

American Exceptionalism and Trumpism: A Reading of J.P. Clark's America, Their America

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Abstract

This paper is a commemorative re-appraisal of J.P. Clark's autobiographical memoir, *America, Their America* originally published in 1964 but reissued in 2015. As a piece of creative non-fiction, the book dramatises the author's personal, first-hand experience of American culture in his one-year sojourn at Princeton University as one of the journalists picked from across the world on the famous Parvin Fellowship aimed at helping the world's best and brightest hone their professional skills before returning to their respective countries. Buoyed immeasurably by the ideals of American Exceptionalism, Clark arrives in the USA only to be rudely brought back to earth by the systemic racism and institutionalised prejudice of white America. The "Trumpism" aspect of the topic focuses on the prevailing ideological somersaults instigated by the Trump presidency. Given Clark's "prophetic" prognosis of the USA in his memoir, a prognosis that hints at Trumpism, this paper investigates the various manifestations of the betrayal of so-called America's Manifest Destiny or Exceptionalism and contends that these acts of betrayal are the seeds of America's decline and probable demise.

Keywords: America, Exceptionalism, Trumpism, Race, Clark.

American Exceptionalism derives in the main from the history of the founding of the United States of America itself; a history which encapsulates Christopher Columbus' 1492 voyage to the New World, the unfortunate experience of the Red Indian Genocide and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, but, more importantly, the emigration/transportation of Pilgrim Fathers and their congregants to the United States. To be certain, the cobbling together of the "lattice-work" that is today known as the United States tended to endow it with a sense of destiny, particularly with its multi-racial composition, *ab initio*. Unsurprisingly, through the years, Americans have come to regard themselves and their country as a "special breed", *exceptional*. Thus, American Exceptionalism as a political ideology is the theory "that the United States is *inherently different from other nations*". This stems from its emergence from the American Revolution, becoming what the political scientist Seymour Martin Lipset called "the first new nation" and developing a uniquely American ideology, "Americanism" (*Google.com*; italics added). The German professor Sieglinde Lemke argued that the Statue of Liberty "signifies this proselytising mission as the natural extension of the US' sense of itself as an exceptional nation" (*Google.com*). Furthermore, the French political scientist and historian Alexis de Tocqueville was the first writer to describe the country as "exceptional" in 1831 and 1840. However, the actual phrase "American Exceptionalism" was originally coined by the Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin in 1929 as "a critique of a revisionist faction of American communists that argued that the American political climate

was unique and made it an “exception” to certain elements of Marxist theory” (*Wikipedia*). According to this online source, American Exceptionalism is based on *liberty*, *equality* before the law, individual responsibility, republicanism, representative democracy, and *Laissez Faire* economics. Thus, similar to Karl Marx’s 11th Thesis on Feuerbach, the United States sees itself as divinely-sanctioned to *transform the world*. Perhaps, it is important to foreground and emboss the constitutive elements of American Exceptionalism as a political ideology for clearer apprehension. As earlier highlighted, these elements include (i) Equality (ii) Self-rule (iii) Limited government (iv) Freedom and (v) The ability to pursue one’s desires without interference from others. The quasi-spiritual underpinnings of the founding of the United States equally find expression in what has come to be referred to as the “Manifest Destiny” of the nation’s global dominance. Manifest Destiny is defined as “the concept of American exceptionalism, that is, the belief that America occupies a special place among the countries of the world” (*Wikipedia*). The Puritans came to America in 1630 believing that their survival in the new world would be a sign of God’s approval (*Wikipedia*). This religious interpellation ineluctably promoted the belief that the USA is a unique compost-bed in which all flora germinates and bears much fruit, a Utopia in which *anything* might be possible. However, in “The Myth of American Exceptionalism”, Stephen M. Walt disproves the various epithets of the USA, such self-gratulatory cognomen as “empire of liberty”, a “shining city on a hill”, the “last best hope of Earth”, the “leader of the free world” and the “indispensable nation”. Walt refers to these aliases as “enduring tropes” which have continued to inspire “endless ritualistic paeans to America’s greatness, notably by U.S. presidential candidates” during elections (*Google.com*). Small wonder, then, Stephen Walt dismisses the “self-congratulatory portrait of America’s global role” as “mostly a myth”.

