

TRANSATLANTIC CULTURAL TRANSLATION: FROM THE BRITISH EMPIRE TO THE BIRTH OF THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC

Key Words and Related Topics

- Cultural translation.
- Intralinguistic translation.
- The continuity between the radical factions in the Protestant Reformation, the English Civil War, and the American Revolution.
- The relation between the Levellers, and the tradition of dissent, and radical Reformation, on the one hand, the radicalism of the 18th century (Tom Paine, abolitionism) in both Britain and America (the relation with the ideas that furnished the American Revolution, and texts like the American Declaration of Independence).
- The development of a global English-speaking culture.
- The Whigh view of history.
- Common Sense
- Thomas Paine
- The secular (classical Greece and Rome) and religious (Protestantism) roots of Anglo-American political culture

Temario de la Guía Docente: 1. The Origins and Evolution of English Institutions. 2. From *Magna Carta* to the Glorious Revolution: the origins of modern English Political Culture. 5. Aspects of English National Identity: The Monarchy, the Protestant Reformation, and Liberalism. 7. The British Empire and the Origins of a Global, English-Speaking Culture.

Introduction:

As we saw in Unit 2, *Magna Carta* is still one of the founding myths of English national identity, and it still continues to be a cultural icon in the political culture of the Anglo-American world. In Unit 2 we also mentioned the impact of *Magna Carta* in the twentieth century through Eleanor Roosevelt's speech on the adoption of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* by the General Assembly of the United Nations in Paris, in which she referred to it as "the international *Magna Carta* of all men everywhere".

In this unit we shall explore how the political culture of England crossed the Atlantic Ocean, and became very influential in the foundation of its colonies first, and then in the foundation of the United States of America. This is a significant case of cultural translation, understood in broad terms—although it did not involve a change in language, it did involve the appropriation of the language of the English political tradition: this is called intra-linguistic translation (as opposed to inter-linguistic translation, which takes place between two different languages). This was a rather paradoxical process, since the new American Republic that appropriated this language had sought independence from the British Empire.

As we shall see, the United States also appropriated the cultural, religious and political capital of the Protestant Reformation, and also of certain important aspects of the Enlightenment: this included the thought and the political discourse of Thomas Paine, a tremendously important author who was influential both in England, in the American Revolution that led to the independence of the United States, and also in the French Revolution.

As John Adams' *Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law* (1765) proves, the American Founding Fathers—i.e. the leaders of the revolution that led to the political independence of the British American colonies—looked back upon this particular English tradition, and more specifically, upon the political and religious debates at issue in England during the seventeenth century, as milestones on the path to the religious, political and civil creed that led to the creation of the United States of America. This is a topic related to the so-called 'Whig view of history' (we shall read a text about this in Unit 8)

An important cultural legacy that the United States also appropriated was the language of Scripture, and more specifically the language of the King James Bible, which is present in the Anglo-American tradition, and continues to this day, both in politics, and also in popular culture. As this unit will demonstrate, the political and religious discourse produced by English culture crossed the Atlantic and was fruitfully transplanted in the United States, and the joint action of the British Empire, first, and then the global dominance of the United States throughout the twentieth century, led to our current global English-speaking culture. This unit will look at some cases that illustrate this evolution.

MAGNA CARTA: A POLITICAL ICON IN CURRENT GLOBAL ANGLO-AMERICAN CULTURE

TASK: Read text number 1. Find out about the history of human rights, and the sort of ideas that led to this particular declaration. Which other similar documents preceded the 1948 declaration? Write a short essay listing them, and explaining their origins and significance.

[1]

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT'S SPEECH ON THE ADOPTION OF THE *UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS* AS "THE INTERNATIONAL MAGNA CARTA OF ALL MEN EVERYWHERE"

(delivered 9 December 1948 in Paris, France: see the transcript and the video here: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/eleanorrooseveltdeclarationhumanrights.htm>)

"In giving our approval to the Declaration today it is of primary importance that we keep clearly in mind the basic character of the document. It is not a treaty; it is not an international agreement. It is not and does not purport to be a statement of law or of legal obligation. It is a Declaration of basic principles of human rights and freedoms, to be stamped with the approval of the General Assembly by formal vote of its members, and to serve as a common standard of achievement for all peoples of all nations.

