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What Is the American Myth Really Like?

This article sets out to establish the main characteristics of the American Myth. The phenomenon is defined here as “the sum of views, visions, images, values, beliefs and opinions presenting the United States as a positive country, and Americans, as a people, in a good light.” The article also addresses the concept (after W. Blum) of the American Nightmare or American Demon that encompasses all the opposites of the positive connotations of the term American Myth.

The main questions posed here are: How is it possible that the culture, civilization and society of a relatively young country can currently shape and effectively influence the world to such an extent? Why not an older and more “esteemed” civilization and culture? The author tries to establish the impact that “Americanness” has had on the rest of the world. The main elements of the American Myth seem to be: the promise of a better “something,” wealth in the American way, the American mythical millionaire, optimism and individualism, success the American way, remoteness and distance, modernity and progress, freedom and democracy and – finally – a supportive attitude towards war and violence. The paper attempts an analysis and evaluation of these from the perspective of cultural and political studies.

Myth is not a lie. A myth is a story, compounded of fact and fiction, which expresses something fundamental about the worldview and the values of the people who tell it: what they assume about how the world is and how people should and do live in it. The people who tell a myth do not judge it by whether it can be proven factually true. Rather, it shapes their view of truth; it tells them what they can accept as factually true and what they must consider false. A mythic story can be told explicitly, or it can be merely implied by a few brief words or an image or action. Either way, a myth evokes powerful emotions because it expresses something essential about the identity of the group and its members, as they see it (Chernus).

A myth is a multi-meaning phenomenon and – consequently – it has to be analyzed in numerous aspects. Nowadays, it seems impossible not to have come across the concept of the “American myth.” Here the problems start; it is strikingly surprising how easy it is to formulate a dozen definitions of “myth” and – simultaneously

– how difficult it appears to define what the “American dream” is. The challenge is a certain research implication itself. It might suggest that the “American myth” is a most unique, highly sophisticated and exceptional phenomenon, or... that it does not exist at all.

To pick out the characteristics of the “American myth,” a thorough analysis seems vital; it would have to investigate practically all branches of science and art. And even so, the full success of the enterprise appears uncertain (Lexington 41). This paper is an attempt to outline the problem in a limited but – hopefully – systematic manner, aiming at highlighting certain more curious and fundamental aspects and manifestations of the phenomenon.

Commonly, “American myth” is applied to both negative and positive notions. The former include e.g. the American complex of superiority postulated by Howard Zinn (37-39), an omnipotent, hideous and conspiring federal government in William Blum’s visions (22-27), American bigotry, pseudo-imperialism, the cult of violence, racial inequalities and Indian extermination under hypocritical slogans (Blum 135). However, these negative aspects appear to be something which may be labelled – not to avoid the question but for the sake of methodological order – as an “American demon” rather than “American myth” (“The other American Dream”).

For the purposes of this paper, the “American myth” is understood as the sum of views, visions, images, values, beliefs and opinions presenting the United States as a positive country, and Americans (USanians?)¹, as a people, in a good light. In numerous aspects, the “American myth” is a paradoxical phenomenon, full of contradictions (Baudrillard 89-90). Interestingly enough, the discrepancies do not create a feeling of a general lack of cohesion (Domoślawski 255-256). To avoid side-tracking and/or confusion, the elements of the “American myth” chosen for analysis here are only those that appear most significant and appreciable from the Polish perspective.²

“American myth” is a phenomenon present in countless aspects of modern reality. And it is not in the least about any sort of American megalomania or Americanophilia, but a set of ingrained associations and visions connected with the United States (Berezowski 11-12). For dozens of years America and Americans have been influencing – directly or indirectly – the lives of other societies (UNRRA, Marshall Plan, UN peacekeeping missions, films, music, blue jeans and chewing gum, to name only a few examples). Perforce, individuals and societies have kept forming their own image of the US; an image important for themselves, since it is a country that the rest of the world is already tightly bound with.

