America has been failed by his predecessors, leaving the country in ruins, rather than emphasizing America's greatness unconditionally. His branch of exceptionalism is an underlying normative assumption about how America should be in the future, one that only Trump as president can make reality.

Keywords: American exceptionalism, Clinton, Trump, American Dream, campaign speeches, presidential elections, foreign policy, diversity

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## Introduction

The American presidential elections have always been fascinating to me. The first elections I can remember are the 2008 elections, when Barack Obama won his first term. I remember being awed by the images on television and the famous 'Yes, We Can!' speeches. This was my introduction to the American elections, and I will never forget the crowds and crowds of people on the street celebrating the election of Obama. It was also the moment my fascination for the United States; the people, and the culture was sparked.

Flash forward seven years later, to March 2015. The run up to Election Day, November 9, 2016, started March 23, 2015 when Texas Senator Ted Cruz announced he was going to run for the presidency in the following elections. He was joined by sixteen other Republican candidates and five Democratic candidates. Months of campaigning, debates, primaries, and caucuses followed, until two of them officially accepted their respective parties' nomination during the National Conventions: Donald J. Trump and Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Donald Trump (1946) was, before he announced his candidacy, well-known as a real estate developer and television producer. His father brought him into his company at age 22; Fred Trump owned a business that developed cheap housing for lower income families in Brooklyn, New York. Working for his father's business, he was introduced to the real estate market where he was taught the essentials of running a (real estate) business. After he took over the lead of the Trump Organization from his father, he started to focus on a bigger, wealthier audience. He developed casinos, golf courses, apartment towers, hotels, resorts, and more, all in his distinctive over-the-top style. At age 29 he started his first big project with renovating the Commodore Hotel (later the Grand Hyatt Hotel), which was a success. Later projects of his were much less successful, such as the infamous project in Atlantic City with a hotel and casino that resulted in Trump's first bankruptcy. Trump had been married two times before marrying Melania Trump.

Charles Groenhuijsen wrote a biography in which several of Trump's personality traits come forward; a drive to success, ability to bluff his way through all of his speeches, his focus, and resolution. Trump is also known, however, for his manipulative side, his narcissism, bad treatment of women and minorities and people he does not like or respect, his atrocious treatment of and relationship with the press, and his preference for riches and grandeur. He often talks in 'truthful hyperboles', which means that he often exaggerates simple things in order to be perceived as better, richer, or more successful. One of his towers in New York suddenly has 90 floors instead of 72, or his autobiography is the best-selling book of all time, and he has a lot more money than Forbes' estimation: 'pleasant little exaggerations'. (Groenhuijsen 30-32).

Trump not only made a career in real estate, he also had a TV-program, *The Apprentice*. He was owner of Miss Universe pageants, and even set up a university: Trump University, which

ended in several court cases concerning fraud, illegal business practices, and misleading marketing. There have been many more controversies surrounding his companies and himself: on top of bankruptcies there were court cases concerning fraud, sexual assault, tax evasion, and much more.

Trump has had different political affiliations: he has been affiliated to the Democratic, Republican, and even Independent party over time (Chasmar). There were other times Trump stated that he was going to run for the presidency, in 2000 and again in 2012, but only in 2015 did he really set through with that ambition. The reputation he built in his public life before the elections, resulted in a 'you-either-love-him-or-hate-him' image. Time Magazine's image of Donald Trump is short, but apt: 'a living performance piece' (Sherer 28).

Hillary Rodham Clinton (1947) is a politician with a long CV. She was born in Chicago, Illinois, as the eldest child in a middleclass family. From a young age Clinton was politically active. She belonged to a group of teenagers, led by a young reverend who organized debates and took them on trips. During one of those trips when they went to see Dr. Martin Luther King, her interest in politics and activism was sparked. Clinton attended Wellesley College, where she became president of the student council. In that position, she actively set to improve the position of her African-American fellow students. Later she attended Yale Law School where she met her future husband, Bill Clinton. After graduation she moved to Arkansas with Bill Clinton who was elected attorney general there. At the time she worked for the Children's Defense Fund as a lawyer, and later she was a member of the committee that advised the House of Representatives on the Watergate scandal. In their Arkansas-years, Clinton was also partner at a law firm. Hillary Clinton moved to Washington, DC, when her husband was elected President in 1993. During her years as First Lady, Clinton had an active role in the White House. She created plans to reform health care and improve the position of women and children in the US and in other parts of the world. After Bill Clinton's second term ended in 2001, she was elected herself as Senator of New York. Clinton was Senator for eight years, before her first attempt to become the Democratic candidate for the 2008 elections. She lost the nomination to Barack Obama, who later was elected as president and in that capacity appointed her Secretary of State in his administration. This incredible CV is proof of her drive, ambition, intelligence, strong will, and perseverance.

However, Clinton is also no stranger to controversy. It started with the Whitewater investigation that examined the real estate investments of the Clintons in Arkansas. This investigation led by independent counsel Kenneth Starr indirectly made way for the Lewinsky-scandal which resulted in the impeachment procedure of Bill Clinton and a damaged reputation. During the 2016 elections these, and several other controversies haunted her: the Benghazi attack (that stems from her time as Secretary of State), her use of a private email server in her role as a high-placed politician, and the exuberantly high Clinton Foundation speaking fees. This all

resulted in hearings, investigations, and lawsuits. It also revealed her and her husband's tendency towards secrecy, which is, possibly, one of the things that contributed to her loss of the 2016 elections (Huys 182).

All in all, this made for an interesting campaign, to say the least: a billionaire businessman and television producer, versus the first female Democratic candidate who is also a former Senator, Secretary of State, and First Lady in the race for president. The elections were (and still are) hotly debated. The elections brought about issues that are to this day source of controversy, such as possible Russian interference in the campaign and/or election results and Clinton's infamous private email server. During the campaign the candidates were passionately insulting each other, were sure to not let the electorate forget these controversies, and Trump managed to slander many other people in the process as well. Also taking in account the scandals and controversies surrounding the both of them, it is no surprise these elections are called the most "acrimonious" and "dirtiest" elections of all time (Revesz). People either adored one of the candidates, or they felt they had to choose 'the lesser of two evils'. Based on CV, it seemed like a done deal who would be the most suitable for the presidency before the elections. However, Donald Trump has been in office for almost two years now<sup>1</sup>. A few weeks before the elections, people were saying that the chances of this happening were close to zero, and even on Election Day The New York Times gave Trump a 15% chance of winning the elections (Katz "Who Will Be President?"). Now, almost two years after the elections, it is time to look back at the election campaign.

However, this thesis is not going to give an answer to the question why Trump won, and Clinton lost. That would involve speculation and there are simply too many factors to consider. It also attempts to give an overview of both candidates' arguments and speeches objectively, to give an overview of what has been said and analyzing that, refraining from judging those arguments and statements. That there are vast differences between Donald Trump's and Hillary Clinton's respective politics is undisputed, but that is also not the aim of this thesis: to argue that there are differences. The aim of this thesis is to show what these differences include. The research question this thesis will answer is: How do Trump and Clinton compare in the way they use rhetoric concerning American exceptionalism in their 2016 election campaign speeches? Questions that follow from this and that will be answered in the following chapters are: when it comes to Trump's campaign slogan "make America great again" and Clinton's reaction to this statement: "America has never stopped being great", what and who are they talking about? What does it mean to be 'great'? What makes Clinton say that America has never stopped being great, and why does Trump say that America is not great anymore? How does Trump want to 'make America great again'?

## Method

To answer these questions, a comparative political discourse analysis of Trump's and Clinton's campaign speeches is conducted. With this analysis, this thesis aims to see how Trump and Clinton's arguments are constructed, and how their stance on these issues differ not only in relation to each other, but also how they fit into the wider academic and social debate on these issues. The debate on American exceptionalism has been going on for decades, ever since this concept exists. This thesis adds to this extensive body of literature by using this concept to study the rhetoric of two politicians, and by looking at its relevance in modern-day, American politics and society. In doing so, it fills a lacuna in the existing literature.

Chapter one offers more background on the concept of exceptionalism, its origins and the academic debate. In chapter two the umbrella term of 'American exceptionalism' is further examined and several subcategories of this concept are identified. These categories are the basis for the comparative analysis of the speeches by Clinton and Trump. The transcripts from those speeches are listed on an online database, the American Presidency Project. These transcripts from this database make up the corpus of this thesis. The corpus includes the most relevant transcripts, starting with the acceptance speeches at the RNC and DNC, respectively, ending with the speeches the day before Election Day 2016. From that time, the candidates were the official presidential candidates for their political parties, and were the only two contenders, which is why this was chosen as the starting date. Between the two of them, the candidates gave a considerable amount of speeches, 103, to be exact.

First, all 103 transcripts were read to get a general idea of the contents. Campaign speeches often include many repetitions of the same phrases, or entire sections that are essentially the same. Not all speeches occur in the analyses in chapter three and four in order not to become too repetitive. All speeches that include 'new' rhetoric on the relevant categories have been marked with a number code that corresponds to the category or categories that were mentioned or alluded to in the speeches. In total, 50 speeches are used in this comparative analysis. The number codes are helpful during analysis, because the relevant transcripts for the category in question are easily identifiable. They do not occur in this thesis, because they were used as preparation for the analysis.

There are several options when organizing a comparative analysis; text-by-text or point-by-point. In text-by-text first one object is discussed in its entirety and then the other, whereas point-by-point alternates between the two objects of comparison (Walk). This comparison uses a text-by-text scheme in which Clinton's speeches are considered first, and then those made by Trump. A text-by-text organization allows for a more in-depth analysis of both the candidates' speeches, because there is also room to examine unique aspects of their speeches that do not overlap and it allows more freedom in organizing the two chapters. The individual chapters are

organized according to the several categories that are identified in chapter two, however not necessarily in the same order. The discussion is organized using a point-by-point scheme, because this way, it is possible to shed light on the arguments separately.

In short, this thesis is set up as follows: in the next chapter the concept of American exceptionalism is explained, and the origins and the academic debate are described. Chapter 2 dives deeper into the concept; it sets up different categories that together make up the concept, and it describes how the concept of exceptionalism is invoked by politicians. These chapters form the theoretical basis to analyze the speeches and to value the quotes for their usefulness to answer the research questions. Chapter three includes the analysis of Clinton's speeches and then Trump's speeches are studied closely in chapter four. Then there will be the discussion in which the results of the previous two chapters are compared and contrasted. This thesis ends with a conclusion in which the research questioned is answered, this project is summarized and several recommendations for future research are made.

## Chapter 1 – Theoretical Framework

American exceptionalism is a complex concept to which many other concepts can be related. This concept should not be used interchangeably with nationalism, which in turn should not be confused with patriotism. Patriotism means the love for one's homeland. The word is based on the Latin 'pater', which means 'father'. One definition holds that patriotism is simply the "allegiance to one's country" (Pei 32). Another definition is given by Robert Stand and Ella Shohat, who define it as: "... a form of relational narcissism, whereby nations exalt themselves ... vis-à-vis other nations" (5). They argue that "[i]t is a question not only of how a nation projects itself but also of how it projects others and what self-flattering functions are served by these projections" (6).

Nationalism is a political ideology, which according to Ernest Gellner is best explained as a principle "which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent" (1). Nationalism is also defined as a feeling of "ethno-national superiority" (Pei 32). However, according to Minxin Pei in practice there is not much difference between the two: "... the psychological and behavioral manifestations of nationalism and patriotism are indistinguishable" (32). Although these definitions resemble the concept of American exceptionalism, they are not quite the same.

There are many other definitions of these concepts, but it is important to see that there are distinctions between nationalism and patriotism in relation to American exceptionalism.

Exceptionalism is, in very short terms for such a complex concept, the idea that America is not only different from other countries, but that it is fundamentally unique and superior compared to other countries. 'Unique', because it is more than only 'different': the word unique conveys an added value; that something is more different than just 'different', that it is qualitatively different. The feeling of superiority is based on the sense that it was divine intervention that made America the embodiment of God's Chosen Land, and that it was established as a country by Revolution. It has certain implications and consequences that are rooted in history and America's founding myths, while they are also deeply established and interwoven in society, culture, politics, and national identity. American exceptionalism includes the idea that the US has a 'special' mission in the world; a God-ordained moral duty to promote democratic values such as freedom, equality, and justice. Jason Edwards expresses the gravity of this concept as follows:

"[the exceptionalist ethos] is fundamental to questions concerning who we are as Americans, where we are going, and how we relate to the world around us. . . It is *the* fundamental agent that has underwritten arguments concerning America's destiny" (352).

Kammen argues that the thing with exceptionalism is that it is a comparative notion: it means that only compared to other countries can America, or things in general, be exceptional.

Nationalism and patriotism cannot be used interchangeably with exceptionalism, therefore, but this is not to say that they are completely unrelated. They are terms of the same family, as James Ceaser states (8). Donald Pease states that exceptionalism “is the name of the much-coveted form of nationality . . .” (The New 7). The American exceptionalism discourse fits a certain ‘narrative of greatness. Sylvia Söderlind states that exceptionalism is part of “a coherent narrative stretching from the “city on a hill” in the seventeenth century, through the Declaration of Independence in the eighteenth, Manifest Destiny in the nineteenth, *Pax Americana* in the twentieth, and the War on Terror in the budding twenty-first century” (3). Söderlind, like Edwards, argues that there are certain implications that come with the concept: “it provides the nation with justifications for making exceptions to norms, rules, and laws established, and adhered to, by other nations in ways that are often baffling to outsiders” (3). The US Constitution, Declaration of Independence, the search for liberty: all are said to be part of the discourse surrounding American exceptionalism. This narrative, a narrative of ‘greatness’ runs like a red thread through American history. This concept has developed over time to what it is today. Before moving on, it is important to offer a more extensive definition of ‘American exceptionalism’ and the debate that surrounds it. The discourse surrounding this notion is essential for other concepts used in this thesis. First this chapter will look at the origins of American exceptionalism, and then how the term evolved academically.