The United States' political culture nurtured as it is by the deeply-entrenched ideology of American Exceptionalism would, after a long period, produce Donald J. Trump, the 45th president of the USA. Trump, a real-estate mogul, had dabbled in politics like a veritable wrecking ball practically pulverising all the time-honoured institutions of his country. The visible face of America’s extreme far-right, Donald J. Trump had ridden on the crest of populism to the White House, deafening the world with his rousing battle-cry of “Make America Great Again” (MAGA). In “Trumpism: A New Era in World Politics?” Yoscha Mounk examines Trump’s brash narcissistic one-upmanship inspired by the American political culture (<https://www.projects-syndicate.org>). According to an online source, Trumpism is defined as “a term for the political ideologies, social emotions, style of governance, political movement and set of mechanisms for acquiring and keeping power that is associated with Donald Trump, and his political base.” (*Wikipedia*). Writing in *The Atlantic*, Derek Thompson in an article captioned “The Deep Story of Trumpism” sees “Trumpism” as “a populist prototype, a personality cult or something stranger”. Thompson also calls our attention to some of Trump’s pet policies and programmes, such as anti-immigration, protectionist messages and a call to dismantle the corrupt bureaucracy, popularly dubbed during the electioneering campaign as “drain the swamp!” Thompson quips that Trumpism exists “in the *dreampolitik* realm of feelings.” Accordingly, it is assumed that, although Trumpism is intimately tied for now to its namesake, it will outlast him and shape the collective destiny of the Republican Party in the future. Thus, in a word, Trumpism may be taken to encapsulate the policies and political ideas of US President Donald J. Trump. In an important online article entitled “What are the three characteristics of Trumpism? A Discourse Analysis of Trump’s Four Major Campaign speeches,” Rachel D. Beeman isolates the three characteristics of Trumpism, namely: (i) an appeal

to populism; (ii) a business-like approach to politics, and (iii) an anti-establishment attitude (Beeman, 2018).

Such, therefore, is the enduring legacy of American Exceptionalism as well as its new-fangled product, *Trumpism* that it has become necessary to take another look at JP Clark's book *America, Their America* to investigate this uniquely American political ideology in the light of the Trump presidency. *America, Their America* was first published in 1964 by Andre Deutsch Limited in London, and after nearly six decades since its publication, it has become important to re-engage the text in the light of America's domestic and foreign policy coupled with Africa's relation with the USA. To that extent, therefore, it is useful to ask the following questions: What is the state of the American Union? How humane and inclusive has the domestic scene in American society become, especially concerning a lot of black lives? Is the USA faring any better in her foreign policy, particularly regarding US-Africa relations? And, what, in the last analysis, is the US standing in global affairs in the era of Trumpism? This paper deploys Clark's creative non-fictional work, *America, Their America* to examine these issues with a view to assessing the role of American Exceptionalism in the US' foreign policy on Africa and the Global South in general. Crucially, given the fact that Clark's book is an autobiographical memoir, our analysis of issues revolves around the personal odyssey of the memoirist himself. Accordingly, his experience in his US sojourn becomes our data for evaluating, analysing and assessing the US-Africa relationship.

In 1962, JP Clark visits the US as one of the journalists on the famous Parvin Fellowship domiciled at Princeton University. He gives a roll-call of the Parvin Fellows: "All in all we made quite a collection, perhaps even more so than the old piece hung up there on the wall showing [...] wanting to be accepted too as an artist" (116 - 7). The Parvin Fellowship endowed by an American millionaire from California is charged with the responsibility of pooling the world's brightest and best, particularly the youth from the rest of the world, who are brought to the USA with the specific aim of *indoctrinating* them with the myth of American Exceptionalism. Accordingly, the chosen of the world, JP Clark included, are given especially – written books on American civilisation, works including *The First American Revolution* by Clinton Dossiter, Edmund S. Morgan's *The Birth of the Republic: 1863-89*, *The Response to Industrialism* by Samuel P. Haynes and A.A. Berle's *the 20th Century Capitalist Revolution* and Dexter Perkins' *The New Age of Franklin Roosevelt* (117-8). JP Clark reveals further: "Princeton however was not taking any chances with us Parvin Fellows. There was a special seminar we had to attend every Thursday afternoon [...] we needed to make us better able to perform our various duties back in our own countries" (116).