We stand today at the threshold of a great event both in the life of the United Nations and in the life of mankind. This Universal Declaration of Human Rights may well become the international Magna Carta of all men everywhere. We hope its proclamation by the General Assembly will be an event comparable to the proclamation of the Declaration of the Rights of Man by the French people in 1789, the adoption of the Bill of Rights by the people of the United States, and the adoption of comparable declarations at different times in other countries.

At a time when there are so many issues on which we find it difficult to reach a common basis of agreement, it is a significant fact that 58 states have found such a large measure of agreement in the complex field of human rights. This must be taken as testimony of our common aspiration first voiced in the Charter of the United Nations to lift men everywhere to a higher standard of life and to a greater enjoyment of freedom. Man's desire for peace lies behind this Declaration. The

realization that the flagrant violation of human rights by Nazi and Fascist countries sowed the seeds of the last world war has supplied the impetus for the work which brings us to the moment of achievement here today.”

JOHN ADAMS. *A DISSERTATION ON THE CANON AND FEUDAL LAW* (1765)

Source: <http://www.teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=43>

John Adams (1735-1826) was one of the American Founding Fathers. He collaborated with Thomas Jefferson in the elaboration of the Declaration of Independence (1776). After George Washington, he became the second president of the United States.

The following text illustrates and embodies the main components that lie at the origins of American sense of national identity, and the principles that led to its political independence. On the one hand, it looks back upon the principles of the rule of law, and the limits to monarchical rule that were established in England in the middle ages (described in the preceding units), and on the other, it also refers to the important role played by the Protestant Reformation, and in particular, the radical Puritans, and the tradition of dissent that was established in England during the seventeenth century. The Pilgrims, i.e. those Puritans who fled England in the early years of the seventeenth century, crossed the ocean and settled in America. In doing so, according to Adams, they planted the seed of freedom in the New World, a seed which would later grow into the United States of America. These Pilgrims that fled religious persecution in England saw themselves as the new Israel, and America was for them the Promised Land, a New Jerusalem. This particular reading of the Bible—the typological reading of scripture—resulted in a sense of mission that pervades American culture.



John Adams, 2nd U.S. president

The text by Adams features key words and events: absolute monarchy, tyranny, Roman Catholicism (“the Romish clergy”), liberty, knowledge (the humanist and Enlightened educational ideals), virtue, the Reformation, or the religious and political conflicts in seventeenth-century England (“the execrable race of the Stuarts”). All of this led to the settlement of America by the Puritans (who are described as possessed of a spirit of “freedom of enquiry and examination”).

The text also mentions the fundamental concepts of government founded upon nature and reason, working not through mysteries, but common sense, and in a plain style that can be understood by common people, not a privileged elite of highly educated individuals. It refers both to the religious foundations of Anglo-American political culture (“that religious liberty with which Jesus had made them free”), as well as its secular roots in the pagan tradition of Greece and Rome (“the ancient seats of liberty”).

TASK: Read text number two and answer the following questions:

1. Does the text at some point explain the genealogy, and the historical origins, of America’s defence of liberty? Identify the paragraphs in the text, and comment
2. Explain the meaning of the following expressions and their relevance within the context of our syllabus

- *Absolute monarchy*
- *The two greatest systems of tyranny... the canon and the feudal law*
- *... and the people were held in ignorance, liberty, and with her, knowledge and virtue too, seem to have deserted the earth, and one age of darkness succeeded another*
- *From the time of the Reformation to the first settlement of America, knowledge gradually spread in Europe, but especially in England*
- *... the execrable race of the Stuarts, the struggle between the people and the confederacy aforesaid of temporal and spiritual tyranny, became formidable, violent, and bloody*
- *It was this great struggle that peopled America. It was not religion alone, as is commonly supposed; but it was a love of universal liberty, and a hatred, a dread, a horror, of the infernal confederacy before described, that projected, conducted, and accomplished the settlement of America.*
- *They knew that government was a plain, simple, intelligible thing, founded in nature and reason, and quite comprehensible by common sense.*
- *... the ancient seats of liberty, the republics of Greece and Rome*
- *... the education of our youth*
- *... public affairs, ... examination into the conduct of their superiors.*
- *... let every sluice of knowledge be opened and set a-flowing*