## Origins

The origins of the term exceptionalism is often found in early texts, especially one by the Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville. He was the first person who used the term to denote Americans. In his two-volume work *De la Démocratie en Amérique* he stated that American society was exceptional, but for different reasons than those stated by modern-day academics: because Americans do not study “the letters and the arts”; they have mostly “concern for purely material things”; and because religion is the only aspect of American society that is not entirely materialistic (35). John Winthrop’s sermon “A Modell of Christian Charity” is therefore cited as the first text that belongs to the American exceptionalist discourse (Siebald 389). Daniel Bell also looks at other early texts, which include optimistic outlooks on America’s future, by Brooks Adams and G.W.F. Hegel; George Berkeley’s poem “Verses on the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America”, with the well-known stanza that starts “westward the course of empire takes its way...”; and a later text by Daniel Boorstin that is about the genius of American politics and democracy (193-197). According to Bell, these works all contributed to the idea of exceptionalism. This includes the faith in America’s future based on the fact that there is a “common political faith”; no complex polity like in Europe; and no nobility, so there is no danger of becoming “decadent” (197). “Individual opportunity”, liberty, and an increasing standard of living would all contribute

to the status of the United States as a world power, “because it was democratic” and “different in the exercise of that power than previous world empires” (197).

However, de Tocqueville’s statement of what exactly is exceptional is far off from the definition which we understand to be American exceptionalism today. Stating that America’s political system is different and/or better is one thing, but to talk about exceptionalism is another; but Rogers does state that de Tocqueville “lent enough oomph to credibly define America as categorically transcendent” (qtd. in McCoy). Winthrop’s sermon is also an instance of a misinterpretation, according to Manfred Siebald. He argues stating that this sermon represents American society as a whole and stating that it is the basis for the term is in fact a misreading and overvaluation of one Puritan sermon (390). Siebald argues that this misreading stems from an instilled “religious sense of mission” in American “cultural memory” in search of “a usable past” (389). President Ronald Reagan was the one who made this sermon popular by quoting it in several speeches (Hodgson 1). President Reagan’s vision and use of Winthrop’s text was based on a misunderstanding, actually. Winthrop was an Englishman who was loyal to the king of England; the sermon was aimed at other Englishmen to preach that this new colony “would be an example to other English colonies” (Hodgson 2-3). However, despite this misunderstanding, the idea of America as the “City upon a Hill”, a shining example for the world to follow, is now deeply rooted in American national identity and political discourse.

Ceaser, Pease, and McCoy all indicate that the term ‘exceptionalism’ originated when none other than Joseph Stalin used it to describe the position of the “American proletariat” when “it wasn’t interested in revolution” (McCoy). It was used negatively, to indicate that the abnormality of American society was the reason communism would not prevail: American society was “individualistic, profit-crazed, broadly middle class, and as tolerant of inequality as they were reverent of economic freedom” (McCoy). Pease notes that America was “an exception to the rule of European normalization”, when “lacking” certain qualities “rendered it not merely different but also qualitatively better than the European nation-states”, because Europe was “especially susceptible to this threat” [of communism] (10).

The origins of the concept in academic texts is debatable. James Ceaser determined that the first academic use of the term was in a text by Max Lerner, published in 1957 (8). However, the modern use of the term originates in the 1980s (McCoy). Since then the debates over what it means and the status of the term in various academic fields has not waned. McCoy actually states that exceptionalism is more wishful thinking than a qualitative denomination of America. According to McCoy the concept and its modern-day context became part of political rhetoric during the presidential campaign of 2008, with Romney accusing Obama of not believing in exceptionalism.

Ceaser argues that there are several things that should be remembered when looking at the term. The first is to realize that the term “packs different ideas under the same label”, which means that exceptionalism can refer to a range of ideas. The second is that it is important to identify which part of this set of ideas is important; and thirdly to not use it too generally (6). Ceaser furthermore notes that it is important to look at how the term has been used in academic debates, because of its complexity. He states that ‘exceptionalism’ is not one set of ideas, but rather “a family of concepts”, that refers to “something different” or “special about America” (8).

### Definition

Michael Ignatieff defines the concept by using four frameworks; a realist, cultural, institutional, and political framework. The realist explanation works on an international level. It holds that America’s global power has enabled the US to establish an exceptional status on a global level. Ignatieff explains that powerful states are to a lesser extent obliged to commit to international laws and treaties than less powerful countries (12). All in all, this means that the US “seeks to maintain its power in a global order of states at the lowest possible cost to its sovereignty” (Ignatieff 12). The cultural explanation of American exceptionalism is based on America’s power as a country and is established in a strong “messianic cultural tradition” (Ignatieff 13). The idea of America as a ‘City upon a Hill’ is part of this messianic tradition. It also resulted in a “desire for moral leadership” in the world and is often believed to be “the work of Providential design” (Ignatieff 13-14). This ‘messianism’ also works on a realist level, as this idea infuses America’s foreign policy decisions. On an international level, America has opened up room for exceptionalism. The US has strongly established institutions: including for example judicial review and federalism. These institutions entail features that “impose exceptional institutional barriers to statutory and nationwide compliance” to international laws and treaties, that stems from fear of infringement on US national sovereignty (Ignatieff 17). Ignatieff argues that “the historical strength of American conservatism” is the political explanation for American exceptionalism (17). Since the 1960s, conservatives made a comeback in politics, after a time of “social liberalism and liberal internationalism”. This comeback of conservative thought in American politics brought with it a “reassertion of nationalist and exceptionalist rhetoric and policy” (Ignatieff 18). Generally, the exceptionalist discourse fits conservative, Republican views on American society.

### Academic debate

Exceptionalism is not a concept that stands on its own. It has been used to explain several elements of American society, culture, and religion, and is also applied to different research areas such as politics, history, and international relations. This means the academic discourse on exceptionalism is immense, and it is therefore virtually impossible to give a detailed,

comprehensive overview of the academic debate on this concept. However, this chapter will offer a general overview of different stances on the concept. Generally, there are three perspectives on the concept of American exceptionalism. There are academics who fully accept the term and agree with the alleged superiority of the US; others are critical of (some of) the implications of exceptionalism or American exceptionalism in general, and there are those who completely deny the notion of American exceptionalism and say that it never even existed in the first place.

The first group consists of many (neo-) conservatives, including politicians such as Mitt Romney and Newt Gingrich, and academics such as Seymour Martin Lipset. Newt Gingrich, a prominent Republican and former Speaker of the House is one of the people who is a strong adherent to the idea of American exceptionalism. In 2011, before he ran to become the Republican candidate for the presidency, he published the book *A Nation Like No Other: Why American Exceptionalism Matters*. In this book he explains how to “restore American exceptionalism” (12). He furthermore wants to look at important elements of exceptionalism, and how to sustain and strengthen the position of and his belief in America (Edwards 355). Gingrich equals exceptionalism to America’s presence and “leadership” in the world. He states it is the “constant, confident push for freedom over the last century”, in Eastern Europe, Japan, Nazi Germany, Taiwan, and Korea (178).

According to Gingrich, Obama’s policies, centralized bureaucracies, left-wing ideologies, and destructive litigation, part of “the big-government welfare state”, are the “antitheses of American exceptionalism” which caused the collapse of the economy (Edwards 355, Gingrich 178). At the same time, belief in American exceptionalism also disappeared, according to Gingrich.

Peter Onuf believes in American exceptionalism in the sense that according to him Americans’ belief in their exceptionalism is exceptional:

“what makes Americans exceptional is not their institutions or democratic way of life or frontier experience but rather their self-conscious and self-defining embrace of American exceptionalism throughout their history . . . [it] set the terms for subsequent and never-ending arguments about their character and destiny” (79).

Onuf states that this acceptance of exceptionalist rhetoric led to even more arguments about America’s greatness. Onuf therefore emphasizes that exceptionalists should be self-correcting and critical, in order to prevent “a narcissistically narrow, self-congratulatory focus” (96).

John Torpey is a critic of the concept of exceptionalism, mostly to Lipset’s definition of the concept. Lipset had likened exceptionalism to “liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism”, and a laissez-faire attitude (163). According to Torpey, this means that if there would be a change in policy, “the United States would no longer look so exceptional” (163). Torpey further criticizes the notion that exceptionalism means being unique or distinct. He states: “[i]f it is merely a neutral characterization for ‘uniqueness’ or ‘distinctiveness,’ . . . the question then arises why the notion

of 'exceptionalism' needs emphasizing at all" (144). This means that the quality of being exceptional should be self-explanatory according to Torpey. He argues that in that sense, all "processes and developments" are distinct from each other, so being different is not enough to be exceptional. It is also necessary to be qualitatively different, mostly in comparison to others.

Andrew Bacevich is also a critic of American exceptionalism, and even believes that it is a dangerous concept. Bacevich wrote *The Limits of Power: the End of American Exceptionalism*, in which he vocalizes what he sees are the dangerous consequences of exceptionalism. He argues that exceptionalism can lead to a blindness towards the "limits of power", which results in too much emphasis on the wrong goals such as global war, nuclear weapons, and importing oil (179-82). All the while forgetting about climate change, a sustainable solution for Islamic radicalism, the quickly rising national debt, and other important issues (179-82). Bacevich argues that advocates of exceptionalism will mostly, "venerate freedom while carefully refraining from assessing its content or measuring its costs" (182). Bacevich states that when approaching issues such as these within an exceptionalist framework, and when people are convinced "that the rules to which other nations must submit do not apply", eventually it all will lead to "willful self-destruction" (182).

Godfrey Hodgson is highly critical of American exceptionalism. Like Bacevich, he thinks that exceptionalism is potentially dangerous, as it is mostly accepted by Americans but not by the rest of the world. He explains that Americans who do not "accept the moral superiority implied by American exceptionalism" are often perceived as anti-American by Americans who do accept this concept. Hodgson argues that "the uniqueness of the U.S. political tradition has been overstressed. America's greatness is not truly her own, because she owes a good chunk of it to Europe, a point which often is ignored" (Edwards 357). This means that Americans feel they are more exceptional than they actually are (Edwards 357). Hodgson states that when the US was striving for democracy and liberty, the same happened in Europe around that time: the US and Europe "were essentially two parts of the same progressive, liberal capitalist civilization" around the nineteenth century (32). He challenges the idea "that America is exceptional among nations in its general superiority, and in particular in its political and moral superiority" (128). Like Lipset, he points at areas in which America is exceptional, but in these cases because they are actually "below international standards" and exceptionally bad, so to say (128).

Other stances include that it never existed. Demerath, for example, argues that America is exceptional in the sense that all countries are exceptional. To him, it means simply that there is a difference. Demerath argues against the "self-congratulatory arrogance" that he sees often go hand in hand with American exceptionalism (38). Daniel Bell was an academic who argued that exceptionalism is over, because "the belief in American exceptionalism has vanished" (197). This article was written around the 1970s, at the time of the Watergate scandal and the Vietnam War

when many people were generally critical towards the American government. However, Bell's work is still applicable today for people who believe in the concept. Bell argues that these events have "left the nation with much moral disrepute", a feeling that has never really left (223). Bell believed it is first and foremost the task of the government to focus on prioritizing domestic issues, such as social equality, before it can move on to seek "being the moral policeman of the world" (223). Bell further states that if America wants to regain their old position, and enter "into maturity" as he calls it, they need to recognize "the mortality of countries within the time scales of history" (223).

## Conclusion

Academics have argued that exceptionalism is positive or negative, dead, never existed, is not a sufficient term to describe America, or is not 'American' per se. However, it is in fact not completely relevant for this thesis which one of these is true. As Donald Pease claims:

"[e]xceptionalism operates less like a collection of discrete, potentially falsifiable descriptions of American society than as a fantasy through which U.S. citizens bring these contradictory political and cultural descriptions into correlation with one another through the desires that make them meaningful" (8).

Exceptionalism in this thesis is used as a discourse of rhetoric that is used to talk about America and everything that it entails; national identity, popular culture, history, etcetera. It is used as a category of language, a narrative in which people talk about America. As Jason Gilmore states: ". . . the United States is exceptional in the minds of the American public not because it can be proven, but because people believe it to be true. It has become an idea that needs no verification, no tests" (2418).

This part of the thesis looked at the different shapes that exceptionalist rhetoric can take. It is important to see how exceptionalism works and how it is established in order to be able to retrace exceptionalist narrative in the campaign speeches. Therefore, it does not matter if exceptionalism is dead or alive for this argument, because people have used and still use this exceptionalist narrative. Especially in politics it is, to a certain extent, even expected that politicians confirm that America is in some way or another exceptional. When President Obama said: "I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism . . .", he received a lot of criticism from mostly conservatives, including former mayor of New York City Rudy Giuliani (R):

"I know this is a horrible thing to say," Giuliani told a small group of Republican donors, "but I do not believe that the president loves America. . . He wasn't brought up the way you were brought up and I was brought up, through love of this country" (Kessler, Jaffe).

It shows that this concept is still relevant in a political narrative, and one of the worst things to say about an American politician is that they do not “love” their country.

## Chapter 2 - American Exceptionalism in American society

The narrative of greatness, including the concept of exceptionalism, has implications for certain aspects of American society. As mentioned, the idea of exceptionalism led to certain (moral) justifications in foreign policy, including Manifest Destiny, and more recently the War on Terror. It also includes belief in the American Dream and upward social mobility, and the idea that America is one, inclusive society, open for everybody who works hard and serves the community. Several concepts and theories that can be included in, or are related to, the umbrella term of exceptionalism will be further examined. In order to see how exceptionalist rhetoric is expressed in the campaign speeches, this chapter will establish how these other concepts can give an answer to the question of which aspects of American society make America 'great'.

Exceptionalism works on both an international as well as a national level, as American exceptionalism has different implications on both levels and is also established differently at home and in the world. These categories both need to be looked at, because of course both foreign and domestic issues are touched upon in campaign speeches.

### Domestic exceptionalism

American exceptionalism and the narrative of greatness are related to and have several implications for aspects of American society and culture. A 2010 Gallup poll shows that 80% of all Americans believe that "because of the United States' history and its constitution, the US has a unique character that makes it the greatest country in the world", and only 18% of the people who were asked disagreed with that statement (Americans See U.S). This faith in America as a country and its "political values and institutions readily find expression in American social, cultural, and political practices" (Pei 32). These elements include religion, national identity, integration, social mobility, and certain values that are often said to be pre-imminently 'American'.