Given its dominant position, thanks to its military-industrial complex in a unipolar New World order, the USA considers itself supremely suited to play the role of the world's wetnurse, what with the iconic Status of Liberty dominating the New York City skyline, holding out the beacon of light, freedom and opportunity to the entirety of humankind. Its vaunted educational humanitarianism is, thus, geared towards dwarfing rival ideologies like the former USSR (now Russia) and its satellite states – all bastions of communism, and projecting the Western economic-political virtues of liberal democracy and market economy. Clark leaves the reader in no doubt, right from the opening pages of his book as to the nature of his grouse with the American establishment. He, therefore, exposes the hypocrisies, the double-standards and the well-rehearsed and deeply-ingrained ethnocentrism, notably white supremacy that undergird the student exchange

programme sponsored by Mr Parvin. The ugly underbelly of the Princeton affair is the façade, the doppelganger that it is for the CIA, the US security *apparatchik* to police the world, install dictatorships loyal to Washington and perpetuate poverty in the world's infernal margins such as Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The second chapter of *America, Their America* talks of the American media establishment consisting of both print and electronic outlets. Clark points out the symbiotic relationship between media and government stressing that the dividing line between the two is pretty thin:

News management was the order of the day then in Washington, and in this matter of standing up for the flag and the constitution, the line is pretty thin between the government and the press, which, as well as being big business in its own right, provides a proper trumpet for the grand triumphant march that is America. (26)

Such is the power and influence of this synergy between media and government that Edward Said remarks on “America media imperialism on the rest of the world” (353), a hegemony that deeply shapes the production, analysis and dissemination of information from the USA (read: *The West*) to the farthest reaches of the earth, and, more important, also shapes how the rest of the world sees itself concerning America or the West. This “mirror-image” or mimicry in the production and dissemination of news and information is what Clark sees playing out in the U.S., and the active collusion between “big business” and government in this regard. Further, most news media outlets in the developing world depend almost entirely on second-hand news items gleaned, say, from such media organisations as CNN, Fox News, ABC News, the BBC and Sky News. It is important that a practising journalist from a Third-World country, or, put more positively, the *developing* world, Nigeria, to be precise, goes to America to try to hone his professional skills and develop his capacity. He manages to hobnob with media executives, reporters, editorial page editors and TV hierarchs, thereby airing his news on topical global issues, for instance, the Cuba Missile Crisis, the Cold War, the resultant spectre of a nuclear conflagration at the instance of the then president John F. Kennedy of the USA and Russia's president, Nikita Krushnev, among others.

Changing tack, JP draws the reader's attention to the Negro Question, namely: the racism of the mainstream white American society against people of colour. “Feeling at that moment more than to the man, I pointed to a block of buildings overlooking the place a lot of black folks seemed to come in and out of there.

‘Are there many coloured people in New Brunswick?’ I asked.

‘Oh, quite a number’. ‘And, how are they?’

‘We are doing a lot for them’. John said warmly.

‘Why, look at the new blocks by the river. You ought to come again so I can take you to see them. *The Home News* did a lot of fighting to have the development of the place carried out by the city council. Oh, it should ease the Negro lot a great deal, and there is more we want to do for them.’

I felt the coffee turn clayish on my tongue. Poor blacks ...

Whenever the adults and patrons are so willing and, in the mood, to be generous, then a little gift or concession here and there for these helpless and powerless” (36).