[2]

“In the earliest ages of the world, **absolute monarchy** seems to have been the universal form of government. Kings, and a few of their great counselors and captains, exercised a cruel **tyranny over the people**, who held a rank in the scale of intelligence, in those days, but little higher than the camels and elephants that carried them and their engines to war... Since the promulgation of Christianity, **the two greatest systems of tyranny** that have sprung from this original, **are the canon and the feudal law** ... By the former of these, the most refined, sublime, extensive, and astonishing constitution of policy that ever was conceived by the mind of man was framed by the **Romish clergy** for the aggrandizement of their own order. All the epithets I have here given to the **Romish policy** are just, and will be allowed to be so when it is considered, that they even **persuaded mankind to believe**, faithfully and undoubtingly, **that God Almighty had entrusted them with the keys of heaven**, whose gates they might open and close at pleasure; with a power of dispensation over all the rules and obligations of morality; with authority to license all sorts of sins and crimes; with a power of deposing princes and absolving subjects from allegiance; ... with **the mysterious, awful, incomprehensible power of creating out of bread and wine the flesh and blood of God himself** ...

Thus, as long as this confederacy lasted,¹ and the people were held in **ignorance, liberty**, and with her, **knowledge and virtue** too, seem to have deserted the earth, and one age of darkness succeeded another, till God in his benign providence raised up the champions who began and conducted the **Reformation**. **From the time of the Reformation to the first settlement of America, knowledge gradually spread in Europe, but especially in England**; and in proportion as that increased and spread among the people, **ecclesiastical and civil tyranny**, which I use as synonymous expressions for the canon and feudal laws, **seem to have lost their strength and weight**. The people grew more and more sensible of the wrong that was done them by these systems, more and more impatient under it, and determined at all hazards to rid themselves of it; till

¹ I.e. The confederacy between canon and feudal law.

at last, under *the execrable race of the Stuarts, the struggle between the people and the confederacy aforesaid of temporal and spiritual tyranny, became formidable, violent, and bloody.*

It was this great struggle that peopled America. It was not religion alone, as is commonly supposed; but it was a love of universal liberty, and a hatred, a dread, a horror, of the infernal confederacy before described, that projected, conducted, and accomplished the settlement of America. It was a resolution formed by a sensible people, — I mean the Puritans, — almost in despair... This people had been so vexed and tortured by the powers of those days, for no other crime than their knowledge and their freedom of inquiry and examination, and they had so much reason to despair of deliverance from those miseries on that side the ocean, that they at last resolved to fly to the wilderness for refuge from the temporal and spiritual principalities and powers, and plagues and scourges of their native country... After their arrival here, they began their settlement, and formed their plan, both of ecclesiastical and civil government, in direct opposition to the canon and the feudal systems. The leading men among them, both of the clergy and the laity, were men of sense and learning. To many of them the historians, orators, poets, and philosophers of Greece and Rome were quite familiar...

They knew that government was a plain, simple, intelligible thing, founded in nature and reason, and quite comprehensible by common sense. They detested all the base services and servile dependencies of the feudal system. They knew that no such unworthy dependencies took place in the ancient seats of liberty, the republics of Greece and Rome; and they thought all such slavish subordinations were equally inconsistent with the constitution of human nature and that religious liberty with which Jesus had made them free...

Their civil and religious principles, therefore, conspired to prompt them to use every measure and take every precaution in their power to propagate and perpetuate knowledge. For this purpose they laid very early the foundations of colleges...

It is true, there has been among us a party for some years, consisting chiefly not of the descendants of the first settlers of this country, but of high churchmen and high statesmen imported since, who affect to censure this provision for the education of our youth as a needless expense, and an imposition upon the rich in favor of the poor, and as an institution productive of idleness and vain speculation among the people, whose time and attention, it is said, ought to be devoted to labor, and not to public affairs, or to examination into the conduct of their superiors. And certain officers of the crown, and certain other missionaries of ignorance, foppery, servility, and slavery, have been most inclined to countenance and increase the same party. Be it remembered, however, that liberty must at all hazards be supported. We have a right to it, derived from our Maker. But if we had not, our fathers have earned and bought it for us, at the expense of their ease, their estates, their pleasure, and their blood. And liberty cannot be preserved without a general knowledge among the people, who have a right, from the frame of their nature, to knowledge, as their great Creator, who does nothing in vain, has given them understandings, and a desire to know; but besides this, they have a right, an indisputable, unalienable, indefeasible, divine right to that most dreaded and envied kind of knowledge, I mean, of the characters and conduct of their rulers...