National identity is an abstract notion that is hard to define. Stam and Shohat argue that it is a comparative process, in which people create an identity and self-awareness by "defining themselves in contradiction to other individuals and nations" (5). However, the nation-state is in itself a constructed concept: it "is premised on demarcating a community and a territory vis-à-vis other communities and territories" (5). Furthermore, national identity is dependent on a certain "discourse and rhetoric", that "must allow for cultural and political heterogeneity" (11). National identity must account for a variety of individual identities, as no country is homogeneous. National identity is thus "a subjective or internalized sense of belonging to the nation", which is also a subjective concept (Huddy and Khatib). This because "the idea of the unified national family camouflages the tensions between and within the different families that form the nation" (Pei 11).

This sense of belonging to a national family stems from a general belief in themselves as a 'chosen people' and "their form of government" (Onuf 79).

### Ethnic relations

The way American society has approached this heterogeneity of its population is also part of the narrative of greatness. Millions of people with different ethnic backgrounds have moved voluntarily or were forcibly taken to America. These ordinary people from all over the world have managed to build up a modern society from scratch in a relatively short time. "A nation of immigrants" is a phrase often used to describe America (Spickard 4).

Citrin, Wong, and Duff look at this aspect of American national identity. They argue that one conception of American identity is that "commitment to the national "creed" of democracy and individualism is what makes one an American", which means that the sense of belonging is not based on "shared blood" but on shared "beliefs and customs" (76). At the same time, they argue that America, as an immigrant nation, often has trouble of "coping with ethnic diversity" (Citrin et al. 71). This is indicated by the motto on the Great Seal of the United States, 'e pluribus unum', that "expresses the desire for a strong sense of common American identity", but this motto does not indicate the "proper balance between the national "one" and the ethnic "many"" (Citrin et al. 4). In other words, there is too much emphasis on qualities that are possessed by only a small group of Americans.

The idea of the American melting pot is often cited as one of the aspects that makes American society great. Arthur Schlesinger Jr. is one advocate of the melting pot, the metaphor of an assimilation process, where newcomers are led "to an acceptance of the language, the institutions, and the political ideals that hold the nation together" (121). The idea of the melting pot is that multiple cultures together 'melt' into one, new cultural identity. He sees multiculturalism and other such models as "an assault on the Western tradition" because too little room for attention to Western tradition and heritage (124). This is dangerous because much, if not most, of American identity is based on Western ideals, according to Schlesinger. Cultural assimilation lies to the core of American identity he states: this process of becoming American is essential to the American Creed, and criticism against it is "a denial of the idea of a common culture and a single society" which is a serious danger for America as a country (Schlesinger 131-133).

These are core standpoints in the debate on American society in relation to ethnicity. Paul Spickard argues that the statement "America is a nation of immigrants" is too general a statement, as it does not take into account the "nature of the peoples" of America and "the relationship between them" (5). It is too self-celebratory to say that all these people have a single American identity (Spickard 5). The idea of the melting pot does not take into account the historically dominant position of immigrants of British descent: the way non-English immigrants are expected

to conform to English-Americans' behavior which Spickard calls 'Anglo-conformity' and 'Anglo-normativity' (5-6). Schlesinger has a specific ideal of how the new identity should be, therefore putting a mold on the melting pot beforehand so there is not much room left for other cultures. By doing so, this model glosses over "race, slavery, oppression, discrimination, and displacement of Native peoples" (7). Nowadays the European "arrival myths" are the standard, the rule, whereas the experience of people of color are the exceptions to that rule (8). Citrin and Sears argue that nativism was the answer to the influx of immigrants in the nineteenth century, which holds that only white Anglo-Saxon Protestants can be truly American (2). However, between 1720 and 1760 more people from African descent were forced to migrate to America than the amount of people from European descent, actually (Spickard 9).

At the same time, there is no room for Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and Asian Americans in the melting pot model. Native American identity is appropriated by white Americans so as to make them more American: "to be Native American . . . is to be naturally, primordially part of America" (Spickard 10). Claiming Native American heritage as a white American makes you even more American than other white Americans, so to say. This is sharp and painful when keeping in mind the near extermination of the Native American peoples by white Americans and the position of Native Americans in modern day America

Then there is the case of Mexican Americans and Asian Americans: two groups that are often wrongfully seen as immigrants and/or foreigners according to Spickard (10). Mexican Americans are often descendants of people who lived in the border regions which were conquered by America in the nineteenth century. Asian Americans, and especially Chinese Americans often came to the US in the mid-1800s, as part of the Old immigration, rather than later as is often believed (Spickard 10). This results in Americans stubbornly regarding American born U.S. citizens of Asian and Mexican descent "as foreigners in their native lands by whites, even [by] those whose ancestry in the United States may be of substantially shorter duration" (Spickard 10).

In accordance to this, Citrin et al. conducted research to see how Americans would describe their nationality in relation to their ethnicity (221). Based on this research, Richard D. Ashmore concludes that most white Americans would describe themselves as "just American", whereas Americans belonging to an ethnic minority would describe themselves as such only one in six times; one in two times they would give up a dual identity, and one in three times they would define themselves only by their ethnic identity (Citrin et al. 222).

The melting pot, or ethnic assimilation theory, is one ethnic relations model in American society: George Frederickson describes three other models. He argues that it is not ethnic assimilation that should be the preferred model, instead it should be cultural pluralism. In that, he argues along the same lines as Spickard. Cultural pluralists, as opposed to assimilationists, "celebrate differences among groups rather than seek to obliterate them" (Frederickson 130).

They argue that this model of pluralism does not go against American democratic values, but is actually a “consistent application” of those values (Frederickson 132). Frederickson believes that this model is “fully inclusive” and allows for individuals to create “their own ethnic identities” (134). Other models such as assimilation and ethnic hierarchy are in comparison far from ideal, Frederick states. Ethnic hierarchy is a model that sees a group that believes it is the core of a society, dominating other groups by claiming “rights and privileges” without sharing them with “others, who have been characterized as unfit or unready for equal rights and full citizenship” (125). He argues that in the future, the formerly majority group of people with non-European ancestry will be in the minority, which means that in order to keep the country governable, there needs to be “a more democratic form of intergroup relations” than ethnic hierarchy or one-way assimilation (134). Citrin sees modern day America as a “splintering society”, in which identity politics, culture wars, and party polarization overshadow the sentiment that if you conform to certain customs and beliefs, the “creed”, you are American (2).

This brings us to the next part of the narrative of greatness: that of the American Dream. All those millions of people who arrived in America did so to “fulfil their version of the American Dream”, and others “were moved to America despite their preferences and have been forced to come to terms with a dream that was not originally theirs” (Hochschild 15). Thus it has become a deeply rooted idea in American national identity. The American Dream is all about success, which, depending on who is asked, can mean different things (Hochschild 16). Of course there are some flaws in this ideology; Hochschild states that the few who have been able to fulfil their dreams, mostly white men, have in doing so also set the standard for everybody else (26-30). This ideal of achieving some form of material or socioeconomic success, Hochschild mentions, can also cause materialism, individualism, and a tunnel view (26-30). This ideal has left three-quarters of Americans with the idea that “they have a good chance of improving their standard of living”, a large number compared to the less than one-third of Dutch people who think the same of their country (21). The American Dream is an ideology that has, as an outlook on potential success, “lured people to America”, trying to beat “impossible odds” (25). Jim Cullen states this notion has become “a kind of lingua franca” in a nation where people “don’t always speak the same language” (*The American Dream* 6). The American Dream is thus, arguing in line with Citrin et al., something that Americans can have in common, even though there are many differences elsewhere. Cullen captures the essence of the American Dream: “it is a culturally democratic phenomenon” that is distinct because it is “quantitatively” different; its quantity is what makes the American Dream exceptional (“Twilight’s Gleaming” 24). Cullen furthermore shows that although it is a fundamentally individualistic ideal, it brings people together in having a common, generally outlook on life:

“The American Dream derives from a notion of a better life that is not solely American. Nor does it depend on a republican form of government . . . But insofar as the sense of human aspiration we have come to call the American Dream has a distinctive flavor, it rests on the breadth of that aspiration and the way it has offered a sense of social cohesion, at times paradoxically, in its most avowedly individualistic incarnations. Even when we have agreed on nothing else, we granted each other the right to dream” (“Twilight’s Gleaming” 24-5).

The American Dream was also articulated in the Declaration of Independence with the statement that all men “are endowed with certain unalienable rights” including the “pursuit of happiness” (US 1776). This statement is an example of how the founding documents of the US, i.e. the Declaration and the Constitution, perpetuate certain elements and values in American society that in their turn could lead to certain feelings of exceptionalism. This is not to say that these documents are the roots or the cause of these sentiments, however, but they are showcases of how it is part of American national identity. These values; the American Dream, ethnic diversity and America’s melting pot, are believed to be part of the story of what makes, or has made America great. Hodgson identifies more values which he believes together make up the core of exceptionalism. These include religion, the idea that Providence made America exceptional; equality, as a country with no nobility; militarism and invincibility, but also isolationism; freedom, which is nowadays a recurring motif in exceptionalist rhetoric; and democracy (Hodgson 100-1).

## Values

Liberty and freedom as values also lie at the core of both American national identity and American exceptionalism. David Hackett Fischer studied liberty and freedom as “two central values in American culture” (2). He defines liberty as “ideas of independence” and freedom as “the rights of belonging within a community of free people” (717). Together as a phrase they denote “the combined heritage of English-speaking people” and “the entire range of beliefs that have developed from their interaction (Fischer 717). Fischer argues that liberty and freedom have lain at the core of “American thought”, while also validating “other beliefs in America” (718). However, while this concept lies at the root of American society, what it means and has meant over time has differed, subject to different important events and people (719). Fischer even indicates certain “contests” between definitions over time, that are results but also the cause of changes in US society and history (721). Included can be the Revolutionary war and the Civil War, but also the Great Depression and the Civil Rights Movement. Fischer argues that this is exactly what lies at the core of freedom in American society: the fact that these different interpretations are allowed to co-exist, because the “gravest dangers” to American society is when people only accept and tolerate their own view (722).

The core of America's exceptionalism, but mostly all these values and ideas are interpreted differently among generations of Americans, among people with different political ideas, but also, especially, on an individual level. The point is that 80% of Americans believe that the US is the greatest country on earth, seeking the explanation in often completely different areas but who nevertheless are able to come to the same conclusion.

### International American exceptionalism and foreign policy

On an international stage, American exceptionalism has certain important implications. This section will offer a general overview and some examples of issues how American exceptionalism functions in foreign policy and international relations. The exceptionalist ethos, as mentioned before, has offered moral justifications to act in certain ways and hold certain standards that are different for the US than for other countries. Michael Ignatieff argues there are three categories of American exceptionalism. He calls the first 'exemptionalism', which means that the United States "supports multilateral agreements and regimes, but only if they permit exemptions for American citizens or U.S. practices" (4). Examples of these include human rights deals and international law, such as the Geneva Conventions and negotiations concerning the ICC and economic trade deals such as TTIP and NAFTA.

The second element of exceptionalism are the double standards: the US "judges itself by standards different from those it uses to judge other countries, and judges its friends by standards different from those it uses for its enemies" (Ignatieff 7). This is a highly "problematic" aspect: when it comes to human rights standards for example, the US ignores UN reports on the poor human rights conditions in American prisons, but criticizes other countries for not complying with those reports at the same time (7). Other people question America's credibility as the world's 'moral leader' with a history of structurally infringing the rights of its own people; most notably Native Americans and African Americans.

The third category identified by Ignatieff is legal isolationism. This includes the position of American courts in relation to "the rights jurisprudence of other liberal democratic countries" (8). This position is explained by the "broad popular sentiment that the land of Jefferson and Lincoln has nothing to learn about rights from any other country", the fact that the US constitution is one of the oldest in the world, which has always had a different interpretation of (individual) rights than other democratic countries (8-10).

Religion plays an important part on what James Guth calls 'foreign policy exceptionalism'. Guth explains this is the messianic belief that America has a "divinely ordained" and moral obligation to take a leading position in the world (78). This sense of duty has decreased among Americans, but 51% still believes that the US has a special role in the world (Guth 78). Guth also found that exceptionalist ideas are often based on "religious affiliation, beliefs, and identities"

(80). Especially traditionalism, “a sense of religious guidance”, and evangelicalism result in people believing in America’s special role in the world. Guth distinguishes between interventionist and isolationist exceptionalism, with the first one being the prevalent model today. This interventionist exceptionalism explains the great support for military power, as it promotes the idea that American exceptionalism should be spread around the world (Guth 81).

The consequences of exceptionalism are visible throughout US history and foreign policy. The idea that America should set an example and has a moral duty based on a divine ordain to lead the world is closely related to “Manifest Destiny in the nineteenth, *Pax Americana* in the twentieth, and the War on Terror in the budding twenty-first century” (Söderlind 3). Manifest Destiny was “widely used as a convenient statement of the philosophy of territorial expansion” in the nineteenth century (Pratt 795). It was used to argue that America had the divine right to gain land around the continent. Julius Pratt had researched the origins of the phrase, and found it in an editorial of a newspaper from 1859. It claims parts of the North American continent, based on

“the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government entrusted to us. . . . The God of nature and of nations has marked it for our own; and with His blessing we will firmly maintain the incontestable rights He has given, and fearlessly perform the high duties He has imposed” (qtd in Pratt 796).

This concept is part of the narrative of greatness, or as Ceaser called it, a family of concepts. This family could also include Wilsonianism and Bush’s War on Terror, which both instigated an interventionist approach towards foreign policy with the idea to spread democracy and freedom around the world. Ignatieff’s double standards also apply here, in the sense that Manifest Destiny was also an excuse in the shape of a moral justification to take away people’s lands for own gain. What America calls ‘spreading democracy, liberty, and freedom’ could also be called ‘imperialism’.

On the other hand, exceptionalism can also result in reluctance towards intervention. 66% of Americans asked agree with the statement that the US “has a special responsibility to be the leading nation in world affairs” (Jones). This shows that exceptionalism does not necessarily go hand in hand with a tendency towards interventionism. Isolationism, defined as “the voluntary and general abstention by a state from security-related activity in an area of the international system in which it is capable of action”, just like interventionism and other foreign policy ideas, can be rooted in American exceptionalism (Braumoeller 362). An isolationist approach can stem from the intention of not doing what European countries did:

“ . . . [Even] the Founders worried about ‘entangling’ alliances and sought not to dominate but to insulate themselves from the tawdry European history of intolerance, religious persecution, and war by hunkering down on the new bounteous continent and

treating the oceans as protective barriers against a dangerous and malevolent world” (Barber 239).