Here comes an obvious question: why is it a relatively young country and its society that shapes and effectively influences the world to such an extent? Why not

¹ For years, the nomenclature of the inhabitants of the North American continent has been more and more an issue of political correctness. While – clearly – Mexicans and Canadians are Americans in the continental sense, the term “American” all too often seems relegated to the inhabitants of the United States. In this paper, nonetheless, the term American is going to be used in the sense of coming from or connected with the United States. The more modern suggestions in this respect, such as referring to US citizens as *USanians* or *USAnians*, have not yet received broader recognition.

² For more on this topic, see Luboślawski, Andrzej. *Kontuzjowane mocarstwo: siła i słabość Ameryki*. Warsaw: Świat Książki, 2007.

any older and more “esteemed” civilization and culture? One answer may be that it stems from the “mythically American” ability (talent/skill/luck/fluke?) of appearing in the right place at the right time, spotting a potential chance and going for it. The rapid development of the US came at the turn of the 20th century. It brought a wave of novel technologies, development of mass media and potential production of every possible kind of product. It also heralded the shrinking of the world due to a more and more advanced means of transportation of people and cargo. These factors made the US government engage more and more energetically in international affairs. Over time, this systematic, well-timed and carefully planned involvement made the US a state of global influence and meaning. Being a US ally, enemy or contender in the political, economic, cultural or military arena aided the dissemination of the “American myth,” both with the will and cooperation of others or against them.

“Americanness” has infiltrated modern reality in a most natural manner. Its manifestations are so obvious and “domesticated” that they start appearing native. Examples? The familiarity with blue jeans and Coca Cola, baseball caps and chewing gum. More? The English language itself; currently, few learn it out of love for Shakespeare, Queen Elizabeth II or respect for the remnants of the British Empire. What is more, phrases such as *OK*, *all right*, *sure* and *thanks* are omnipresent nowadays, regardless of the continent, country or language; they have become so natural that – in many languages – there have appeared their native adaptations, such as the Polish word “*okej*.”

The above prevalence and accessibility of everything that comes from America has created pseudo-knowledge of the United States – no matter how incomplete, simplified (simplistic?) or sweeping it appears (Łysiak 3). While, in many corners of the world, little is known about the cultural-civilizational accomplishments of ancient Egypt, Greece, Persia or Rome, most people have their own “kind of vision” of the US and their own personal views on it. Curiously enough, the views are always colored; it is quite difficult to find people totally indifferent towards Americans and their homeland.

One of the fundamental elements of the “American myth” is the *promise of a “better something”* – with emphasis on the “something.” The “something” can be anything indeed, depending on individual needs, views and values – a better job, future, money, partner or fate. The tendency is observable in the use (and abuse) of the English language in the nomenclature of various firms and products. It is still assumed (and for good reason, apparently) that the use of a name and advertising campaign that are in an American style boost the chances of success of the product or its producer. Polish examples might be the style and image of such companies as *House*, *Cropp*, *Big Star* and *Americanos*. The tendency worries language purists and others who seem concerned about the collapse of numerous national traditions which the above-mentioned aspect of Americanization imminently brings about. Nevertheless, the phenomenon cannot simply be ignored or denied.

Paradoxically, even in the cases when anti-American initiatives are taken in a pre-meditated way, they are based – all too often – on direct imitations of the American standards which they are to combat. An ideal example here may be the Arab products meant to be ideological and economic competition for their American equivalents: *Qibla Cola* and *Mecca Cola*. They both look (and taste) very much like imitations,

if not clones, of the famously ubiquitous *Coca Cola*. Similarly, it was very much the same case with the Polish drinks *Polo-Cocta*, *Quick Cola* and *Club Cola*, which unsuccessfully aspired to take the place of the “king” in the 1980s. The above examples perfectly illustrate how difficult it is to find an alternative in a situation when an American standard is attempted to be replaced with whatever is new or different.