Let us presume, what is in fact true, that the spirit of liberty is as ardent as ever among the body of the nation, though a few individuals may be corrupted. Let us take it for granted, that the same great spirit which once gave Cesar so warm a reception, which denounced hostilities against John till Magna Charta was signed, which severed the head of Charles the First from his body, and drove James the Second from his kingdom, the same great spirit (may heaven preserve it till the earth shall be no more) which first seated the great grandfather of his present most gracious majesty on the throne of Britain, — is still alive and active and warm in England; and that the same spirit in America, instead of provoking the inhabitants of that country, will endear us to them for ever, and secure their good-will...

Let us tenderly and kindly cherish, therefore, the means of knowledge. Let us dare to read, think, speak, and write...

Let us study the law of nature; search into the spirit of the British constitution; read the histories of ancient ages; contemplate the great examples of Greece and Rome; set before us the conduct of our own

British ancestors, who have defended for us the inherent rights of mankind against foreign and domestic tyrants and usurpers, against arbitrary kings and cruel priests...

In a word, let every sluice of knowledge be opened and set a-flowing. The encroachments upon liberty in the reigns of the first James and the first Charles, by turning the general attention of learned men to government, are said to have produced the greatest number of consummate statesmen which has ever been seen in any age or nation. The Brookes, Hampdens, Vanes, Seldens, Miltons, Nedhams, Harringtons, Nevilles, Sidneys, Lockes, are all said to have owed their eminence in political knowledge to the tyrannies of those reigns. The prospect now before us in America, ought in the same manner to engage the attention of every man of learning, to matters of power and of right, that we may be neither led nor driven blindfolded to irretrievable destruction."

GENEALOGIES: FROM PAINE'S *COMMON SENSE* TO JEFFERSON'S *DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE* AND BARAK OBAMA'S SPEECH

The following texts illustrate the influence of Thomas Paine—an intellectual and political thinker who was in turn the heir of radical Protestantism, and the secular English Enlightenment—upon the Declaration of Independence, and how the figures and the ideas of both lie behind a speech by the president of the United States, Barack Obama. For further details on Tom Paine, see unit 6.

TASK. Read texts [7], [8], [9] [10] and [11] and answer the following questions:

1. Compare text (A) from the *American Declaration of Independence* (1776), with text (B), from George Buchanan's *De Jure Regni apud Scotos* (1579), which we studied in unit 4.1, and comment:

(A)

Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government

(B)

Kings do not exercise authority by divine or other inherent right, but are created kings by election at the hands of their people, and on condition of maintaining the laws. This contract does not create society, which is necessary for the maintenance of an ameliorated, stable, and civilized society. Failure on the part of a subject to obey the laws deprives him of their protections; and failure on the part of the ruler to maintain and observe them places him, likewise, outside the protection of the laws

2. What is the connection between Paine and Jefferson? How do both of them relate to traditional English political culture, and to the Enlightenment?
3. Which other, non-English sources, stand behind the Anglo-American tradition that these authors and these texts represent? How do these different sources appear reflected in the murals that illustrate texts 9 to 11, and decorate the walls of the National Archives in Washington?
4. How does Obama's speech relate to current issues, like the threat of terrorism and human rights?

[7]

"If Paine's reputation in America was to subside almost as quickly as it had flared, his **central belief in the sanctity of the rights of man was perpetuated in American political life by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence (1776)**, the necessarily final statement in the long debate over the right relationship of America and Great Britain.