A second reason for an isolationist attitude is that interventionism is the least preferred option: the latter “would draw the U.S. into conflicts that had little or nothing to do with her security and interests, and it would undermine the preservation of republican government at home” (Federici).

McDougall explains that these contrasting tendencies, isolationism and interventionism, but also other foreign policy traditions from the past centuries are all different answers to the questions of how to act as an exceptional country:

“Does our blessed heritage as a land of liberty require us to crusade abroad on behalf of others, as our New Testament in foreign policy commands? Or does giving in to the temptation to impose our will abroad, however virtuous our intent, violate the Old Testament principles that made America great in the first place?” (Federici).

### Invoking American exceptionalism in political speeches

This family of ideas is, as argued, important for American national identity. Jason Gilmore wrote a paper in which he looked at how presidents invoke exceptionalism in political speeches. Gilmore argues that this set of ideas gives people “a sense of self-esteem”. It is of course a gratifying idea that your country is ‘better’ than others, which could then also increase your self-image. It is a job for the president to perpetuate this image, and “actively promote a collective sense of national pride”. So, Gilmore states, “when promulgated by a U.S. president, therefore, such a view is almost certain to resonate with American audiences” (2418). Of course, presidents benefit from this and as such will try to refer to this family of concepts often. Another reason for presidents to use this theme of American exceptionalism is to improve America’s “image” by repeating the greatness of America (Gilmore 2419).

Gilmore furthermore explains there are three ways in which the concepts of American exceptionalism are invoked: the first one is the idea that America is “the single global exception”; the US is “placed on a set-apart pedestal where it is glorified for reasons and qualities” that are unique in the world (2420). The second way is by using rhetoric that characterizes the US as superior, being the greatest of all time: “everything associated with the United States [is] fundamentally better, or grander, or “more” by comparison with the rest of the world” (2420). The third way “suggests the country has been chosen or favored by God or another divine power to play a special role in world affairs”, fitting the idea of manifest destiny and the perception that America is ‘God’s chosen land’ (2421). This kind of rhetoric is now more or less expected by Americans from their presidents and other prominent politicians.

## Conclusion

This chapter aimed to provide context to the concept of American exceptionalism as part of the narrative of greatness. It has tried to offer several perspectives on the many possible answers to the question of what people mean when they are talking about America and its supposed 'greatness'. It also looked at the way American presidents invoked this concept in their speeches. Ultimately, several categories emerged that will be used in the next chapters: the American Dream, ethnic relations and diversity, America's values and foreign relations. The next chapters also examine the way the candidates frame the future of American exceptionalism. These next chapters look at the campaign speeches by Trump and Clinton, based on the several aspects that were mentioned in this chapter.

## Chapter 3 – Hillary Clinton

This analysis will answer the question: How does Hillary Clinton invoke the concept of American exceptionalism in her 2016 campaign speeches? As mentioned in chapter 2, Ceaser stated that exceptionalism is a family of concepts, rather than a single idea. This will be clear in this chapter; the speeches will be analyzed from the different angles; the American Dream; diversity; international exceptionalism; and founding values.

Clinton's speeches, though all different, follow a similar format that is adapted to each audience. First she is introduced by a prominent person based in the location of the speech, after which she thanks that person and others from that area. Then she introduces her most important policies, written in such a way that they fit the audience: for example whenever she is at a University or school, she emphasizes her education policies, focusing on tuition fees. This in contrast to speeches at a community college or an Outreach Centre, for example: the focus is in these cases on the creation of (manual) jobs, the economy, the middle class, and the position of people with disabilities. The most important issue she touches upon is different again at the Black Women's Agenda Symposium: in that case Clinton emphasizes the position of African American women, and the importance of families and child care for American society.

After introducing her policies, she mentions the importance of voting, and explains how to register and how to vote by mail. To conclude, most of the times her speech ends not with a "God Bless America", which is often used by presidents and other politicians, but with a reference to her opponent: "Friends don't let friends vote for Trump" or a pun with his name: "love trumps hate". She warns against Trump, and in doing so diverts from the script that most politicians use.

### The American Dream

'Dreams' and the American Dream especially make up an important aspect of Clinton's speeches. Clinton often speaks about it in a rather positive way, stressing the importance of dreaming and the way the American Dream is connected to US national identity. Clinton defines the American Dream as an ideal that could be achieved by everyone if they work hard enough, but at the same time it is also the thing that drives people to do just that. This is the idea of upward social mobility, and one of the ways success is actualized. However, what it means, and how it is realized, its result, and how to achieve this Dream, if that is even possible, is different for everybody. Clinton mentions: "I want everyone to have the chance to get your piece of the American Dream" ("Cuyahoga Community College").

According to Clinton, if you can dream it, you can, or at least should be able to achieve it ("Address Accepting"). Clinton includes a prospect of upward mobility in her definition of the Dream, which means that you create a better, richer, more successful life for yourself, and by doing

so, you will be able to pass that on to children so “[they] would have an even better life” (“Martin Luther King, Jr. Plaza”). Clinton states that this is the case with her own family, with her grandfather and his business, and her father who was also able to start his own business after the war. She states that she thanks her success to her parents, who enabled her to “follow [her] dreams” (“Frontline Outreach”). It is this prospect of upward mobility that is important to the American Dream, and Clinton uses her own story as evidence that the American Dream ‘exists’. She states that during her career she has always been focused on helping people achieve their dreams: “I’m going to close this campaign the way that I started my career a long time ago. . . standing up for people who may need a little extra boost in life, making sure that this country delivers on the promise of the American Dream” (“Goodyear Hall”). She wants to continue doing so, and by telling her own story, her own version of the American Dream, Clinton offers hope for a better future and a better life to many Americans. A good life is in Clinton’s view being able to “participate in our economy and lead rich, full lives that are as healthy and productive as possible” (“Frontline Outreach”). If Clinton can achieve her version of the American Dream, then it could be reality for other Americans as well. “I feel blessed, and I want everybody to have the same chance to go after your part of the American Dream” (Broward College’s”).

Clinton says that she recognizes the hardship that people go through and in that way creates a bond of understanding : “. . . they don't understand the American Dream and how hard it is for people to make it” (“Cowles Commons”). Clinton also time tries to alienate them from Trump by saying that he does not believe in the Dream and therefore in them, and that he cannot possibly understand their situation.

For Clinton, the Dream is about working and about building. It means setting a goal for yourself, and creating an environment that allows you to achieve that goal. It means that you use whatever you have to get there to become great. She states: “Let’s build a better tomorrow for our beloved children and our beloved country. And when we do, America will be greater than ever!” (“Address Accepting”). In that same speech she notes, using her own experiences: “my family were [...] builders in the way most American families are. They used whatever tools they had, whatever God gave them and whatever life in America provided and built better lives and better futures for their kids” (“Address Accepting”). People do have to work hard and it will not happen out of nowhere, but when they do, the reward will be success: “If you're willing to work for it and do your part, you should be able to get ahead and stay ahead in America”

As mentioned before, the American Dream is like a lingua franca; a language that is understood by many people, even though they have different backgrounds. Clinton often uses rhetoric that shows the American Dream is all-inclusive. This is useful for her as a presidential candidate, because she does not count out people that way. The American Dream also offers a form of social cohesion in a society that is often divided. So by invoking this idea, Clinton speaks

to everybody, because the American Dream also includes everybody. Clinton states “I’m talking about people with disabilities, men and women, boys and girls, who have talents, skills, ideas, and dreams for themselves and their families, just like anybody else” (“Frontline Outreach”).

This is important for the message she wants to purvey, and is also visible in the way she talks about the need to work together: “[w]e have so many blessings. Now it’s our job to deliver on those and to make sure every single person, and particularly every child, no matter who they are, what they look like, or who they love, is part of the American Dream now and way into the future” (“University of North Carolina”).

Her campaign slogan ‘Stronger Together’ is also the way the American Dream should work according to Clinton: “the American Dream is really premised on people coming together to lift each other up. Nobody, nobody makes it alone” (“Palace of Agriculture”). However, despite the fact that Clinton wants the American Dream for everyone, she also recognizes that sometimes, some groups are written off or are left out of this story. This is a problem because: “we not only short-change them and their dreams, we short-change our country and our own futures” (“Kendall Campus”) Clinton also emphasizes that she does not only include Americans, but also “dreamers”, immigrants, for whom the American Dream includes “following their future” and becoming an American citizen (“Palace of Agriculture”). Clinton often mentions that she believes that the Dream is ‘big enough’: “the American Dream is big enough for you and there is a place in America for you” (“Palace of Agriculture”). And in another speech in: “I think the American Dream is big enough for everybody, and education is absolutely essential to it.” (“University of New Hampshire”)

At the same time, one fundamental problem in America is that not everybody is able to achieve their dream, or even believes in the dream. Clinton also connects the American Dream to US national identity: the idea that everybody can make it if only you work hard enough is an important part of it.

“... I think about our country. I want our country to be the land of opportunity. The place where dreams do come true if you're willing to work for them... I want every child in this country to have a chance to live up to his or her God-given potential... we will have a country that delivers on our dreams and a future we can all be proud of” (“Goodyear Hall”). The problem is that some people are still left out of this ideal. So, Clinton states, “we've got to face that and do better for everyone's sake because this really does go to the heart of who we are as Americans” (“Frontline Outreach”). Most Americans will understand and believe Clinton when she speaks about the American Dream and US national identity that way. The Dream is even described in the Declaration of Independence: it is the ‘pursuit of happiness’. This is the reason why it is important that everybody is included, because it is not only part of American identity. According to Clinton the Dream is also one of the foundations of American ‘greatness’: “it is the basic bargain

that made our country great, and it's our job to make sure it's there for you and future generations" ("Frontline Outreach"). This statement fits the second theme that was identified by Gilmore in the last chapter: America as a superior country, better than all others.

This is the essence of Clinton's message on the American Dream; it is an inclusive ideal, based on whatever God gave people, but it is necessary to work hard to ultimately achieve success: better lives and better futures to be able to pass it on to your kids:

"I want to just stress that our campaign is about the fundamental belief that, in America, every person, no matter what you look like, who you are, who you love, you should have the chance to go as far as your hard work and dreams will take you. In America, if you can dream it you should be able to build it" ("Address Accepting").

This also fits the first theme of invoking American exceptionalism: the theme of singularity according to which America is seen as the global exception. In this case that means that only in America is it possible to achieve your dreams. That is what she promises to set out to do if she becomes President: "[We are going to build] a country where all our children can dream and those dreams are within reach" ("Address Accepting"). Because "way too many dreams die in the parking lots of banks" ("Frontline Outreach").

All in all, this theme of the American Dream is frequently present in most of Clinton's speeches. She truly builds upon the sense of hope that goes along with the Dream. Clinton presents it as the driving force for people to achieve success. Individual success will eventually lead to success for America. Therefore, the American Dream makes America an exceptional country, according to Clinton.

## E Pluribus Unum

Diversity and ethnic relations are sensitive topics, because it goes to the core of individual identity. It can be controversial to speak on diversity for example. Debates about it can cause conflicts as not only people's opinions can be questioned, but to some extent also their identity. For example when people ask when you can call yourself an American. As a presidential candidate, it is easy to offend people speaking about diversity and identity, in other words. However, at the same time the diversity of the American people is also seen as a core concept of American national identity. This is the reason that Clinton has an ambiguous stance on diversity. Sometimes Clinton advocates to celebrate rather than even out the cultural differences among Americans, in line with the model of cultural pluralism as explained in the previous chapter. She states: "Either we're going to fear our differences, or embrace and celebrate our diversity. Either we're going to pit Americans against each other and deepen the divides, or we're going to be stronger together" ("Congressional Hispanic Caucus"). Clinton says that cultural diversity is "one of [America's] strongest assets", and one of the things why America is "great", even exceptional: "I believe America is an exceptional

nation. . . it is because of the diversity of our country. I think our diversity is one of our strongest assets” (“Coral Springs”).

In strong words, Clinton argues that diversity and differences are part of America’s DNA, that there should be room to have these differences and that they should be celebrated. She furthermore states that America “[has] the most dynamic and diverse people in the world” (“Address Accepting”). One speech was concluded with this idea: “if you believe diversity is America’s strength, not America’s burden, join us” (“Temple University”). These statements are in line with the multiculturalist model that Spickard and Frederickson described.

However, other times she would talk rather differently about ethnicity in America. Diversity and ethnicity in America were also a theme in another speech Clinton held at the Black Women’s Agenda symposium. During this speech Clinton again brings up diversity as a core aspect of American identity. However, during that speech there are some hints to a version of a ‘color-blind’ view on American society, which is goes along the lines of ‘there is no black and white race, only a human race’, but then changed into an American version: ‘it does not matter that we are different, because we are all Americans.’ Once she states: “I look at America, I see everyone” (“Black Women’s Agenda”). This seems to be more in line with Schlesinger’s model of cultural assimilation. During her acceptance speech for the Democratic candidacy she also quotes the American motto; E Pluribus Unum, and then asks the audience to stay true to that motto. This motto is really the essence of cultural assimilation: out of many cultures, one, single American identity will emerge. Clinton talks about “*the* (American) people” [emphasis added]; she calls her vision for America a “unifying vision” (“Temple University”). However, Clinton does not hold up an ideal version of how American culture and society should be. There are multiple aspects that together make the American people. She does not restrict American identity to specific assets, as Schlesinger does. There is room for everybody in Clinton’s perspective on ethnic relations.

Further reading of the campaign speeches shows that Clinton also uses the topic of diversity as a way to show the differences between her and Donald Trump. Trump has a completely different view on diversity. Clinton states: “His message is you should be afraid – afraid of people whose race or ethnicity is different, or whose religious faith is different, or who were born in a different country” (“Congressional Hispanic Caucus”). This, Clinton claims, is in sharp contrast to her campaign message: “stronger together”. Listening to each other and celebrating diversity will make America “smarter as well as stronger” (“Ohio State University”). This message stems from history, Clinton argues, however it is not only a history lesson, but also a “guiding principle”. Apart from a guiding principle and a history lesson, it is one of America’s strengths. Clinton states: “we celebrate our diversity, as a source of national strength” (“Watch Hillary”).