Another, extremely important, feature of the “American myth” is its *impossibility of fulfilment*. However, it is crucial to point out here that this notion in the perspective of the “American myth” does not imply negative connotations or frustrations. It merely means that a purpose/aim is set. The point is to strive to achieve it, not necessarily to realize it to the full. The impossibility of fulfilment provides a feeling of unattainability of the ideal, an opportunity for constant pursuit – without the danger of disappointment in making the dream come true. This issue of disappointment avoidance seems crucial; thus, the “eternal attractiveness” of the “American myth” has been guaranteed (Brzeziński 9-11). Indeed, being aware of the impossibility of the full realization of one’s intentions and the real state of matters, whatever verification of the goal itself or the sacrifices faced in its pursuit is not possible.

The above-mentioned promise of a better “something,” combined with the impossibility of fulfilment – thus pursuing an idealized exemplar – is commonly acknowledged and accepted. It happens that the goal is not clearly defined at the beginning; and it does not always have to be. Such a set of contradictions kept fuelling Polish entrepreneurship after 1989, being the driving force behind numerous successes – frequently in the American style. This aspect of the “American myth” constantly provides motivation, stimulates for further action, and generates ambition. In this way, it becomes a catalyst of progress, professionalism and tendency to self-improve.

The above is inseparably connected with yet another ingredient of the “American myth,” namely wealth. “Wealth in the American way” is a most intriguing phenomenon. Curiously enough, it is perceived in a completely different way in the European or Asian tradition (Baudrillard 97-98; Kagan 9-11). While in Europe and Asia wealth is believed to be mainly inherited or won, in the sense of the “American myth,” wealth is to be reached or achieved. Furthermore, in European and Asian tradition, it seems much more difficult to become rich without the right family background or appropriate connections. Without these, one can merely be a *nouveau riche* – in other words, “a faulty rich man.” Such an individual should not hope for the full acceptance of the “traditionally rich” aristocrats. The above manifestation of peculiar determinism is thoroughly rejected on the grounds of the “American myth,” which assumes that potentially everybody can get rich (Carnegie 23-31). In other words, if one is not rich yet, one should not be jealous of wealth, or turn wealth into a reproof against those who were able to make it. According to the “American myth,” it simply means that – so far – a poor person has not used his or her potential and/or has not mobilized himself or herself properly enough (Carnegie 120-126).

Also, *being wealthy* is yet another feature distinguishing the “American myth” from other traditions. Although, naturally, people would rather be rich than poor, in Asia and Europe, wealth is perceived as something not entirely moral or good, sometimes even illegal; in a sense, sometimes it is perceived as a troublesome and somewhat shameful burden. Hence, there are numerous philosophical and social ideas and views emphasizing the meaninglessness and shallowness of material wealth as opposed to the virtues of poverty and spirituality.

Reaching wealth and being wealthy according to the “American myth” is shockingly different. It is a process – often long and difficult – that is aimed at shaping the character (Tocqueville 616-625). Few are truly able (or willing) to subordinate it to a larger part of their lives. The “American mythical millionaire” is intelligent, ambitious, open and energetic. Through hard work, owing to intuition and innovativeness, he earned his fortune. Potential lack of a good family background or lack of education were no obstacle on his path; anyway, if necessary, he could make up for the latter through self-education or practical expertise.³ Neither of the above drawbacks is contested or criticized in the general sense; nonetheless, the absence of influential family or a well-rounded education does not seem to determine an individual’s success as much as it does in Europe and Asia.

To cover the distance “from zero to hero,” one must be psychically and physically constructed in a most peculiar manner. The “American rich man” is incredibly curious about the world and life in general. He stands in shocking opposition to the European aristocracy or the Asian caste systems. As a resourceful, tough and consistent man, he accomplishes more than others due to his creativity, openness and readiness to work hard (Domosławski, 284; Tocqueville 503-519). And it happens this way not because he envies wealth; on the contrary, he focuses exclusively on his goals, possibilities and needs, and always mobilizes himself to the full. At the same time, he is God-fearing, principled, respectful of hard work and ready to sacrifice – and all to a higher degree than others (Himmelfarb 138-142). In other words, the “American rich man” appears to be an American mixture of Byzantine emperor, Benedictine monk, Chinese sage, serf, Spartan warrior and St. Francis.