A particularly notorious instance of systemic and institutionalised racism is memorably etched in *America, Their America* in the case of James Meredith, an American Civil Rights Movement figure, writer, political adviser and Air Force veteran. Meredith had been most sensationally offered admission to the University of Mississippi, being the *only* person of colour to have been so honoured. His elevation had caused a nationwide furore, sparking hate speech and sundry acts of violence by white people who saw his “grafting-in” into the prestigious tertiary institution of learning as “pollution”. It had taken the intervention of the nation’s Supreme Court to ratify his admission in a landmark ruling before Meredith could get on with his schooling. Even so, a female undergraduate from his College had gone on TV to denigrate and disparage his academic performance, claiming falsely that he was unfit for such “grafting-in” solely on grounds of his race. Such was the groundswell of disaffection provoked by Meredith’s elevation that the government had to assign him, special bodyguards. In the same connection, Clark introduces the reader to the story of another African-American family comprising the matriarch of the family, simply referred to as Sister, Gloria, her daughter and others mostly absent from home, pursuing their respective careers. As usual, the father-figure is missing, probably incarcerated or dead, destroyed and wasted by the system. Clark reports on Sister’s struggle:

There she sat, the archetypal image of mother and mourner as well as guardian and co-sufferer of every member of her embattled race. For hundreds of years, in a land of equal opportunity and freedom she has kept watch, wept and waited; as all her sons were forced out into the fields to labour for others to reap the abundant fruit, and for this, flogging and worse misfortune has been their wages; as her brothers were hurled out of the house to be hanged from trees or stoned to death without trial for offences as little or non-existent as asking for their birthright or casting an innocent eye on a harlot who happened to be white; as her daughters, desired and defiled by lustful masters, were made to bear a bastard breed and then turned out to walk the streets and she has watched and waited in vain when her husband that should be the pillar and prop of the house has broken under the burden and taken after to poisoned drinking... she has sought out the odd ends and scattered bits to keep together the broken structure of her family (61 - 2).

Against the much-vaunted ideals of American Exceptionalism, the excerpted passage above reads like a deeply revolting rebuttal. One is forced to wonder: where are the glowing pieties of America’s Manifest Destiny? Where is *equality* before the law? The freedom? Where is the boundless opportunity? To be sure, Sister in the passage just quoted strikes one as a kind of symbolisation of the undying spirit of Africa, reaching beyond the Atlantic to the New World, keeping a watchful eye on her persecuted progeny in Diaspora. What’s worse, the anti-black racism in America seems to account for the criminalisation of race and the racialisation of crime in the US. As though to further complicate the plot, JP Clark, for good measure, throws in the overarching element of race in the professions:

Of the large body of professionals, artists, and intellectuals, whose shady colouring assigns them to a sort of limbo in the American hierarchy, I saw very little to win me over from the unsparing views of the late Professor Frazier in his ‘Black Bourgeoisie’, although much to enlist for them sympathy and understanding. Daubed in a white society as Negro lawyers,

Negro doctors, Negro professors and Negro writers or entertainers, and therefore not quite belonging to the civilised and prosperous professional guilds and cults, this class of the blacks in America struck me as falling into two main groups (63).

This group of professionals, like their present-day descendants in American society, is *profiled* and *stereotyped* on account of the colour of their skin or their race. However hard they try to climb the rungs of the social ladder to the top, they are constantly reminded of their *difference*, hence, their unworthiness, and their questionable ontology. The notion of a black inferiority complex is normalised by the epithet “black” – *black* poet, *black* president, etc. This is an egregiously *artificial* racial/racist categorisation which demonstrates, sadly, the permanence of racism in the USA.

In an online essay entitled, “The challenge of achieving racial justice in America”, Ladipo Adamolekun wonders: “Is achieving racial justice America’s Sisyphean task?” Adamolekun seems pained by the intractability of racial injustice in the USA because all efforts made so far to solve the problem have proved abortive. He notes that the “three amendments of the US constitution – the 13th, 14th and 15th (also called Reconstruction Amendments) adopted between 1865 and 1870 – which affirmed that African Americans were legally equal to white Americans “have been largely cosmetic and, hence, ineffectual. Adamolekun writes: “Strikingly, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) enabled White Resistance (and white supremacy) through decisions that reversed the gains provided by the Reconstruction Amendments. First, in 1883, SCOTUS ruled that the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was unconstitutional and not authorised by the 13th and 14th Amendments of the Constitution [...] Second, in 1896, SCOTUS upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation under the “separate but equal” doctrine thereby making segregation [...] the law of the land. These crucial decisions constituted the bedrock of what became codified as so-called Jim Crow Laws; the body of laws that made segregation and discrimination legal in the Southern states with the Ku Klux Klan as a notorious enforcer” (www.vanguard.com).