Clinton wants to accept “hardworking immigrants” who contribute to the American economy, because “it would be self-defeating and inhumane to try to kick them out.

Comprehensive immigration reform will grow our economy and keep families together” (“Address Accepting”). Clinton wants Americans to come together, and heal the divides that she sees in American society: “Are we going to pit Americans against each other and deepen the divides in this country, or are we going to be, as I know we can, stronger together?” (“Temple University”). Because, Clinton states: “Protecting all of God’s children is America’s calling” (“Little Rock”). In line with this she also proposes to “. . . hold on to a common vision. Let’s come together to make America a place where every child, no matter who they are, where they’re born or what they look like, has the chance to live up to their God-given potential” (“Little Rock”).

Clinton thus also uses diversity as a way to perpetuate the greatness of America. Although she uses both the cultural pluralism and the ethnic assimilation model, Clinton turns both of them in qualities and ‘strong assets’ of American society. This, in conclusion, is another way Clinton uses rhetoric to show that America is an exceptional country.

### Foreign policy exceptionalism

Another way of invoking American exceptionalism is by looking at the position of America as a country vis-à-vis other countries. This is also a recurring theme in the speeches by Clinton. She frequently talks about the position of the US in the world, often in relation to the military and terrorism and the role of the president as commander-in-chief: “we’re electing a commander-in-chief. We’re looking to see who can protect our country and provide steady and strong leadership around the world” (“University of New Hampshire”). The military is part of the narrative of greatness, as the embodiment of America’s strength and power: “You know, we believe we should honor the men and women who fight for our country and that America is safer when we work with our allies to lead the world with strength and intelligence” (Saint Anselm College”).

Clinton thus perpetuates the idea that America is uniquely qualified for the role of (moral) leader in the world: “American leadership means bringing the world together to solve global problems as only we can” (“Watch Hillary”). Having this status as moral leader in the world, the US is therefore also designated to guide the world in the endeavor ‘defeat’ terrorism. Other countries are helping the US with that, and not the other way around: “I will do everything I can to keep our country safe and to work with others to defeat the threat posed by terrorism” (“Goodyear Hall”).

Clinton frequently talks about the US in relation to terrorism and their position as world leader: “We stand with those who will help us defeat terrorism. And while we’re doing that, we’re going to make sure that our country’s safe and that America provides strong and steady leadership around the world” (“Coral Springs”). Here, Clinton again implies that other countries merely help America in their struggle to end terrorism. There are more examples of this:

“But just look for a minute at the strengths we bring as Americans to meet these challenges[terrorism]. . . We have the most tolerant and generous young people we've ever had. We have the most powerful military, the most innovative entrepreneurs” (“Address accepting”).

In this instance, Clinton uses rhetoric in line with the narrative of greatness, arguing that America is pre-eminently suitable for this role. Clinton also reflects on the importance that America holds this position: “So no matter how hard it gets, no matter how great the challenge, America must lead. The question is how we lead. . . American leadership means standing with our allies” (“Watch Hillary”). Even the relationship with other countries is something that makes America exceptional: “Because our network of allies is part of what makes America exceptional. No other country in the world has alliances like ours. . . [our allies] deliver for us every day” (“Watch Hillary”). Clinton implicitly notes that America’s allies do what they do only for America, so they are more than just a leader. The difference between America’s alliances and other countries’ alliances is that America, contrary to other countries, is “*the* indispensable nation” in the world, and “[p]eople all over the world look to us and follow our lead” (“Watch Hillary”). Clinton is not the first one to argue that. Her husband and former president Bill Clinton also said that America is the “one essential nation” (Ivie and Giner 360).

Clinton asserts this unique position comes with a sense of responsibility for the consequences; or as she puts it: “[t]he decisions we make, and the actions we take, even the actions we don’t take, affect millions even billions of lives” (“Watch Hillary”). Clinton furthermore maintains that there are certain values that must be followed because of this responsibility:

“our power comes with a responsibility to lead. Humbly, thoughtfully, and with a fierce commitment to our values. Because when we fail we leave a vacuum. . . American leadership means leading with our values, in pursuance of our interests in protection of our security. At best the United states is the global force for freedom, justice, and human dignity” (“Watch Hillary”).

Clinton’s ideas are more in line with the interventionist approach, specified in the previous chapter, because America’s unique position and superiority allows them to ‘spread’ these values over the world. Clinton invokes this by arguing that America is part of a heroic mission to rid the world from evil: “When we say America is exceptional . . . [i]t means that we recognize America’s unique and unparalleled ability to be a force for peace and progress, a champion for freedom and opportunity” (“Watch Hillary”). She often reinforces this idea that these values are essentially American:

“. . . we should be so proud that those words [freedom, equality] are associated with us. I have to tell you, as your Secretary of State I went to 112 countries. When people hear those words, they hear America!” (“Address Accepting”).

This section shows that apart from certain qualities that are exceptional, America is also exceptional especially in relation to other countries. Clinton makes it look like that the rest of the world acknowledges and accepts this leadership, especially in the case of America's allies. This fits the exceptionalist views that America is a shining city on a hill, an example to follow.

### Exceptional values

Clinton claims that liberty, democracy, equality, dignity, volunteerism, ingenuity, generosity are fundamentally American values. For her these values are part of what makes America great; although many countries are in fact democracies and have freedom, these values are often invoked by Americans and are an important part of the narrative of greatness: “[they are the] the fundamental values that made America the greatest nation in the history of the world” (“Broward College”). To give one more example: “In the United States of America, the greatest country in the world, we believe everyone is created equal” (“Frontline Outreach”). Because defining these values as pre-eminently American, it also means that not only America as a country is exceptional, its people are as well: “in a country founded on liberty and equality, I can't think of a more important notion than every one of us is valuable” (“Sunrise Theatre”).

Clinton also uses this perception to emphasize the importance of the coming elections. The outcome of these elections will decide the future of America as the global force of spreading freedom and justice: “make no mistake. Our core values are being tested in this election. But my faith in our future has never been stronger” (“Grand Valley”). “And ultimately, this election really is about the kind of country we want for our kids, . . . Are we really a nation that believes in freedom and justice for all?” (“Eastern Market”).

As was noted in the previous chapter, the American Dream sometimes goes hand in hand with individuality, materialism, and selfishness. However, Clinton also often talks about working together, not being able to make it alone. Solidarity and unselfishness are important values and also part of the American ‘spirit’. She talks about ‘serving the country’ and generosity, more than once: “To join with people across America who care about service, because this speaks to both what is great and good about the United States” (“Sunrise Theatre”). According to Clinton, America's exceptionalism is therefore partly due to the American people themselves: “I talk a lot about how America is an exceptional nation. We're not exceptional just because of the size of our military or the size of our economy. We're exceptional because of the generosity and ingenuity of our people” (“Fort Pierce”).

Clinton often repeats that this spirit of making it together in America is part of what makes America a great country:

“Isn't that America at our best? We don't thrive on tearing each other apart, or separating ourselves. We know we are stronger together. We believe in equality and

dignity for all. . . we strive to do better, . . . to move toward becoming that more perfect union that our founders hoped for” (“Frontline Outreach”).

Clinton furthermore states that Americans have made the US greater over time, and did so together: “every generation of Americans has come together to make our country freer, fairer and stronger. None of us ever have or can do it alone” (“Address Accepting”). As a reaction to her opponents comments, Clinton states she wants to emphasize that this is not how she sees America: “we know that America is big-hearted, not small-minded. We want to lift people up, not tear each other down” (“Coastal Credit Union”)

Clinton often talks about freedom and equality, and adds democracy to this list as well. The sense that democracy is pre-eminently an American trait goes back to the founding of America. Clinton presents it is a source of pride, this feeling that America is the “greatest and longest lasting democracy the world has ever known” (“Broward College”). Clinton also mentions de Tocqueville, who is, as mentioned before, said to be the first person to argue that America is an exceptional country because of the democratic government:

“Alexis de Tocqueville . . . was travelling around, trying to figure out, 'What is this new place called America? They fought a revolution. Who are they?' And he saw how we had set up our government, and we had three branches . . . This has been our story, the American story, since the beginning of our nation, and it is still going strong today” (“Sunrise Theatre”).

As said before, de Tocqueville called America ‘exceptional’ for different reason, but Clinton still appropriates his words to emphasize the greatness of America’s democracy. Clinton adds several aspects of democracy to this, to show how deeply rooted it is in American society. She includes the transfer of power, free elections, and freedom of speech: “the peaceful transfer of power is one of the things that makes our country great – something that – something we can't lose, something we shouldn't even doubt” (“Saint Anselm College”). This because in many countries, that is not the case, as Clinton states. So this fact is something that sets the United States apart, compared to other countries.

Clinton often refers to the past in her speeches. She mentions that all of these values, as well as the American Dream and the diversity of its people have been part of American identity from the beginning. She talks about Alexis de Tocqueville as well, saying how he, as a European, already saw the exceptional qualities in American society. Clinton later also talks about the Founding Fathers, specifically George Washington. By invoking the reputation of the Founding Fathers, Clinton can strengthen her argument, by showing that America’s exceptionalism has its roots in the past

“I think it all started -- I think this all started when George Washington refused to become a king. Right? . . . that was one of the most important decisions any president has

ever made . . . We would not be subject, we would be independent citizens” (“Broward College”).

Since George Washington, Clinton argues, America has lived up to this potential and became more equal and freer. She furthermore praises America’s history: “what we have done over the course of our history to keep widening the circle of opportunity and equality and freedom is unlike any other place in the history of the world” (“Smale Riverfront”).

Apart from George Washington and Alexis de Tocqueville, Clinton quotes (other) popular former presidents, Ronald Reagan and Abraham Lincoln. Clinton argues that America is still the “last best hope of earth”, to use Lincoln’s words. She states that America is still “a shining city on a hill”, and says she quotes Ronald Reagan. However, this concept dates back much further, but this way Clinton connects it to a popular former Republican President. Clinton also speaks to potential Republican voters this way, invoking traditional exceptionalist rhetoric.

The way Clinton frames America as a moral leader, and talks about what she states are American values, fit the second category of international exceptionalism as identified by Ignatieff. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this second category is the idea that the US sets different standards to judge themselves in comparison to other countries, resulting in certain moral justifications to act the way. Clinton also states that America is “great” because they are “good”, talks about leading the world and spreading freedom and justice. She looks at American history to show how America has always been great, how it is an example for the rest of the world. Clinton argues that: “we don’t incite violence and turn people against each other. We respect the open exchange of ideas that a democracy depends on” (“Broward College”). But as said in the previous chapter, other people seriously doubt this assessment of America as moral leader, looking at America’s human rights track record and history of slavery and segregation.

### The future of exceptionalism

Clinton speaks of the past and present, but also more than once refers to the future. Although according to Clinton America is a most exceptional country, it can be even better because there are still challenges that can be solved. Even the greatest country on earth has flaws, but the best is yet to come: “if we build that future together, we will be able to say we were part of making sure that America’s best days are still ahead of us”. To give one more example: “Are we really a nation that recognizes our best years can still be ahead of us if we make up our minds to have that be our goal?” (“Eastern Market”).

Clinton also emphasizes that individuals can help achieve these goals: “Because every single one of us has something to contribute. To this great country. We are already great but we can be greater. And we will be greater” (“Grand Valley”). This way she does not have to ask people to vote for her, but for America: “[b]ut sometimes, the fate of even the greatest nations lie in the balance.

For America, this is one of those make or break elections. It really is in your hands” (“Pasco-Hernando State College”).

By equating her election to America’s future, she is able to reach out to more people, including people who maybe do not like Clinton as a person but do believe in American exceptionalism. As Gilmore stated, American presidents are conscious of ‘the power involved’ when they talk about exceptionalism. Clinton, although not a president, surely is aware of this.

There are many more examples where she gives people a sense of power to decide their future and implores how much there is at stake, personally and nationally: “Let’s make [this election] one for the history books. Please be part of what we’re doing in these next days and let’s make sure that we not only have a future we can believe in, but one we can help create together” (“Coastal Credit Union”). “When your children or grandchildren ask what you did in 2016 when everything was on the line, I want you to be able to say, ‘I voted for a better, stronger, fairer America’” (“Eastern Market”). To offer one more example: “this is a crossroads election. . . the question really is, who are we as a country? What are our values? What kind of future do we want to create together?” (“Cuyahoga Community College”).

## Conclusion

This chapter gives an answer to the questions: How does Hillary Clinton invoke the concept of American exceptionalism in her 2016 campaign speeches?

One of the questions this chapter answered is why does Hillary Clinton believe America is, and has never stopped being great? Clinton’s rhetoric fits the themes of singularity, superiority, and that of America as a God-favored country, although the religious aspect is not as much present as the other two. She states that the American Dream is the basic ‘bargain’, as Clinton calls it, of American greatness, just as America’s diversity, its network of alliances, the generosity of the American people, the military, and America’s position as the international champion for democracy, freedom and equality are reasons that America is qualitatively different and superior to all other countries. This all means that the United States has the status of moral leader of the world, and is an example for others to follow. However, that does not mean that this status is forever. Clinton implores people to vote for her because the alternative would mean the end of it. All in all, Clinton uses clear exceptionalist rhetoric whenever she speaks about America.

It was said that national identity is part, and indeed a source of individual identity. So words that celebrate America also celebrate the Americans themselves. Clinton often invokes American exceptionalism; from her speeches it becomes evident that America was, is, and will remain an exceptional country. She alludes to all of the categories that were specified in Chapter 1 and 2: to ethnic relations, the American Dream, America’s founding values, and America’s

international role. Clinton finds several arguments to support her statement that America has never stopped being great.

In a time where American exceptionalism is criticized and questioned, Clinton, the Democratic candidate, can be placed in the group of politicians who actively propagate American exceptionalism as is tradition. Clinton does not fit the group of neo-conservative, traditional exceptionalists, for example emphasizing diversity as an asset. However, as mentioned before, she does adhere to the unspoken rule of invoking this concept in front of the American people as much as possible, because it sheds a positive light on the American people and American society. In that sense, Clinton is rather traditional in her invocations of American exceptionalism.