The above comparison illustrates another feature of the “American myth.” No matter how seemingly ridiculous or contradictory a collection of features or values might seem, the “American myth” reconciles them all in a surprisingly harmonious entirety. It is a unique phenomenon nonexistent in other cultures. Thus, “an American Croesus” cannot really be compared with anybody. Having earned his wealth, he develops the feeling of a mission – he turns into a benefactor and philanthropist. At the same time, he is a man that remembers his rough days; the wealth does not corrupt him; it “helps him to help others.” Such an individual is easy to identify with. Therefore, contrary to the European or Asian patterns, the “American rich man” is worth following and socially useful. He shuns idleness and vain pastimes. He constantly develops himself and aspires to greater heights. And all of this is due to the above-analyzed reconciliation of discrepancies. The impossibility of fulfilment of the “American myth” seems to guarantee the further continuous work of a rich man on himself. Simultaneously, it provides the less wealthy with a hope to equal him.

The aspects of the “American myth” thus far explored inseparably coincide with *optimism* and *individualism* (Domosławski 257). Contrary to many other cultures in which collective effort is more valued, effective or desirable, the “American myth” bets on an individual. Originally, the pioneer Americans were few. Unlike in Europe, or even more so in Asia, where the human element was never a problem, in America, every individual counted. Hence the attention to features, skills, education,

³ Examples of this thesis might be some of the log cabin presidents, such as Andrew Jackson, Abraham Lincoln or James A. Garfield.

preparation and potential of every single citizen (Huntington 72-74). Everybody sees oneself as somehow unique; everybody wants to have a better life, too. Optimism is crucial in this respect. Therefore, the "American mythical American" is impossible to discourage. The unbelievable dose of optimism against all odds frequently proves the foundation of success. If this is so, optimism should be cared for, cherished, fuelled and constantly developed.

It might be the very optimism and individualism that make the "American myth" so attractive. No matter how much a given culture promotes collectivism, every human being has a feeling of their distinction and uniqueness. The "American myth" fuels these features – but by no means questions the value of collaboration and collective effort. On the contrary, the protestant work ethic, one of the American social pillars, puts a lot of emphasis on cooperation for the common benefit as well as for individual happiness (Huntington 76-77). Nonetheless, even in such a case, the "American myth" forecasts success only if each of the participants in the collective effort has an individual awareness of how important their individual mindset, attitude and work quality are.

Additionally, optimism lets both an individual and groups believe that the accomplishment of their plans – whatever they are – is certain and feasible. If – in the process – an individual approach and full potential are going to be applied, regardless of any circumstances, success is at hand. Paradoxically again, the reality and accomplishment of goals are as much integral ingredients of the "American myth" as the impossibility of fulfilment (Baudrillard 107).

All of the elements listed so far constitute the next pillar of the "American myth," i.e. *American success*. That is yet another paradox; commonly an average American client or consumer is identified with or envisaged as an individual that is ignorant, narrow-minded, and of little – if any – general knowledge and boorish manners and taste. That is how Americans are portrayed in European caricature: loud, fat, garishly clothed, simpletons considering themselves the center of the universe. Also, America appears as a kingdom of plastic commercialism, and its mighty quasi-deity: the American dollar. Then, the assumption might arise that American success shall be understood as a phenomenon of a strictly financial and commercial nature. The statement could not be further from the truth. These aspects are significant; however, if they were to be the determinants, there are markets in which one can earn much more (e.g. China or India). Although American success means loads of earned money, it is not the money itself that is crucial – which is another discrepancy within the "American myth."