Owing, therefore, to the hopelessly polarised nature of American society, African-Americans then set aside their hostility towards Africans and embraced Africa as their authentic origin and Africans as genuine kin. Lorraine Hansberry’s play, *A Raisin in the Sun* explores this theme to a point. So do some forms of African-American cultural production, especially cinema and film. A notable instance is a recently released film “Coming to America 2” in which both Nigerians (African) and African-Americans star or feature. The injuries of the past (i.e., slavery) are conveniently forgotten in the desperate search for racial *rapprochement* with Mother Africa. Happily, we see a movement from *faith* to *vision* among African-Americans as they look to forge a common identity with their African kith and kin. Yet, a reality-check at this juncture is in order. As the foregoing discussion shows, racism constitutes the pivot of America’s mainstream culture and even more so in the post-Obama and Trump eras. Shortly after Donald J. Trump was declared winner of the US Presidential Elections in November 2016, Adebayo Williams, writing under the pseudonym of Tatalo Alamu, in a typically cerebral piece captioned, “Trump Triumphant: The Revenge of the Old Right” remarks thus:

In a way, this may presage the precipitous decline of America’s global hegemony, the unravelling of the nation-state paradigm and the resurgence

of the ancient *National Question* even in the most seemingly secure nation on earth (*The Nation* 3).

He adumbrates piquantly:

To be sure since its inception as a nation, America has always boasted of such extremist, murderously xenophobic groups, *White Aryan Resistance*, *the Ku Klux Klan*, *White Order of Thule*, *the White Knights*, etc. who might have been responding to the wanton brutality and savagery that accompanied the birth of America as the most modern nation the world had seen (3)

Tatalo Alamu (aka Adebayo Williams) thus argues that it is the deeply racist nature of the American nation that produces “the emergence of a reactionary right-wing huckster and hustler like Donald Trump, himself a mere symptom of a more fundamental human malady” (3). Rallying around Trump, therefore, extremist groups such as the *alt-right* movement, neo-Nazis and other affiliate white supremacist groups have seized the initiative and have begun to stoke the embers of culture wars, an ugly trend with global ramifications. Alamu posits thus:

The Donald Trump phenomenon in its shrill xenophobia and crude loathing of the other is all at one with the Brexit vote that has crippled Great Britain, the persistence of ultra-nationalist parties in France, the resurgence of Neo-Nazi groups in Germany and the xenophobic murmurings despite Angela Merkel’s countervailing personal heroism, Russia’s relapse into an ancient pan-Slavic nationalism and the human fiasco the Middle East has become. This is not to talk of the devastated phantom nations of post-colonial Africa. It is a broken world crying to be fixed (3).

Apart from these world-historic seismic global issues, JP Clark as a man of letters does not shirk his responsibility to his immediate constituency which in *culture*, and, in this regard, highlights how the US manipulates the levers of cultural production, especially *literature* and the theatre. To dramatise this, JP takes the reader back to Princeton University again, this time around, to the Department of English. The condescension, the paternalism and the superciliousness of Professor Downer of the Department of English at Princeton hit you right in the face from the word go. As his name suggests, the professor, who happens to be, symbolically speaking, a representation of American cultural arrogance “downs” our “Awkward Guest”, who, interestingly, happens to have “a chip on his shoulders” – as he is routinely accused by his American hosts, - and, therefore, is able to give as much as he takes, measure for measure. JP broaches the matter of his interest in creative writing, apprising the don of the fact that he is a dramatist. The American is bemused and incredulous about this, disbelieving the possibility of an *African* bringing himself to penning a play. Downer is stunned to hear that the play has been published. JP is unable, however, to mount his published play at Princeton, as he is told that the McCarter Theatre only produces *classics*, meaning by that, that only English-language and *French* canonical masterpieces are staged. Consequently, JP moves from the local theatre scene to the central stage, this time he lands in New York City. Having observed the American theatre management and practice at close quarters, JP Clark is able to infer that it is mercantilist in orientation. Both on Broadway and off-Broadway, the merchant-producer alongside a lot of pseudo-professional middlemen and hangers-on does not have or wishes to have any professional interest in theatre or the arts but is *solely* motivated by