## Chapter 4 - Donald Trump

The question this chapter answers is: how, in comparison to Hillary Clinton, does Donald Trump invoke the concept of American exceptionalism in his 2016 campaign speeches? Trump's campaign slogan serves as a starting point for the analysis, which is: 'Make America Great Again'. This statement implies that he believes America has been, at some point, 'great', but is not at the moment. Trump's policy plans for the future will, according to him, make America great again. They thus show what he thinks is 'great' in a country. However, Trump does not fit the Republican exceptionalist framework of Mitt Romney and Newt Gingrich that was set out before. Around 60 campaign speeches were taken into account, and in those speeches, Trump mentions American exceptionalism twice. First to say that Americans have an exceptional way of life: "We have an exceptional country, an exceptional way of life" ("Youngstown State University"). The second time he also states that equality and the rule of law makes America exceptional: "what makes us exceptional is that we are a nation of laws, and that we are all equal under those laws" ("Jeffco Fairgrounds").

Exceptionalism is often used to describe America's founding history, important values that are said to be first and foremost 'American', and it is an important part of American national identity. Trump, however, only connects it in relation to the way of life, American culture, and its laws. Trump thus diverts from the traditional, exceptionalist idea that America is an extraordinary and superior country with an exceptional history and a God-ordained, moral duty to spread its values around the world. Trump's version on America's position is much simpler: America needs to win and in order to do that, its leaders should act from an 'America First' perspective. America needs to be "great" to win, and win to be "great". Ultimately, America should be respected for its actions and not because its founding history is special. This idea of America First on the one hand, and the ideal of uniting the American people on the other hand are his ways of making America great again. They also make up the basis of Trump's campaign message. This message also includes an attack on America's governing system, which can be found throughout his speeches: "Our campaign is powered by our love for this country and our love for our fellow citizens. It's a campaign about rejecting the cynicism and elitism of our failed political establishment" ("Delaware County").

### Narrative of 'ungreatness'

What stands out immediately in Trump's speeches is that they are marked by a lack of coherency. His earlier speeches contain many unfinished sentences and unstructured statements. He made up the numbers and he used some confusing phrases and words,<sup>2</sup> but actual, concrete plans are non-existent. Trump often repeats the same thing over and over again. The speeches are

furthermore littered with hyperboles and superlative adjectives and adverbs, but in most cases to state something negative about America. He uses phrases like “the worst deals any country has ever made” or states that something is ‘one of the most important issues decided by this election’, or he proposes “the largest tax reduction of any candidate” (“Phoenix Convention Center”; “Presidential Nomination”). There are many instances in which Trump paints a rather ugly picture of America, and only a few instances in which he states that America is exceptional in some way. He states for example that the political system is “rigged”, the American military is “depleted” and because of high unemployment rates “these are hard times for many in this country” (“Summit Sports”). Trump one time summed up the problems: “Our system is broken . . . We have unemployment, tremendous losses, and we have none of the benefits . . . We do so badly” (“Proposals for”). Several times he even goes so far as saying that “we are witnessing a horror show in this country and throughout the world” (“KI Convention Center”). This makes it clear that Trump does not think America is a ‘great’ country at the moment.

Trump states that this ‘horror show’ is caused by the previous administrations, which have failed completely. Trump says: “Let’s look back at . . . the very beginning of 2009 before the Obama/Clinton administration, that I call a catastrophe, took over” (“Mississippi Coliseum”). Everything that this administration before him did was a disaster, a catastrophe, or wrong: “this plan is a total rip. It does not work, so it’s going to fall [sic], because economically, it is a disaster for the country, too”; “our current strategy of nation- building and regime-change is a proven, absolute failure” (“KI Convention Center”; “Youngstown State”). On top of that, America cannot make ‘deals’ anymore: “As you know, NAFTA, one of the worst trade bills in history maybe, maybe the worst trade bill signed in the history of the world. Not only in our country” (“Summit Sports”). “The destruction that NAFTA started will be finished off if the Trans-Pacific Partnership is approved” (“XFinity Arena”).

According to Trump, Democrats have basically ruined the country on a national and international level: “the inner cities of our country have been run by the Democratic party for more than 50 years. Their policies have produced only poverty, joblessness, failing schools, and broken homes” (“Summit Sports”). “Their policies have failed, and they’ve failed miserably” (“McGlohon Theatre”). The previous leaders were unfit to lead the country, because they were too ‘dumb’: “There’s no common sense, there’s no brain power in our administration by our leader, or our leaders. None, none, none” (“Phoenix Convention Center”). “We don’t even read it, our country.<sup>3</sup> Because we’re led by stupid people” (“News Conference”).

### How to make America great again

Trump mentions numerous plans to solve America’s problems for all kinds of policy areas. Most of the times Trump gives a long list of what he wants to do, for example:

“We are going to renegotiate our terrible trade deals, end illegal immigration, stop the massive inflow of refugees, reduce surging crime, cut taxes and regulations, unleash job-producing American energy, rebuild our military and take care of our Vets, and repeal and replace the disaster known as Obamacare” (“WNC Agricultural Center”).

Exactly how he wants to do this is not clear, but these proposals are based on his intention to ‘put America First’. This forms the foundation for Trump’s plans for social welfare, the economy, immigration, foreign policy, and national security. Trump believes that this attitude will make other countries respect America (again): “as long as we are led by politicians who will not put America First, then we can be assured that other nations will not treat America with respect, the respect we deserve” (“Presidential Nomination”). So, “Americanism, not globalism” will be Trump’s “credo” (“Presidential Nomination”). Trump does not mean that he will work against other countries, but that the American people will be his top priority: “We are going to be considerate and compassionate to everyone. But my greatest compassion will be for our own struggling citizens” (“Presidential Nomination”). Trump criticizes the former administration and leaders, because they were focused too much on globalism and what Trump calls ‘nation-building’.<sup>4</sup> By doing so, according to Trump the former administration ‘forgot’ their own, American, citizens. Trump often criticizes the previous leaders on this: “someone needs to inform Hillary Clinton [Secretary of State at that time] it’s not the job of our leaders to represent a “global community”, because “it’s the job of our leaders to represent American citizens” (“Suburban Collection”). Trump is against meddling and nation-building in other countries because he thinks that it is not in accordance with what an American president should do. He is a representative of America: “I am not running to be President of the world. I am running to be President of the United States. I am for America First” (“Suburban Collection”).

Trump is not a complete isolationist, however, but America’s best interests are a priority, as Trump states. Although he wants to stop the nation- and peacebuilding missions in the Middle East, he does want to set out to destroy ISIS together with American allies. In order to do that, the “depleted” military has to be improved. Trump often mentions America’s position in NATO and trade deals that are in his opinion “bad deals”, but that does not mean that he does not want any deals at all, nor that he wants to withdraw from NATO. He wants to improve those deals so they benefit America; in other words: he wants to start “winning” again. These wins will make other countries respect him and America. Trump emphasizes: “my sole and exclusive mission is to go to work for our country to go to work for all of you. It’s time to deliver a victory for the American people. We don’t win anymore, but we are going to start winning again” (“Presidential Nomination”).

Trump argues that in the twentieth century this idea of ‘America First’ has brought America to a “position of global dominance” (“Detroit Economic”). Cities were “booming”, Trump

states, but this was all ruined by his Democrat predecessors, when the policy of America First was abandoned and the nation squandered. The nation-building policies are an example of this: “we started rebuilding other countries instead of our own. The skyscrapers went up in Beijing, and in many other cities around the world, while the factories and neighborhoods crumbled in Detroit” (“Detroit Economic”). Trump states that these nation-building policies and peace missions all over the world took its toll on the working class in America. But now, Trump wants to start a new ‘movement’, one where America will be put first by its leaders. This will bring back America’s greatness. Trump talks about an America First future: “It’s time for America to recapture, like you just heard, to recapture our destiny” (“Mississippi Coliseum”). The word use of the word ‘destiny’ shows that Trump has a specific version of American exceptionalism in mind, that it America’s natural position is that it is the best in the world. Destiny in this context does not refer to Manifest Destiny or a higher goal. It means that America will not be dictated to and that America will have a strong reputation once again according to Trump: “we are ready to dream great things for our country once again. We are ready to show the world that America is Back—Bigger, and Better and Stronger Than Ever Before” (“Detroit Economic”). Eventually, the people are the ones who will have to work towards this. Here, Trump emphasizes that it is all in the voters’ hands, and by doing so, he gives them the feeling that they have the power to change the future: “The only force strong enough to save this country is you. The only people brave enough to vote out this corrupt establishment is you, the American People” (“South Florida Fair”).

Ultimately, his goal is to keep industry in America, so all products and goods are manufactured in the US by Americans. This is his narrative of American greatness: America’s position is priority. Trump often mentions that ultimately, when he is elected president: “American cars will travel the roads, American planes will soar in the skies, and American ships will patrol the seas” (“High Point University”). The people with industrial jobs are ‘forgotten’ according to Trump. By putting American citizens, mostly working class Americans, first, the nation will be brought together again: “American hands will rebuild this nation – . . . I will fight for every neglected part of this nation – and I will fight to bring us all together as Americans” (“High Point University”).

### Dreaming about the future

Although Trump is quite pessimistic about the situation in the country, he speaks about hope for a better future. There are several cases in which Trump talks about the American Dream. It is ultimately the only aspect in which Trump’s ideas more or less fit within the framework that was set out previously. The American Dream for Trump also means upward social mobility, a ladder of success that is part of American national identity. Trump’s version of the American Dream, however, is connected to American industrial success and, once again, to an America First policy.

According to Trump, those dreams have ‘shattered’ when industries collapsed: “When we were governed by an America First policy . . . builders, laborers, shippers and countless others . . . lived out the American Dream. But for many living in this city, that dream has long ago vanished” (“Detroit Economic”). Another time Trump states that: “The wealth has been raided from our country, leaving behind dilapidated communities, rusted out factories, and shattered dreams” (“Cross Insurance”). This is an attempt to connect to the working class Americans by acknowledging their problems and promising a better future specifically to them. However, by employing an America First strategy, factories will be opened up again, which should bring back jobs and thus also the American Dream for the neglected working class. Underneath the poverty, Trump states, there is still hope for a better future among Americans, but these hopes are limited by the current leaders: “America is a nation of believers, dreamers, and strivers that is being led by a group of censors, critics, and cynics” (“Presidential Nomination”). This is a statement that fits the exceptionalist myth, though. It shows that to Trump, the American Dream is part of American national identity. However, when immigrants are called ‘dreamers’, he immediately brings up that Americans are more important: The dreamers we never talk about are the young Americans. Why aren't young Americans dreamers also? I want my dreamers to be young Americans.

Trump will further unite the Americans by promoting a spirit of Americanism and cultural assimilation in American society, resulting in “an inclusive society, one that offers hope and opportunity to every part of this country . . . We will ensure that every child in this land . . . is put on the American ladder of success: a good education, and a great job” (“American Legion”). This idea that there is hope for a better future is part of what makes American culture great, according to Trump. It is in fact, he states, a vital aspect of American culture and American ‘character’. He wants the American people to revive that optimism, despite the political situation in America:

“I’m asking the American people to rise above the noise and the clutter of our broken politics and to embrace that great faith and optimism that has always been the central ingredient in the American character and there's nothing better or stronger than the American character” (“First 100”).

### Diversity and immigration

Trump’s pet topics, both during the elections and after, are immigration and his infamous proposal to build a wall on the border with Mexico. This is in fact a showcase of his stance on diversity, but also his standpoint on America’s national identity. The older immigration policies were a “disaster” and have caused a severe crisis, according to Trump. Illegal immigration has furthermore led to “a jobs crisis, a border crisis and a terrorism crisis like never before” (“Immigration”). Therefore, Trump states, “all energies of the federal government and the legislative process must now be focused on immigration security” (“Immigration”).

Trump's main objective is to end immigration from Islamic countries because "we have no idea who they are, what their thought process is, where they come from" ("First 100"). On top of that "radical, Islamic terror is right around the corner" ("First 100"). To Trump, terrorism, immigration, and the Islam are closely connected: "We have thousands and thousands of people from certain terrorist states, from certain parts of the world that we are allowing to come into our country" ("KI Convention"). In one speech, Trump lists examples of instances when immigrants from Islamic countries turned out to be terrorists as an argument to stop immigration: "A college student who immigrated from Somalia who later applied and received U.S. citizenship, attempted to blow up a Christmas tree lighting ceremony" ("KI Convention"). So, Trump states that it is essential "to keep Radical Islamic Terrorists out of our country" ("Delaware County").

A second reason to end illegal immigration according to Trump is that illegal immigrants cost American jobs and money. He for example claims that it costs the state over \$113 billion a year,<sup>5</sup> and that these illegal workers "draw much more out from the system than they can ever possibly pay back" ("Immigration"). Trump furthermore mentions that "most illegal immigrants are lower skilled workers with less education" and they take jobs away from, as Trump calls it, "vulnerable Americans" ("Immigration"). This group consists of Americans with industrial jobs, mostly. Trump wants to protect them by ending illegal immigration. He furthermore emphasizes the danger that illegal immigrants pose to Americans, making it look like they are all violent murderers: "illegal immigrants and other non-citizens, in our prisons and jails together, had around 25,000 homicide arrests to their names" ("Immigration"). Trump's America First idea also applies to his immigration policies. Trump for example proposes a new immigrations system in accordance with this ideal, this is "a system that serves our needs, not the needs of others" ("Immigration"). Trump adds that Americans should "remember, under a Trump administration it's called America First. Remember that" ("Immigration"). Trump tries to soften his statements by stating that this does not mean that immigrants will be treated poorly, but his system should be beneficial mostly for Americans: "We will treat everyone living or residing in our country with great dignity. So important. We will be fair, just, and compassionate to all, but our greatest compassion must be for our American citizens" ("Immigration").

Trump advocates that these new immigration laws are necessary in order to protect America and its very way of life, because immigrants are taking over American jobs and are not conforming to American culture: "immigration law doesn't exist for the purpose of keeping criminals out. It exists to protect all aspects of American life. The work site, the welfare office, the education system, and everything else" ("Immigration"). These new immigration laws will bring stability, and Trump believes that America's way of life will also be protected. However, Trump does not mention from what it should be protected.