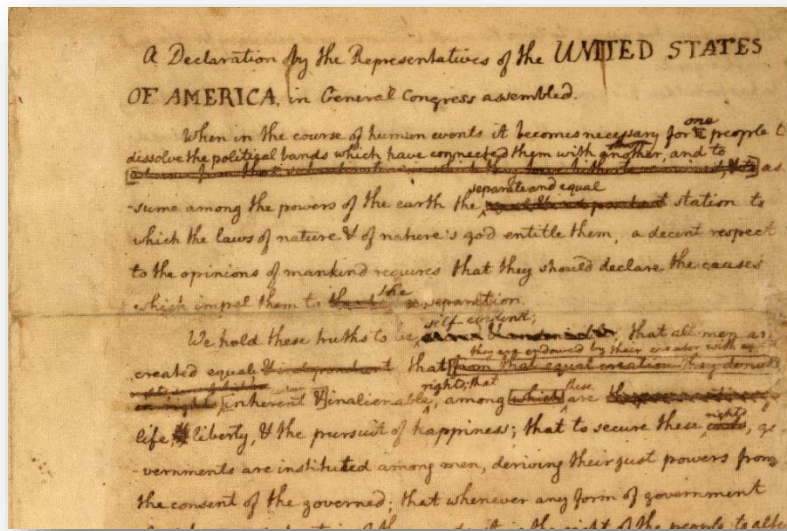
(...)

Grounded on the three terms of its controlling syllogism, **the Declaration moves from its opening proclamation of the people's right to overthrow a destructive government**, through its accumulated evidence of the destructive nature of British rule in America, to its concluding declaration of the independence of the colonies from that rule.

(...)

In its assertion of the Lockean doctrines of natural rights and the consent of the governed as the only basis of legitimate rule, it became the most radical, as well as the most fundamental, of the national documents, subjecting all future American governments to its own stern tests of justice and right. **To the world at large, it marked the opening of the age of revolution, taking its place as the first of the great manifestos of human rights that the next two centuries would call forth.**"

(Thomas Philbrick, "The American Revolution as a Literary Event", in Emory Elliott, gen. ed., *Columbia Literary History of the United States*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 139-55, pp. 144-45)



A draft for the Declaration of Independence

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE AND ITS SOURCES: ARISTOTLE – CICERO – LOCKE

[8]

"The Declaration of Independence was written by **Thomas Jefferson**, with some assistance from **Benjamin Franklin** and **John Adams**. Its purpose was to furnish a moral and legal justification for the rebellion. Much of it consists of a lengthy enumeration of the wrongs committed against the colonists since 1763, all of them laid squarely, but somewhat unfairly, at the door of George III, who was accused of seeking deliberately to establish an 'absolute Tyranny over these States'. But the subsequent fame of the Declaration rests upon its brief preamble, a lucid and eloquent statement of the political philosophy underlying the colonists' assertion of independence. Jefferson never claimed any originality for his handiwork; it was intended, he said, to be simply 'an expression of the American mind'. **In proclaiming certain truths to be 'self-evident' he drew upon the natural-rights philosophy that dated back to Aristotle and Cicero and had been given classic formulation in 1690 in John Locke's second *Treatise on Civil Government*. According to this, men possessed certain natural rights which Jefferson defined as 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness'. Governments were established to secure those rights, derived their just powers from the consent of the governed, and could legitimately be overthrown if they subverted the purposes they were created to serve.**"

(Maldwyn A. Jones, *The Limits of Liberty. American History 1607-1992*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2nd edition 1995, pp. 37-57, pp. 46-48)

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

[9]

“In Congress, July 4, 1776.

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,

*When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the **Laws of Nature and of Nature's God** entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.*

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.--Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world. [...]

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.”

Click here to access the text of the United States Constitution and other related documents:
<http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution.html>

OBAMA, THE FOUNDING FATHERS AND ABRAHAM LINCOLN. OBAMA'S SPEECH AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES IN WASHINGTON ON MAY 21ST 2009

The following are excerpts from the speech that Barak Obama gave in the National Archives in Washington on May 21st 2009. Rhetorically and visually, Obama inscribes himself and his political agenda—even his own personal experience—as part of a larger narrative of American national identity which, in some respects, has close links with the radical tradition of the Levellers, Thomas Paine, the Founding Fathers, and ultimately, Magna Carta.



The fact that Obama chose to deliver this speech at the National Archives in Washington is very significant. This building houses the originals of the Declaration of Independence, the American Constitution and the American Bill of Rights. Obama chose to deliver his speech and to stage his public appearance standing before two large murals that commemorate and celebrate two founding moments of the United States of America: the Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution.

