

## THE CONCEPT OF THE MANIFEST DESTINY IN THE BOOK OF ELI

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### ABSTRACT

The present paper concerns the depiction of the concept of Manifest Destiny in the movie Book of Eli. It tries to make a relationship between the Manifest Destiny as a socio-cultural concept with its criteria and the movie Book of Eli film directed by the Hughes brothers 2010. The movie portrays a trip done by the protagonist Eli who convinced by the mission to carry the Bible to the western part of America, faced overcome many problems done by bad men who looked for stealing his burden in a poste chaotic environment. At the first sight it seems to be a mere science fictional movie, however when dive deep inside the story, we may find some symbols and aspects of the Manifest Destiny as a cultural concept among them: the mission, the chosen people, the westward rush and many others that characterized the concept of Manifest Destiny from its beginning. The aim is to prove that the concept of Manifest Destiny, though is rarely used, still exist and adopted by the American society on one hand and to show for the reader and specially the EFL students to what extend could a simple movie implies some hidden messages that are related directly to the culture.

**KEYWORDS:** Destiny, God, Mission, Father Pilgrims, Westward, USA, Eli

### INTRODUCTION

The United States of America has become one of the greatest and most powerful country in the world economically, politically, culturally and socially. It has got so many special events and values in its history that led it to be an exceptional country and very different from the rest of the world.

The modern civilization of America is one of those precious values that made it as a special country simply because it is a unique civilization based on very affective and meaningful moral concepts and principles that the Americans could understand and appreciate them, and started to work on realizing those bases of life in order to be at the top of the world.

“Manifest Destiny” is the most important term that the US civilization has ever seen, this time simply because this principle is based on religion and could be used in politics, society and culture. The Americans had a general belief about the meaning of Manifest Destiny before it had been brought in 18th century. Although this term had been disused during 19<sup>th</sup> century by the American government because their people started to understand the real Manifest Destiny and became aware that government is using it for their own benefits; however the concept still existed in the American culture and society, maybe because this principle’s impact was so much heavy and meaningful on the Americans this time. This research aims at depicting some aspects of the concept of Manifest Destiny in Book of Eli the movie. It is divided into three parts after introduction and the objective of the study, the concept of Manifest Destiny through which a brief idea about this American cultural concept is given from 1845 and before until now. The second part concerns the Book of Eli the movie with its plot and characterization. The third part concerns the depiction of the concept of Manifest Destiny in the Book of Eli.

## OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The research paper aims at depicting some aspects of the concept of Manifest Destiny in a science fiction movie THE BOOK OF ELI.

## THE CONCEPT OF MANIFEST DESTINY

The concept of Manifest Destiny has been strongly linked with the 19<sup>th</sup> century rush to the western part of the American continent especially after the Texas independence 1836. The dream of reaching the western part of America becomes more and more real; and the notion of destiny has been once again confirmed, the famous slogan "Go West, Young Man" becomes more than just simple words written by Horace Greeley but a real but a real symbol of the western conquest. The American Mexican War and its issue, in addition to the discovery of gold in California confirmed that the west is blessed and it is the future. It was the era of a strong belief in the nation's destiny to gain western territory in order to spread the American way of life from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

It was John O'Sullivan who used for the first time the term Manifest Destiny in 1845 to justify or to explain the idea of the American expansion and acquisition for new territories whether by a legal trade or by invading that of the weak communities especially the Indians. He wrote:

*"This claim is by the right of our manifest destiny to overspread the possess the continent which providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government entrusted to us"*  
(Shane Mountjoy, p10)

It was so clear that this text has directly justified the future governmental acts of securing Oregon Territory California, Mexican land in the Southwest, and, in the 1850s, Cuba. to extend its influence beyond its continental boundaries into the Pacific and Caribbean basins' While the United States clearly had the material capability to expand westward in the nineteenth century, it would not have done so without the social idea of Manifest Destiny' (KarlK. Schonberg 66)