Trump also argues that the current immigration system has failed, and immigrants could not be deported: “nearly 13,000 criminal aliens were released back into U.S. communities because their home countries would not, under any circumstances, take them back” (“Immigration”). This has led to a peculiar statement from Trump, who said that this makes America look “like the big bully that keeps getting beat up [sic]” (“Immigration”). He calls America a ‘bully’, but then makes it seem like being a bully means that you get hurt. It is an example of a case in which America ‘lost’ and were ‘disrespected’ as those countries did not recognize America’s authority.

Trump wants to build a wall on the Southern border that should stop illegal immigration and should make the country safer. On top of that, cultural assimilation and Americanism will be the basis of a new immigration system. Trump believes that this ideology has to be reignited. He does not want to exclude people, as he explains it, but rather unite them around this idea of one American identity. Trump argues that in the past “tremendously positive things have happened” because of assimilation (“Immigration”). In a speech on immigration he explains how assimilation works in relation to immigration: “to ensure assimilation we want to ensure that it works. Assimilation, an important word. Integration and upward mobility” (“Immigration”). It clarifies that assimilation to him means ‘integration and upward mobility’, but Trump does not further elaborate on those ‘incredibly positive things’. Assimilation is also in the best interests of the American people, Trump notes, it is

“not an act of hostility, but an expression of compassion . . . This approach will not only make us safer, but bring us closer together as a country. Renewing the spirit of Americanism will help heal the divisions in our country, of which there are so many” (“Immigration”).

The reason it is in America’s best interests, in other words, is that cultural assimilation will unite people. The divides he sees among Americans are dangerous according to him. Assimilation and Americanism will solve that threat and heal the divides among the American people. Trump sees an example in the military: “we will follow the noble example of our military men and women, working selflessly across all different races and incomes and backgrounds, to achieve unity and accomplish amazing things” (“American Legion”). With unison, it is possible to achieve ‘amazing things’. He does not elaborate on what this entails exactly, but there is also a downside to assimilation, as not everybody will succeed: “We also have to be honest about the fact that not everyone who seeks to join our country will be able to successfully assimilate. Sometimes it’s just not going to work out”, Trump therefore wants to impose a ‘vetting system’ so the people who will not be able to ‘assimilate’, or who are not expected to do well, can be rejected. “It’s our right, as a sovereign nation to choose immigrants that we think are the likeliest to thrive and flourish and love us”. Because assimilation is based on immigrants’ ‘love’ for America and to their potential, Trump proposes to instate an “ideological certification” system; or “extreme vetting”

("Immigration"). This is supposed to test if immigrants "share our values" and "love" the American people, because even though there are many problems and crises facing America, Trump believes that "even with all it's going through, we're very proud of our country" and therefore it needs to be protected ("Immigration").

The consequences of a vetting system for immigrant families and human rights implications are not a concern for Trump. He also does not mention what exactly and how this will be tested, and he does not clarify how 'love for the American people' can be measured. This policy however does fit in with Trump's narrative of greatness, in which he wants to focus on Americans first. One of only two times that Trump mentions exceptionalism, is in relation to the 'American way of life' and American culture. His narrative of greatness is mostly about winning and demanding respect for America. American culture and values have to be protected because they are the best in the world. "The era of division will be replaced with a future of unity. We are going to do it by emphasizing what we all have in common. We will proudly promote our culture as Americans, the best in the world". American culture should be promoted and protected in the US itself, rather than around the world according to Trump. This is more fitting to the idea that America should abstain from mingling in other countries, rather than the idea that the US has a special mission and a God-ordained moral duty to spread its values around the world. That goes much deeper than what Trump means with promoting American culture. Trump's version is although a bit weakly, more in line with the idea that America is the single global exception to the rule.

### Claiming values

Underneath Trump's calls to make America great again and his idea that America is witnessing a 'horror show', he does mention there are certain aspects of America that still makes Americans proud of their country and makes it worthwhile to rebuild the ruins. These are values that have been associated with America and its national identity, and, according to Trump, still demand respect from (people from) other countries.

During a speech in front of the American Legion, a veteran association, Trump talks about the American flag as a symbol for American values and as a source of pride and patriotism in America. The following quote was retrieved from a 'remarks as prepared'-excerpt, with the capital 'N' and 'F' nation and flag. This emphasizes the importance of the idea of the American nation, and the flag as a symbol that represents it and is therefore more than just a flag:

"[it is] one American Flag. The flag all of you helped to protect and preserve. That flag deserves respect, and I will work with the American Legion to help to strengthen respect for our flag" ("American Legion").

Trump wants to use this image of the flag to teach Americans to respect American values. He emphasizes that he wants children to recite the Pledge of Allegiance every day at school and this way promote “American pride and patriotism in America’s schools” (“American Legion”). To Trump, the flag and the values that it represents are a reason to demand respect and to be proud of America. However, ‘the flag’ is still in danger, according to Trump, so he proposes to defend the American flag, and by doing so the values it represents, by teaching children about common principles, “the incredible achievements of America's history, its institutions, and its heroes” (“American Legion”). Trump believes that Americans have been apologizing for America, why exactly he does not say, but he emphasizes that this will end once Americans start celebrating the country again: “We will stop apologizing for America, and we will start celebrating America” (“American Legion”).

Trump furthermore believes that the image of the American flag will bring the people together and heal the divides among the American people. Trump often promotes the idea of equality in the sense that every American is the same; he often talks about a common culture and principles:

“I will fight to ensure that every American is treated equally, protected equally, and honored equally. . . and seek a new future of security, prosperity and opportunity – a future built on our common culture and values as one American people” (“Washington County”). He reminds the audience of the ‘common values and principles’ that Americans held. Trump uses it as a metaphor, so all Americans should be able to attach their own meaning to this one image of the American flag. Trump states: “we will be united by our common culture, values and principles becoming One American Nation. One country, under one constitution, saluting one American Flag” (“American Legion”).

In a later speech, Trump changed this statement to “I will fight to bring us all together as One American People. Imagine what our country could accomplish if we started working together as One People, under One God, saluting One American Flag” (“Rally at Berglund”). This statement was criticized because he said “under One God”, and as such excludes atheists and people with other religions. These words come from the Pledge of Allegiance and are used to show his patriotism, but at the same time are in sharp contrast with his goal of uniting people. However, it shows that Trump has the idea that there is a common American identity, rooted in Christianity, and that Americans all have, or should have, the same values, principles, and ideas about their country.

Trump often mentions that only immigrants who respect America’s values are allowed to live in the country, and that Americans will be united around their common values. However, he almost never clarifies what these common values entail. There are certain cases that can provide a perspective, though. All in all, Trump never specifically mentions any values, but there is an

implicit emphasis on Christian ideas. For example during one speech in Detroit, Michigan, in which he speaks in front of the congregation at Great Faith International Ministries, Trump credits African-Americans, their churches, and the Civil Rights movements as a Christian source for America's moral character:

“It's from the pews and pulpits and Christian teachings of black churches all across this land that the Civil Rights movement lifted up its soul and lifted up the soul of our nation. It's from these pews that our nation has been inspired toward a better moral character, a deeper concern for mankind, and spirit of charity and unity that binds us all together” (“Great Faith”).

Trump describes that the African American church also brought a spirit of charity and unity in the country. Trump underscores the importance of this, he even calls the African American faith community “one of God's greatest gifts to America and to its people” (“Great Faith”). He frequently emphasizes his value for the African American church in this speech: “no action . . . would do more to heal our country and support our people than to provide a greater platform to the black churches and church-goers” (“Great Faith”). Here, Trump, as a white Christian, stresses the importance of the shared Christian ideas they hold in an attempt to gain support from the African-American electorate.

Sometimes he also mentions that certain people embody certain American values, from which it can be deduced what these values entail. For example, the members of the military, who “embody the goodness and decency of our country” (“National Guard”). He also includes the members of the American Legion, veterans, who “represent the best of America. Strength, courage, selfless devotion. Your organization, and its members, have done so much to defend our country, our flag, and to advance the cause of Americanism – not Globalism” (“American Legion”). A number of Trump supporters have been criticized for their warnings about “Radical Islamic Terrorism”, who were called Islamophobes and xenophobes in the media. Trump supports them however, and argues that they are “decent American citizens who want to uphold our tolerant values and keep our country safe”, and the people who are voicing concerns about immigration are “patriotic” (“Rally at the James”). This is an example in which he juxtaposes American values with (radical) Islam. This shows that Trump believes that American and Islamic values are mutually exclusive: everything that belongs in the latter category cannot be American. In the following excerpt this becomes clear. Trump talks about the fight against terrorism, which he believes is based on contradicting ideologies.

“It's also an ideological fight. We will confront directly the hateful, it's just so hateful, ideology of radical Islam and promote American values and American culture and America's system of government. Only by standing up for and supporting, we have to stand

up for and support, our values can we become a united country once again” (“Mississippi Coliseum”).

Trump believes that by standing up for American values in the fight of Islamic terrorism, there will be more unison. Ultimately, Trump states that America will become a “country of security and freedom, a country of strength and unity. The future is limitless. All we have to do is believe in America once again” (“Mississippi Coliseum”). America will become great again if Christian teachings prevail and if people all believe in one kind of America in which there is not much room for people who have different ideas on American culture and society.

Trump, however, consciously or unconsciously, is himself a danger to American, democratic values. His immigration policies are viewed as racist, as people from certain countries are excluded. Trump states that tolerance is an important, American value. However, his fight against what he calls ‘radical Islam’ is everything but tolerant, and some people go so far as calling it a violation of the First Amendment in which freedom and free exercise of religion is protected (U.S. Constitution. Amend. I). On top of that, Trump also attacks several elements of the American democratic system, for example by stating that the election system is rigged against him and that he would not accept the outcome in case he loses. He also attacks his opponent, Clinton, and goes so far as stating that maybe the “Second Amendment people” could do something about her, after stating that she essentially wants to abolish it (“Rally at the University”).<sup>6</sup>

### Foreign policy

Trump’s ideas of Americanism are especially apparent in his comments on foreign policy. He speaks fiercely against missions in the Middle East, which have failed incredibly according to Trump: “We must abandon the failed policy of nation building and regime change that Hillary Clinton pushed in Iraq, Libya, Egypt and Syria” (“Presidential Nomination”). However, American values and culture should be defended and respected, and to do so, Trump wants the ‘depleted’ military to be rebuilt. The reputation of a strong American military will in itself be enough to defend the flag as the symbol that represents everything that is American, as this will deter enemies: “In addition to teaching respect for the flag, we also have to make sure we give our military the tools they need to defend that flag and to deter violence and aggression from our foreign adversaries” (“American Legion”). Trump’s idea on the military is also a clear example of Trump’s Americanism. On the one hand, Trump wants to stop military missions in the Middle East that focus on creating democracies, but on the other hand he does want to rebuild a ‘depleted’ military and focus on ‘destroying ISIS’. He actually states one time that he ‘loves’ the military. “Can you imagine General George Patton, who is right now spinning in his grave, the great General Douglas MacArthur -- can you imagine -- and I say, because we have so many military people, and this is such a military state and I love it” (“Rally at the University”). So only when it directly benefits

America or America's reputation does Trump want to deploy the military. Trump has criticized Obama and Clinton for nation-building missions in the Middle East, because Trump felt that America was 'losing' those wars. In relation to Trump's narrative of greatness it is fitting. Rather than spreading democracy and freedom around the world and actually taking action, a strong reputation should be enough to win respect.

Furthermore, instead of spreading democratic values in other countries, all energy must first go to the American people, and all resources should go to American interests. These interests are stopping terrorism and destroying ISIS: "I believe in a foreign policy based on our national interests that focuses on American security and regional stability – instead of using our military to create democracies in countries with no democratic history" ("Rally at the Greenville"). Trump wants to achieve this by working together with allies towards a common goal. Trump does not mention that the allies must follow an American example, or that America will lead this endeavor. He states that: "we must work with all of our allies who share our goal of destroying ISIS and stamping out Islamic terrorism and doing it now, doing it quickly. We're going to win. We're going to win fast" ("Presidential Nomination"). Once again, Trump does not mention concrete plans to achieve this. He wants America to 'win', because that will demand respect from other countries. He feels that foreign leaders believe that America is weak:

"I'm only interested in winning. Once I win, I'll get along great with foreign leaders, but they won't be taking advantage. I mean, the problem we have with foreign leaders, whether it's China, Russia, or anybody, they don't respect our leadership. . . it shows how weak we are, it shows how disrespected we are. Total—assuming it's Russia or China or one of the major countries and competitors, it's a total sign of disrespect for our country" ("News Conference").

At the same time, this excerpt shows that Trump expects America to have a certain kind of status, it conveys Trump's assumption that America should hold a position of leadership in relation to other countries.

Another area of foreign policy is trade, on which Trump takes the same Americanist and protectionist stance. Trump states: "I pledge to never sign any trade agreement that hurts our workers . . . I will never, ever sign bad trade deals. America First, again! America First!" ("Presidential Nomination"). He believes that trade agreements such as NAFTA and TPP hurt the American working class. Trump states that this caused a trade deficit, or, to use his words, that America is "ripped off" ("KI Convention"). So, American benefits should be put first, and the deals should be renegotiated: "If we don't get the deal we want, we'll leave NAFTA and start over to get a much better deal" ("Toyota of Portsmouth"). Trump wants to solve trade problems by making new deals with "individual countries": "I'm going to renegotiate our trade deals where we're losing with everybody. I'm going to renegotiate our military deals where we're protecting

countries and they're not living up to the bargain" ("News Conference"). With this Trump means NATO, which was a controversial issue during the elections. According to Trump, the NATO countries disrespected the USA by not living up to the 2% rule so "as usual, the United States has been picking up the cost". It was in fact a show of 'disrespect' to America. As mentioned before, exceptionalism in foreign policy can entail a fear of infringement of America's authority, resulting in a reluctance to comply with international laws and treaties. Trump's aversion to the deals is based on his America First agenda and his goal to 'win', rather than a belief that America already is superior to other countries. Trump simply wants to be, and believes America should be, better than others and show that by 'winning'.

## Conclusion

The chapter gives an answer to the question: how does Donald Trump invoke the concept of American exceptionalism in his 2016 campaign speeches?