profit. This pan- American penchant for crass materialism and tawdry commercialism makes people involved pass off imitation articles for the real thing (91). Sadder still, even in the theatre business, supposedly far from the madding crowd of *realpolitik*, the politics of colour is equally *writ large*. “A black skin, however, is a sure liability except of course in those proverbial caste-typed parts of slaves or servants. Producers of Broadway, like the publicity men of Madison Avenue, are so full of respect and regard for the feelings of their white sponsors and clientele that they prefer not to take the risk of ruffling and offending their tastes by starring coloured people in roles where they are not normally seen in real life as lived in a vast area of the United States of America” (109).

Clark adds that: “The American spectator-public is touchy about many things. It avoids colour like leprosy and eschews anything demanding thought or dealing with attitudes and beliefs foreign to its conditioned consciousness” (111). On the issue of the “American Dream”, JP Clark in the narrative reconstructs America’s political history, deftly delving into the messy entrails of America’s record of slavery, the Civil War, “reconstruction and reaction” as he puts it – the economic meltdown that JP Morgan could not arrest but for the firm and dependable hands of Franklin Delano Roosevelt who restored the American estate to tolerable health. But the USA could only recover fully after World War II through its amassing of “ill-gotten gains” (115) secured in weapons sales. But before America arrived at this level of global dominance, Clark notes, it had fought long and hard, both against the untamed raw environment and human adversaries. And, the early birds were not all high-minded virtuous individuals. Among their ranks were also criminal desperadoes. America, therefore, was forged in the crucible of man against man and man against nature, with the old destitute desperate for “gold, land and freedom” (118). But before this heroic conquest, French philosopher and political thinker, Alexis de Tocqueville in his book entitled, *Democracy in America* (1881 – 82) had laid out what turned out to be a visionary prognosis for America. His text was thus a prophetic work about the USA’s chances of success anchored on (i) the American’s sense of commerce and trade, (ii) his concept of a classless society, (iii) his suspicion of a government strong and purposeful at the centre, (iv) his belief in equal opportunity, that every citizen has a “right to a fair and open share of what there is of the land and nature’s bounty” (120).

The memoirist or autobiographer finds the rabid spirit of primitive accumulation or/ and conspicuous consumption prevalent in American society and culture rather immoral and downright unethical. This quasi-religious single-minded pursuit of the economic doctrine of *Laissez Faire* deeply lodged in America’s DNA ends up creating fault-lines in the body politic, throwing up exclusionary politics that alienate millions from the banquet table. It is not an irony of history that the very nation of emigrant peoples is today under Trump, trying to destroy the very basis of American Exceptionalism or the so-called “American Dream”? For instance, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), the US immigration policy that allows some individuals who entered or remained in the country illegally to receive a renewable two-year period of deferred action from deportation and to be eligible for a work permit is to be thrown out under the Trump administration. The slogan used during the presidential electioneering campaigns “Drain the Swamp”, a diatribe aimed at the Washington establishment as well as “Make America Great Again’ (MAGA) is a downright *protectionist, separatist*, illiberal and xenophobic battle-cry aimed at slamming the door of opportunity close in the face of potential emigrants who have been charmed by the American Dream. By the same token, the politics of aid has also been affected in

a radical way by Trump's unconstitutional way of doing business. For example, in the 1960s, the USA used to dole out aid to African countries like Nigeria, provided they remained loyal to American interests and not be caught harbouring any hint of pro-Russian sentiment. Under Trump, who described African countries as "shit-holes", African countries now have their job cut out for them. American aid will probably be given to them at a premium, with the most stringent of conditionalities.