Manifest Destiny became also the banner that hides the crimes committed against hundreds of natives by the westward expansionists. The notion of Manifest Destiny was published in the papers and used as propaganda for the decision makers of US nation' Destiny required U.S. power, but so did power require Manifest Destiny' Karl K. Schonberg66

Yet what had been published was only an expression of feelings lived by each American; John O'sullivan coined only a term to a cultural tradition that is deeply rooted in the history of the USA. By the first settlement of the Fathers Pilgrims and their successive events that nourished their journey and transformed a simple trip from the old world to the new one into a holy trip lead by divine forces. The perils that lurked in unknown territory which was already occupied by Native Americans, not all of whom were friendly. Nevertheless, the dream was extremely potent, not only for those who sought America fabled wealth, but those whose consciences were chained by religious persecution. The series of events that the first puritans witnessed during their trip seemed so exceptional and abnormal. In fact, the journey of the puritans, who has been considered as separatists by the British crown, from Plymouth to Virginia was the beginning of a real Exodus. The disease that affected part of the puritans, the clash and tensions that have been established among the puritans and the non-puritans on the Mayflower than the most important event that of the strong storm that oblige the ship to change

its direction to Cap Code were signs of the great dangers that expected those who dream about a better life in a new world. What followed created the legend; the hard winter of 1620 -1621 that killed half of the puritans, their first contact with the natives who at the beginning were hostile than they established a peaceful neighboring relationship, the meeting with Squanto and his tribe .The natives acted as guides through the forests and taught how to raise crops, to hunt or simply how to master the new environment or precisely how to survive in this new and unknown world. The dinner that had been organized on November 1621 by the colonists who invited their neighboring natives known by The Thanksgiving is the symbol of the end of an age and the beginning of another one .It also transformed the simple trip with its difficulties to a pilgrimage to a holly land and the separatists' puritans to Fathers Pilgrims.

From that time and on, the American people started to believe in their destiny and realized that in spite of all the obstacles and crises that happened to their ancestors, God had survived them through some miracles just to put them in charge of spreading out democracy, liberty and happiness.Salvation became then the core of the American thoughts; in fact people compared the survival of the Pilgrims with that of the Jewish with Moses and America as the Promised Land or the providence given by God to the new chosen people, the Americans. The idea of chosen people convinced the new settlers about the divine mission given by god to establish a new society completely different from that of the old world and a political system based on democratic institutions that had been neglected by the European countries. It was then beyond the Christian belief or asJAMES W. CEASER explained 'While echoes of Puritan themes can readily be found, manifest destiny, in the degree that it can be considered a religious doctrine, is more properly placed in the strand of "liberal Protestantism" rather than traditional Christianity' (JAMES W. CEASER 16)

All those events convinced the Americans strengthened the idea of the chosen people and convinced them about the mission that they have to fulfil .the task is for them is too difficult but the end would be glorious and all what follows was only an additional proof to their convictions: The American Revolution, the Louisiana Purchase, The British American war , the Mexican American War are considered as miracles for the American society and even the American civil War is for them an exam for their pursuit of the divine happiness.

Although the term 'Manifest Destiny' is nowadays rarely used, due to its bloody impact on the minorities, the idea of 'Destiny and the sense of Mission' is deeply implied in the minds of the Americans who are believing in their exceptionality

*'Mission, in this sense, is a covenant between Americans and God that they will live and conduct society in a way that becomes a brilliant example for the world, a manifestation of John Winthrop's "city upon a hill." Manifest Destiny was a political idea incorporating the westward movement and, as a by-product, led to the subjugation of Native Americans... Manifest Destiny became muddled confused with Mission. We must add, however, that the vision of Manifest Destiny eventually died out. Mission rode on. The American mission statement in the Declaration of Independence called for "a decent respect for the opinions of mankind. What could be more humble? The point is that "American Exceptionalism" is more related to Mission and individual attitudes than it is to Manifest Destiny or any sense of American triumphalism.'*

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## THE BOOK OF ELI

THE BOOK OF ELI is a post-apocalyptic neo-western action film directed by The Hughes Brothers in 2010 written by Gary Whitta and starring Denzel Washington, Gary Oldman, Mila Kunis, Ray Stevenson and Jennifer Beals.