The element of success that turns out to be as vital as profit is the satisfaction stemming from prestige, position on the market, ambitions and respect from rivals. Consequently, success for a filmmaker means Hollywood, US, and not Bollywood, India; for a musician, it is the concerts and records given and sold in the US and not in Japan; for a computer engineer it is a post in Silicon Valley rather than employment in the Indian or Chinese "Cities of the Future;" a scientist does not dream of a tenure in Bologna, Tokyo or Rome, but of a chair with one of the Ivy League Universities. It happens not just because of the fact that one can earn more there. It is more about the social reception of success and its consumption. The opportunities and conditions for further development also come into play here. And, realistically speaking, the best are in the US. American markets are demanding, sophisticated,

fastidious and cruel. Success here means not only money but also survival, respect, admiration and self-satisfaction.

From the psychological perspective, American success gives fulfilment, comfort and the feeling of reaching "the roof of the world." But also, it is quality and competitiveness, and the satisfaction of extremely demanding customers, incomparably more choosy than Asian or European ones. A comparison of the standard equipment and options of a typical fridge or the basic version of a car for the American market and wherever else. Finally, success in America, in a sense, means success everywhere. As the American market is associated with the global one, success in America is received identically. On the other hand, success everywhere else but America is considered incomplete. Even if the profit is relatively high, there is always a feeling of being left on the margin of "true fulfilment." An example might be the incredible and intense popularity of Bollywood stars and their lack of global acknowledgement, and limited, local opportunities of professional development.

The next aspect of the "American myth" logically stemming from the previous one is the issue of *remoteness and distance*. Historically and politically accepted, it has frequently been used in various circumstances (Huntington 259). "Distance" is understood in two senses: a) the US and the rest of the world, b) the distances within the US. The former is something that makes America appear much more colorful, enchanted and idealized than the other, more closely located oases of well-being, e.g. Germany or the UK. In that case, the confrontation with reality is more instant. Due to the distance and associated cost of travel, visas, etc., few foreigners have a chance to visit and become acquainted with America. Therefore, they are susceptible to numerous secondhand accounts by various myth-propagators. And another conclusion here. The "American myth" seems to be a sum of the observations and views brought from the US by foreigners (Szymkowska-Bartyzel 67-79). Equally difficult as getting to America, surviving and succeeding there is hard; the US seems to be an Eldorado for the best of the best. The trip there is a great, fairytale-like adventure, but also a risky escapade. Therefore, those whose priority is immediate improvement of their financial status and not striving for wealth on a higher scale decide to find a job in the European Union – much closer and safer. The "American myth" is a phenomenon of total nature. It seems impossible to choose and realize a few elements rejecting or eliminating the other. Even today, there still remains something of the *conquista* spirit in the concept of the "American myth."

The distances within the country give an idea of how vast the place is and that there is always some room for newcomers (Baudrillard 116-117). This belief that there is enough room for wealth and happiness under the American sky is uniform for most of the less developed countries (Bryson 42-44). But not only for them. The notion is the nutrient for another element of the analyzed phenomenon. Again, contrary to the situation in most other places in the world, one can be born American or *become* one. Although most countries nowadays introduce regulations to grant citizenship to foreigners, still – in most cases – immigrants are perceived as an alien element. Distance and religious, social and cultural differences effectively block a full and swift integration. The "American myth" offers a chance to become an American in the first generation (Sorman 171-173). As, technically speaking, all non-natives that inhabited America were immigrants, assimilation seems easier and the target society somehow more open to newcomers, although there are exceptions

(Huntington 170-172). There is no original native majority that “rules,” regulates and rations its dominant culture top-down.

Then there is the – largely justified – question of *modernity and progress*. The US has always been a pioneer in many fields (Petry-Mroczkowska 4-8). American social experiments, technology, medical advancements and economy make many people desire to become a part of that modern world. Thus they try to immigrate to the US, or – if possible – aspire to achieve similar standards in their own countries. Hence, the “American myth” is applicable and adaptable in all corners of the world. It is realizable and spreadable everywhere due to its universality and flexibility. It is rarely possible in other cultures. The aspect of territorial ascription of tradition and values distinguishes the “American myth” in a very significant manner.