Trump almost never explicitly invokes the concept of American exceptionalism in his speeches. In fact, many of his statements are actually dangerous for American democracy, by attacking the elective process and the freedom of the press. He actually completely goes against this idea that politicians should use the narrative of greatness in their rhetoric. Rather than praising American society and thus also raising the confidence of the American people, Trump turns the idea that America is at present the

In Trump's view, America is no longer a world leader at this moment, but has become the 'laughingstock' of the world, a country that has deteriorated over time and lost the world's respect. But, America *could* and *should* be. Ultimately, America will be great again; it will be the greatest of all time and the single global exception, because the American people will be united based on the idea of Americanism and cultural assimilation to a single form of Americanism because of him. The American culture will be protected in the US, because in this future society there is no room for diversity, only for conformism to this one idea of what America should be. This is based on Trump's framing of America in the past and by claiming certain (Christian) values. Furthermore, America is or can only be great when Trump starts winning for the American people, meaning that he will renegotiate treaties and agreements that he claims are not beneficial for the American people. America's greatness stems from the economy, businesses, and the industry mostly, so these should get space to thrive once again. America has at one point been great in the twentieth century, when, as Trump stated, the economy was thriving and politicians put 'America First'. However, his Democratic predecessors ruined this status, so now only Trump can make America great or exceptional again. Trump thus makes the future of America and its exceptionalism dependent on how much he can win for the American people if he is elected President.

As the candidate of the Republican party, Trump does not fit the neo-conservative group of American exceptionalists, who, like said before, are rather profound in the way they talk about exceptionalism. Trump's version of American exceptionalism is much less in-your-face. Trump does believe that America should hold a certain status; his branch of exceptionalism is mostly vested in the future and is dependent on how much awe or fear, both are possible, other countries have for America and how much he can 'win'. To him, it goes without saying that America was and should be a great, even an exceptional country, but the way he clarifies this, is not in line with the traditional exceptionalist framework at all.

## Discussion

This thesis set out to offer a comparison between the 2016 campaign speeches made by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump to see how they fit the exceptionalist framework as explained in Chapter 2. The previous chapters offered an analysis of the campaign speeches that were given between the Republican National Convention and the Democratic National Convention, and November 7, 2016, the day before Election Day. This section will work with the conclusions made in the previous chapters and offer a comparative analysis. Chapter 2 explained that American exceptionalism makes up a family of concepts and provided several angles with which the campaign speeches were analyzed. These include the American Dream, diversity and ethnic relations and foreign policy. Besides these categories, the analyses also took in account the way the candidates framed the future of America.

Based on the results in the previous chapters, there are several things that stand out when the speeches are set side by side. The first of several differences is that Clinton's speeches were more coherent and better organized than Trump's. Clinton is clearly used to giving this kind of speeches; her speeches have a structure and there is a clear message. Trump's rhetoric was much less understandable, however. He often deviates from the topic he is speaking about and frequently loses his train of thought. While there are of many more such differences, this thesis mainly explored how the contents of their speeches compare.

The American Dream is a theme that often occurred in the speeches by both candidates, although more frequently by Clinton. Clinton used this theme to encourage young Americans, saying that everything is possible if you work hard and believe in yourself. She emphasized their potential, and used her own back story often as living proof of how the American Dream works and what America could offer in life. Trump's version of this Dream was much less positive. He used it to show how America has deteriorated over the past decades, to emphasize that a country that was once a nation of dreamers, has now failed on all fronts, mostly by forgetting the Americans themselves and prioritizing foreign policy over domestic affairs. Obviously, Clinton is much more optimistic than Trump. She offers hope to the people, and states that success is dependent on them, as individuals. Clinton merely holds up a mirror and, in case she is elected, she is going to enable them on their way to success. Trump frames his rhetoric in a way that individual's success, people achieving their dreams, is dependent on him personally. He will stop illegal immigration, so people can keep their jobs; they will be protected by a wall that he will build; he will prioritize America's domestic policies; he will stop meddling in other countries' affairs and spend more money on American national security, etcetera. Their messages come down to 'I will help you, you can do it', versus Trump's 'because of me you can do it'.

One of the biggest differences between Clinton's and Trump's speeches is their view on diversity and ethnic relations. Clinton frequently emphasizes that diversity is an important American asset. Throughout the speeches, she was more or less switching back and forth between a 'unifying vision' on America and one where she actually promotes a more pluralist ideal. Trump maintained that cultural assimilation will unite the American people and he wants to eradicate this diversity and immigration, so there will be one single American identity. Both of these standpoints can be deemed exceptionalist, in fact. Clinton states that this history of diversity, of America as an immigrant country is one of the most exceptional aspects about American culture, whereas Trump has an ideal American national identity in mind, which he believes is exceptional. It is only tainted or threatened by people who do not conform to it. He therefore wants to end illegal immigration, from Muslim countries and from Latin American countries. According to Trump these divert too much of that ideal identity, which is mostly based on Christian values and ideas. Trump does gloss over America's history as a country that is built up by people from all over the world, with different religions. In doing so, Trump excludes many ethnic minorities who have been in America for generations and do not fit the white, Christian norms.

Exceptionalism becomes a slightly paradoxical concept when it comes to foreign policy, as mentioned before. Interventionist, but also isolationist policies can be justified with American exceptionalism. Again, Clinton and Trump take completely opposite views. It was demonstrated that Clinton wants to spread democracy, freedom and independence around the world. According to her, America takes, and should take, the lead to end terrorism. America is the country that is pre-eminently suitable for this role and is in the perfect position to provide moral guidance to the rest of the world. Trump, on the contrary, once again looks at this from an 'America First' perspective. He is not completely against intervening in other countries' domestic affairs, but only when it is about ending terrorism. He does not necessarily want to spread democracy the way Clinton does. He is more hesitant towards nation-building than Clinton, because Trump does not see direct benefits for America and its citizens in intervening. And that is what is most important for Trump: to gain status or to win in every way.

When it comes to ethnic relations, Clinton and Trump take completely opposite sides, but both candidates use their perspectives to claim that America is an exceptional country. Trump is a cultural assimilationist. To use the metaphor of the melting pot: he has a specific idea of what should come out of it, and picks one ideal version of national identity to which all Americans should conform and then regain that exceptional status. There is no room for deviations from that ideal on the road to exceptionalism. Trump takes this view, because he wants to heal the divides he sees in American society. However, by forcing his specific version on American society, he excludes people who can never conform to this view and in doing so, consciously or unconsciously makes those divides even bigger. Clinton mostly celebrates America's diversity. She explains

diversity itself is one of America's most important assets. Clinton also talks about *the* American people, but in contrast to Trump, she does not have one ideal. There are more ways to be American, in her version.

Lastly, when it comes to their framing of America's position on the world stage, Clinton and Trump once again have contrasting views. Clinton's vision of America is that it holds a certain position of prominence. She repeatedly argues that America is the world's leader on all fronts. The founding history is the root of its exceptionalism and during the times that followed America only gained in superiority. All in all, this completely fits the exceptionalist discourse that America is qualitatively better, the single global exception, God-ordained, and an example for the world to follow. Trump, however, continually frames America's image as that of a country in ruins. The once greatest country in the world, is now the whipping boy; laughed at by the rest. However, Trump does allude to certain aspects of exceptionalism, for example the American dream and its history. From his speeches it is clear that he holds certain underlying normative assumptions; although America is not great at all right now, it should be. America should hold a certain status and should be admired by the rest of the world. Therefore, Trump wants to re-establish American exceptionalism; by promoting his goal to make America 'great' again. He tells the electorate he wants to adopt a strategy that should put America 'first' if he is elected as President. He furthermore frames a certain ideal for people to conform to, based on this one Christian ideal.

The way Trump and Clinton invoke American exceptionalism is not in line with expectations, however. The group of people that are generally perpetuate the narrative of greatness the most enthusiastically mostly consists of (neo-)conservatives, so expected is that whatever arguments he makes, Trump's rhetoric would at least affirm American exceptionalism. However, as the previous two chapters demonstrate, the reverse is generally true. Clinton's rhetoric is actually more explicitly in line with the narrative of greatness, whereas it is considerably more complicated to find this narrative in Trump's speeches. Exceptionalism is more implicit in his speeches than in Clinton's. Trump first states that America is in ruins, which seems like a complete reversal of American exceptionalism. However, underneath this, the belief that America's exceptional status is actually the way it should be, and is going to be because of him, is visible. It was explained that an important part of American political discourse is to emphasize America's greatness as much as possible and that historically, it is now almost expected of politicians to adhere to this rule. Trump does the complete opposite, namely perpetuating that America is the worst country in the world at the moment. So on the one hand, Clinton's rhetoric on exceptionalism does not fit the traditional framework, as seen in the way talks about diversity, for instance. On the other hand, the fact that she does explicitly affirm her version of American exceptionalism fits a tradition in American political discourse. In that sense, Trump is the exception to the rule by not doing so.

## Conclusion

This thesis set out to answer the question: How do Trump and Clinton compare in the way they use rhetoric concerning American exceptionalism in their 2016 election campaign speeches? To answer this question, Chapter 1 first explained that exceptionalism denotes a family of concepts that together result in a narrative of America's greatness. American exceptionalism is, in short, the idea that America is qualitatively different and superior to the rest of the world. With it comes a repertoire of roles that America can take on. It puts the label of God's chosen land on America, and the single global exception to the rule. It enables America to take on the status of moral leader in the world; an example for the world to follow. Exceptionalism can furthermore result in isolationism, but also in interventionism. It can close up America to the world, but can also enforce spreading American values, freedom and democracy especially. It offers America an exemption for certain international conventions, but at the same time it asks for exemplary behavior to enforce America's superior status. Exceptionalism is thus a seemingly contradictory concept that offers politicians a range of possibilities, and it is generally expected and accepted that politicians allude to this status in their political discourse.

This chapter also explored the academic debate surrounding the concept. Several academics hold the idea that there is no such thing as American exceptionalism, others would argue that exceptionalism is applicable to every country in the world, as all countries are different. There is also a group of traditional, neo-conservative academics who actively promote American exceptionalism. However, although it is important to look at this debate, this thesis does not argue one side or the other. All in all, this idea that America is exceptional is deeply ingrained in American national identity and among the American people, its history and its culture. This results in a narrative of greatness, as explained in Chapter 2. This narrative also includes certain ideas about social mobility – the American Dream – and diversity – the melting pot versus ethnic pluralism. It furthermore results in claiming certain values as fundamentally American own, including democracy, freedom, and independence. Exceptionalism comes with the assumption that America's position is generally accepted, and that other countries follow America's example.

This thesis then followed with a comparative discourse analysis of the 2016 campaign speeches. The corpus that was used contains 103 speeches in total, after which the speeches were read and discarded based on their relevance and if they contained new information about the categories leaving 50 speeches. These speeches were analyzed per category. Then, in the discussion the results were compared point-by-point. From this comparative analysis followed that Clinton's discourse fit the more traditional side of the political discourse, because she was more explicit in her exceptionalist rhetoric. Trump, however, does not fit into this framework as

easily. Although certain exceptionalist assumptions can be found in his rhetoric, Trump's rhetoric is normative; he explains that American society is in ruins, but *should* be exceptional.

To give an answer to the research question: Clinton invokes the concept of American exceptionalism in a more traditional way: stating that America is without a doubt the greatest country in the world. This standpoint fits the way politicians usually invoke exceptionalism for their political benefit. However, the way she talks about diversity does not fit the traditional view on American exceptionalism, because of her multiculturalist position. Trump also invokes the concept of American exceptionalism in a certain way, but the traditional framework cannot be applied to Trump's speeches as easily. His version of America's exceptionalism is set in the future, when he, himself, has allowed or made it possible for America to become great again. This greatness is based on 'America First'. Then his rhetoric is also non-traditional because at first glance he completely pulls down the idea that America is exceptional. According to him, America has become the laughingstock of the world when his predecessors diverged from an 'America First' standpoint. That is therefore Trump's ambition: to bring back America's greatness by prioritizing America's needs and by starting to 'win' again. In short, Clinton is more traditional when it comes to her rhetoric on American exceptionalism as that is what is normally expected of an American politician, whereas Trump is not. Not because he does or does not believe in America's greatness, but because he almost never explicitly states that America is exceptional.

This research adds to the existing body of literature on American exceptionalism. It does not add to the debate whether America is or is not exceptional as such, as there already is a vast amount of literature on that. However, much less research has been done on the rhetoric of presidents and politicians on American exceptionalism. In that sense, this research aims to fill up that lacuna: it looks at how prominent, modern-day politicians use this long-established idea and corresponding assumptions and concepts in important speeches. It shows that his concept still speaks to the American people and that it is deeply ingrained in American society. This thesis demonstrates the prominence of exceptionalist narrative in the political discourse by two American politicians. Future research could expand on this and examine in what way Clinton's and Trump's exceptionalist rhetoric have developed over time and how they compare to other American politicians. The implications of exceptional rhetoric for several policy areas have not been taken in account either. Future research could provide an overview of implications of American exceptionalism in for example foreign, military and economic policy. It could look at America's relations to other countries and how exceptionalism has played a role in establishing them. Another angle could be to give a more extensive overview on how American exceptionalism has changed since for example 9/11.

As mentioned in the introduction these elections were at the least controversial, and the 2016 campaign is certainly one for the history books. Eventually, Trump was elected as President

of the United States, and has been in office for a year and a half at the time of writing. Over this time, the controversy has only increased, as since May 2017 a Special Counsel has been investigating possible Russian interference with these elections. This thesis did not aim to judge these incidents or Trump's presidency. However, it is important to be critical and to keep evaluating; because "the strongest weapon against hateful speech is not repression; it is more speech" (Obama, 2012).

## Notes

1. Summer 2018
2. Such as: bigly/big-league, "braggadocious", and "the cyber" when he talked about cyber security
3. Trump refers to the TPP documents
4. I am aware of the academic debate surrounding this concept in terms of its definition. However, my interpretation after reading his speeches is that Trump actually means 'third-party state-building' whenever he uses the word 'nation-building'. Third-party state-building is defined as "efforts by outside powers to build state capacity on foreign soil" (Darden and Mylonas 86). Therefore this is also how the word 'nation-building' will be used in this chapter.
5. PolitiFact, an independent website that looks at politicians' statements and rates them for their accuracy, in fact rated this statement as 'mostly false' (Valverde)
6. The Second Amendment protects the right of Americans to bear arms (US Const. Amend. II). Trump alludes to killing Clinton by saying this.

## Corpus of speeches

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