### Plot of the Movie

The story is about Eli (Denzel Washington) who crossed on foot the former United States from the east to reach the extreme west, San Francisco. Trying to survive in a desert caused by a nuclear chaos thirty years before, Eli arrives at a town which reflects its time and environment led by Carnegie (Gary Oldman) who dominated even the minds of people and who is ambitious to build more similar cities. Carnegie is ambitious, he believes that only one book could permit him to dominate the minds and then the world, a book that was a holy grail for him and subject of daily scrutinizing of his followers. The meeting between Eli and Carnegie was after a clash in a bar with some bikers in which Eli kills them all. Believing in the abilities of Eli, Carnegie proposed to him to be part of his team but Eli refused. Carnegie did not accept and tried to all means possible to attract Eli even by sending Solara (Mila Kunis), the daughter of Claudia (Jennifer Beals) the blind mistress of Carnegie, to seduce him and maintain him close to Carnegie. Yet Eli refused any proposition that could derive him from his quest even that of a pretty woman like Solara. This last attracted by the secret side of Eli, looks in his bag and finds a book but she did not realize that it was the famous book. After that Eli wanted to make Solara on the right way and taught her the grace before eating. The following day, Solara repeats the words of grace learned but Carnegie was at the right place to hear her and realize that they are words of the famous book he is looking for. After obliging Solara to tell him everything, Carnegie realizes that Eli owns what he wants and it was the beginning of the clash between the two men. Solara shows the way to escape for Eli hoping that she will accompany him but Eli let her down while he was out of danger. She finds herself alone in front of two bandits who want to rape her but Eli returned in order to save her by killing the bandits and repair his first act. In such atmosphere, Eli opened his heart and explain his quest that he is carrying the last copy of the holy Bible existed after an intentional destruction of the others after the nuclear disaster. It was a voice in his head which ordered him to take the book and to carry it in a safe place located in the west. The voice convinced him that he has been chosen for that mission and he will be protected during his trip.

Their escape ended at a house where they fall between the hands of a couple of cannibals George (Michael Gambon) and Martha (Frances de la Tour) who want to trap them but while they wanted to escape from them, they found themselves in front of Carnegie and his henchmen. In an exchange of fire the cannibal couple are killed with many other Carnegie followers. The bloodshed ends with the capturing of Eli and Solara by Carnegie. This last threatens the life of Solara against the book. At the end Eli accepted to give up but Carnegie shoot him and leaves him for dead. Believing in the prophecy of Eli, Solara escapes from Carnegie and drives Eli to the west. Carnegie so happy by what he gained, he returns to the town but he was surprised by discovering that the famous bible was written in Braille and he required from Claudia to read it but she pretended that she forgets how to read it. Meanwhile Eli and Solara reach San Francisco and precisely the Island of Alcatraz where a group of wise men who try to save all men achievements or symbol of the dead civilization aiming at reconstruct a new and different one. Eli declares that he possess a copy of King James version Bible. The story ends by the revelation of Eli as a blind person guided by the light of his mission and a bible in his mind which he transmitted to Lombardi (Malcolm McDowell) the leader of the group. Eli dies after uttering the last word of the holy book. The book has been printed to several copies and a copy has been placed in the bookshelf among the Torah, the Quran and other books. Solara preferred to return home where Carnegie lost his influence, she took Eli's sword and other possessions as symbol of

the continuity.