From the above, there emerges a sub-myth of novelty and innovation. The country itself was a new quality in a political, historical and social sense. America appears as a source of new ideas or their innovative interpretations (Brzeziński 206-207). Americans are perceived as experimenters, uneasy spirits in pursuit of something new, better, more successful or profitable. Thus, the drive to develop, experiment, and take on challenges is another ingredient of the “American myth.” It brings constant freshness, progress, and the well-being of the country and its people. The drive makes Americans believe that certain historical processes, such as the falls of empires or degradation and degeneration of countries and nations, do not apply to the US (Garrison 120-129). The fallen states, failing countries and nations are those – in the “American myth” interpretation – which ceased to develop and aspire. The view is commonly manifested in American historiography and politics.⁴ The notion that the US is a safe country, in this respect, due to the impossibility of fulfilment, distance, cult of individualism, the fear of God and nature, constitutes the basis of various political views. Undoubtedly, it also brings hope for the future.

And here comes the aspect of freedom and democracy. In America, freedom is totally understood (Baudrillard 119-120). An American is completely free and unlimited in his decisions in whatever aspect (Kaiser-Lechowicz 246-248). This “American freedom” is yet another element distinguishing the “American myth.” An American is not – and never will be – anybody’s subject, be it by birth or through coercion. Simultaneously, Americans themselves reject the idea of subordinating others by force or through hereditary privileges (Woods Jr. 44-50). Americans are equal to everybody else, reject the importance of an upper-class family background and see no reason to distinguish anybody on those grounds (Garrison 77-78). This way, Americans freed themselves of complexes and inhibitions; they are not embarrassed or uncomfortable when mixing with foreign gentry or aristocracy – contrary to many other nations. Consequently they feel no fear or superiority in contact with people who – outside the US – are considered “B” class citizens (Tocqueville 702-721).

However, in the “American myth,” total freedom is strictly separated from lawlessness and thoughtless intemperance, which is another feature of the phenomenon. An American is supposed to limit himself/herself; however, he/she will accept only those limitations that he/she voluntarily agrees to. They might be of a natural background – the necessity to accept the power of nature; religious – fuelled by humility and fear of God; political – ensuring better security or power. Nonetheless,

⁴ See President Barack Obama’s speeches.

“the American pioneer,” the master of his own life and decisions, will not accept top-down, involuntary restrictions (Kaiser-Lechowicz 250-251). He simply does not need a master or a ruler to realize what is good, or how to live properly and decently. This extremely powerful and vivid element of the “American myth” was ultimately attractive for Poles, especially in times of domestic and foreign limitations, such as in the period 1945-1989.

An inseparable element of the aspect of freedom within the “American myth” is the subordination to authority, as long as it is rational and justifiable and does not lead to oppression or enslavement. Simultaneously, even subduing authority, an American wants to have insight, influence and control over authority. It is observable in significant legislative freedom of states within the federation (Kozłowski 148). The state laws sometimes differ shockingly, which stems from considerably different conditions of living, the specificity of historical experience, attitudes and life philosophies. And then again, the inconsistent laws and regulations within and among states do not create any social disarray or administrative chaos. Thus, there seems to be no reason to make them uniform. First, it is never going to be fully possible in the US; second, considering the size and diversity of the country, the variety is too rich to be codified in a comprehensive way (e.g. how to standardize the living needs of an Alaskan and a Californian).

Another issue – strictly connected with freedom – is the use of force, and the attitude to war and violence. Against all appearances, an American, according to the “American myth,” is no warrior whatsoever (Soros 148). Not being a *homo militaris*, an American has a tendency to avoid settlement by force. Nonetheless, in defense of their liberties and rights, Americans are uncompromising and ready for sacrifice (Garrison 96-99). Here is a certain danger for both Americans themselves and for the rest of the world. The above-mentioned feeling of a mission, the need to spread good and combat oppression, push them in wrong directions. Americans feel moral coercion to intervene in every place that is – in *their* opinion – endangered with oppression or injustice. This is the source, rather than the warrior-like or blood-thirsty nature of Americans, of the image of America as a nation that keeps seeking conflict and domination, all-too-ready for settlement by force.