It is important at this juncture to remind ourselves of the fact that the basis of civilised society is the rule of law. To that extent, therefore, Clark examines the intricate workings of the American judicial system and after a thorough examination of it, delivers a damning verdict. Simply put, the legal system is mired in racism and bigotry. Hence, JP Clark queries:

But what happens if, as was disclosed by as rare defending attorney to the shock of America, the entire staff tending the tree are drawn, and indeed have always been and will for a long time to come, exclusively from one sector of an irrevocably mixed community, even though the cry is that all offenders come of that one neglected section called coloured? Could the accused ever expect a fair trial and sentence for a charge often as flimsy and trumped up by bitter and frustrated members of the dominant sector? The answer has been lived down through a century of lynchings and compliance to the will of mob rule ... (170)

After all, is said and done, JP Clark concludes that: "The one damper to the occasion was the fact that I could not help admitting to myself, more so as we entered deeper into the heart of the establishment, that America is a white country, with blacks merely there on terms worse than sufferance" (171-2). It is, indeed, impossible to read *America, Their America* without being struck by Clark's fierce and fiery independence of mind. He is deeply disappointed by America's double-standards and hypocrisy, especially concerning systemic racism against peoples of colour, a demographic sector described by a US senator in the text as a "superfluous population". For Clark, therefore, America does not have the moral right to preach fairness whilst condoning social segregation, racial prejudice and racism. All told, what is referred to as "American Exceptionalism" or "American Dream" is nothing but a wish-fulfilment, an article of faith or "largely a myth", as Stephen Walt declares at the beginning of this paper. Given its long history, the "American Dream", through the years, has come to shape people's expectations of the USA, seeing the American nation as truly "a shining city on a hill", an earthly paradise, a *utopia*. Unsurprisingly, the experience of JP Clark as a Parvin Fellow at Princeton is not dissimilar to that of Akeem, the protagonist of the Hollywood blockbuster, "Coming to America". Both Clark and Akeem emigrate from a supposedly poor region of the earth to America, God's own country. The pity of it, though, is that the disparity between *expectation* and *experience* is huge. The same scenario plays out in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* and other African literary texts including prose fiction, drama and poetry. For instance, Ayi Kwei Armah's *Why Are We So Blest?* Niyi Osundare's *A City Without People* as well as most African-American literary texts explore the dystopian inferno that the American society is. To be sure, Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Golden House* delivers a savage denunciation of the hollow humbug known as, "American Exceptionalism" as the novel's characters who have emigrated from India to the USA are *incinerated* in the American cauldron. From Haley Haley's *Roots* through Isidore Okpewho's *Call Me by My Rightful Name* to Osundare's *City Without People*, America seems to *promise* much but

delivers so little, no thanks to the chains in which its “opportunity” is trapped (cf: The Statue of Liberty).

The tragedy of American Exceptionalism mainly highlights the timeless theme of *appearance* and *reality*. As Clark finds out in the dusty and dreary atmosphere of New York City, the “stifling house” of Princeton University, the crass mercantilism and gilded hollowness of Broadway through the dye-in-the-wool racism of mainstream America to the belly-churning paternalism of America’s media empire and its cloak-and-dagger politics, among others. What’s worse, the advent of Trump, or, what we have proposed as “Trumpism” which is characterised by a culture of “post-truth”, “fake news” and the wheeling-and-dealing with Russia against national interest, the resurgence of the Old Right, *etcetera*, clearly shows that American Exceptionalism is going to seed. Crucially, the term “American Dream” now rings hollow in the popular ear as the item “American” pejoratively connotes mere bluster or braggadocio; and the other item “Dream” used in conjunction with “American”, equally translates into “nightmare”, or, at best, a *hoax*. And, like all former world empires, America’s decline and eventual demise are playing out right before our eyes, no thanks to the Trump phenomenon that is sure to linger into the foreseeable future. Sinclair Lewis’ dystopian novel entitled *It Can’t Happen Here*, originally published in 1935, is generally hailed as a classic that predicted the advent of Trumpism. Remarkably, here we find *art* presaging and predicting *reality*. However, in the far more interesting world of *realpolitik*, the American empire is evidently in dire straits.

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