### **The Concept of the Manifest Destiny in the Book of Eli**

THE BOOK OF ELI seems to be a mere science fictional movie however many symbols lead us to be convinced about the fact that the writer and the director have been inspired from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century culture as Craig Detweiler confirms in his study guide :

*As Eli, Denzel Washington embodies a different kind of hero, driven by divine calling. Directors Albert and Allen Hughes have created a distinctive look for The Book of Eli. The stirring script by Gary Whitta combines elements from classic westerns and sci-fi in surprising ways.(Craig Detweiler)*

### **The Setting**

The setting of the movie is very important the fact that the writer chooses a post-apocalyptic period or as it was precisely explained after 30 years of a nuclear war in a dead land where it is only desert that dominates the greatest part of the story. The hostility of the environment shows at the first sight and before all the difficulties that the protagonist will endure. The wilderness of desert is also symbol of the unknown and its danger but symbolizes more the environment that faced those who decided to move westward during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and they crossed the Texas, Nevada or New Mexico with all their dangers keeping their minds the belief in their destiny traced as a path by the divine hands .We can also depict the same feeling for the father Pilgrims once they feet for the first time the new continent or the promised land the famous ‘city upon a hill’ is symbolized in the movie at the end once Eli reached the Island of Alcatraz .

The time in the movie is another symbol of the Manifest Destiny since the post-apocalyptic period is only the symbol of no hope, darkness, and anarchy it was in fact the period of different struggles of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Great Britain that pushed the Father Pilgrims to emigrate to the New World hoping to establish a new society completely different from the other societies. Special Effects have been chosen to show the shift from the darkness to the light; the color of the movie was from the beginning dominated by the black and white and more black than white as if people or the different characters were living in an endless darkness until the arrival of ELI in San Francisco where we discover the colors and especially the light as if the protagonist reached heaven. It is so clear that the director wanted to symbolize the difference between the blessed and the damned people and lands, heaven and hell, the beginning and the end and precisely the mission and the rewards.

The plot of the movies reflects with exactness the concept of manifest destiny .first the chosen people symbolized in the person of Eli throughout his revelation then the mission symbolized by protecting and carrying the last Bible on earth, the westward trip similar to that of the first settlers the fight for surviving symbolized here the fights of Eli Carnegie's men who wanted to steal the bible and finally the denouement by reaching the last land in the western part of the continent.

### **Characterization**

Characterization is so symbolic in this movie since the director chooses a colored person (Denzel Washington) as a protagonist .In fact the physical properties of the protagonist is very important and not hazardous in order to avoid any misinterpretation the story is based on a divine mission to Eli however this is exactly what had been thought by the first Americans during the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> century and gave the birth to doctrine influenced by the Social Darwinism called

White Man's Burden issued from the Manifest Destiny that resulted conflicting situations inside and outside America by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century .the blindness of the protagonist is also important and meaningful ,in fact Eli received a revelation that ordered to carry the last bible to the west this was guiding him and protecting him from the different obstacles done by the evils in his path so the eyes are not necessary only the divine voice can guide him the condition was that he must believe in his mission and always follow the path .The mission ,the path, the revelation are considered as the pillars of the concept of the Manifest Destiny and what has been written by O'Sullivan is only a confirmation of the sense of the divine mission given to the Americans. Eli is a warrior the strongest character and no one can beat him since he is the warrior of god.

The second character Solara(MilaKunis) represents two faces at the beginning the symbol of temptation that aims to derive Eli from his path but the scene of Eli with Solara in introducing her in the power of praying changes completely the data and transform Solara from an evil adept to angel that tries to help Eli and to take over the mission of perpetuating the values of this man.

Carnegie (Gary Oldman) the Antagonist who wanted to steal the bible, the only book that could lighten the minds and then could maintain his domination over the people he represents the evil disciple and it is clear that the director and the writer of this movie used this character referring to James I or and especially George III who has been described as Pharaoh in the American Declaration of Independence. All those characters and others are representing a real tribute to the period that is extended from the first settlement to the mid of 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Americans reached California and realize a dream of over two centuries to unify the whole territory under one and unique nation.

## CONCLUSIONS

This paper aimed at depicting some aspects of the Concept Of The Manifest Destiny a doctrine that emerged during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and deeply rooted in the history of the first settlement America .the movie though is science fictional narrating a poste apocalyptic era in the future , but it portrays all the aspects and the characteristics of the doctrine of the Manifest Destiny .The relationship is so strong that it proves the perpetual doctrine adopted by the American culture in the past ,present, and undoubtedly in the future.

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