The negative image stems from the fact that the “American myth” makes Americans treat liberties and rights that they enjoy and value as something inborn and natural; in no sense are they given privileges or rewards (Michałek 14-15). An attempt to reduce or take those rights away from people is perceived in America as an objection against nature. Hence, if something challenges nature, it must be eliminated or changed – for the sake of nature. Thomas Bender accurately commented:

We, Americans, are so deeply convinced that our intentions are good and the causes we fight for are so noble that we are unable to perceive ourselves as aggressors [...]. Our intentions are sometimes good; yet that does not mean that others have to see them likewise (Domosławski 41).

In such a situation, American democracy appears to Americans as a remedy for almost every problem or form of evil (Sardar, Davies 173-177). The “American myth” makes social problems of all sorts solvable with full respect to the freedom of an individual – freedom in the broadest sense.

In conclusion, it needs to be stated that the omnipresent "American myth" has become, in numerous aspects, an ingrained element of cultures, economies and societies of many countries, including Poland (Surdykowski 73-81). Certain elements, or fetishes, of the "American mythology" have become so common abroad that they are hardly associated with the US.

Unlike the "American demon," the "American myth" carries positive connotations; it is a promise of a better future. Hence its acceptance and natural reception. Although variously understood, the desire to live a better life is common for most people. Therefore, this element of the "American myth" is the least controversial.

The impossibility of fulfilment is another important asset of the "American myth." As nobody is ultimately satisfied, there is no worry that the myth will expire. "It is all about chasing a rabbit and not about catching it."

Wealth, success and fame seem to be the motors of the "American myth." Becoming a better person through hard work improves character and goes hand in hand with religious values. Wealth thus earned, apart from the obvious satisfaction and comfort of life, brings freedom, independence and social mission. Contrary to Europe or Asia, an American millionaire escapes being labeled a representative of the "slothful lot." He appears as a useful, morally healthy citizen and role model. *American success* means success in America. Whoever succeeds there can justifiably have the feeling of a truly global triumph.

Distance – an American specialty – mythologizes and colors the US even more. It is still a fairylike land "over the hills and far away." Hence – for many – the necessity to build their vision of America by resorting to second- and third-hand accounts, not fully reliable observations and simplifications.

Modernity and *progress* are often variously understood; yet, it is difficult to find people proud of being obscurant. Thus, the notions are vividly present in the "American myth" and universally attractive.

Freedom – in the broadest sense – is a value in itself. The only limitations that are acceptable are those that are voluntarily accepted. If enslavement is more or less universally detested and rejected, freedom – as an element of the "American myth" – is perfectly acceptable in most corners of the world.

No matter how idealistic the separate elements of the "American myth" may appear, how naively they might sound or how unrealistic they sometimes prove in real life, they are still around. People need good patterns, correct and simple directions, and suggestions for how to do good deeds and avoid evil. And the "American myth" caters to all of that longing.

The "American myth" lives its own life; it keeps changing and developing all the time (Chernus). Sometimes it is supported by certain American factors such as businesses, advertisement, show business or government. However, the American negligence of *soft power* from G.W. Bush's not-so-distant administration seems to convince people that the "American myth" would rather defend itself, much the same way as it created itself. No official factors have proven as effective as real-life examples and the pragmatism of the American philosophy of life. Perhaps the "American myth" – if left alone – can do better than animated top-down. Anyway, if we assume that the "American myth" is an invention "made in the US," and that it

epitomizes all possible positive aspects of American civilization, there should be no problem with its intrinsic and independent adaptation to circumstances against all odds and regardless of the obstacles, in a typically American style.

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