You can see the murals here: http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/charters_mural_declaration_b.html#





Barry Faulkner, *Declaration* (1936)



You can find more information at <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/convention/faulkner/>

This website is also the source of the following text:

[10]

“Faulkner's 1936 rendition of the Constitutional Convention—coinciding with the opening of the National Archives—has the delegates standing in an ancient Roman setting rather than sitting in a Philadelphia assembly hall. Faulkner's portrait of the Framers of the Constitution was not well received originally. One commentator said he “must have been reading Roman history and not American history.”

Faulkner's affection for the outdoors is reflected in “The Constitution,” in which the Founding Fathers are outside, making this painting different from the indoor interpretations. Indeed, unlike the other works depicting the signing of the Constitution, this one seems almost to have been painted with the out of doors landscape and Roman architecture as the main considerations. There are no tables, no windows, no drapes, and no Philadelphia. Faulkner was chosen by John Russell Pope, who was known as the “last of the Romans.” Pope designed both the National Archives and the Jefferson Memorial”

Note the reference in this text to the Roman influence in the decoration, and also in the architectural design of the building of the National Archives as well as of the Lincoln

Memorial: this is another case of America's divided soul between republic² and empire. It also proves how, in the narrative of Anglo-American cultural and political identity, Rome (and Greece) play an important role as founding milestones.

Obama chose this setting to make an important announcement: the closing down of the Guantanamo detention facility, in which suspected terrorists are held without the basic rights granted to a normal citizen. For instance, there is no *habeas corpus* in Guantanamo: as we have seen before, the *habeas corpus* was already enshrined for the first time in Magna Carta (unit 2). In the question of Guantanamo, and the balance that must be kept between essential rights such as *habeas corpus* and the sort of security that must be implemented in the face of terrorist threats, the United States also wavers between the idealized principles of a republic founded upon the principles of liberty and due process of law, on the one hand, and its actual status as a global empire, on the other, with the power to impose its will by political, economic, and military means.

All of this comes to show that certain trends in our current political rhetoric—in our global political culture indeed—relies on language and tropes, on concepts and principles, that are part of the larger narrative of Anglo-American political culture. In order to justify his policies, and to reinforce them before public opinion, as the following text demonstrates, Obama is turning to this tradition to effect a transfer of cultural, political and moral capitals so he can push his agenda.

In this website you can read a transcript of the speech, and also watch it on video:
<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobama/barackobamanationalarchives.htm>

[11]

*I believe with every fiber of my being that **in the long run we ... cannot keep this country safe unless we enlist the power of our most fundamental values. The documents that we hold in this very hall – the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights – are not simply words written into aging parchment. They are the foundation of liberty and justice in this country, and a light that shines for all who seek freedom, fairness, equality and dignity in the world.***

I stand here today as someone whose own life was made possible by these documents. My father came to our shores in search of the promise that they offered. My mother made me rise before dawn to learn of their truth when I lived as a child in a foreign land. My own American journey was paved by generations of citizens who gave meaning to those simple words – “to form a more perfect union.” I have studied the Constitution as a student; I have taught it as a teacher; I have been bound by it as a lawyer and legislator. I took an oath to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution as Commander-in-Chief, and as a citizen, I know that we must never – ever – turn our back on its enduring principles for expedience sake.

[...]

*We do need to update our institutions to deal with this threat. But we must do so with an abiding confidence in **the rule of law and due process; in checks and balances and accountability.** For reasons that I will explain, the decisions that were made over the last eight years established an *ad hoc* legal approach for fighting terrorism that was neither effective nor sustainable – a framework that failed to rely on our legal traditions and time-tested institutions; that failed to use our values as a compass. And that is why I took several steps upon taking office to better protect the American people.*

² As Obama declares in his speech: “the United States of America grew from a small string of colonies under the writ of an empire”, or in other words, the United States fought British imperialism to gain its independence as a free republic: the first free democratic republic that followed the principles of the Enlightenment (or at least, some of them: we must not forget slavery).

First, I banned the use of so-called enhanced interrogation techniques³ by the United States of America.

[...]

As Senator McCain once said, torture “serves as a great propaganda tool for those who recruit people to fight against us.” We must leave these methods where they belong – in the past. They are not who we are. They are not America.

The second decision that I made was to order the closing of the prison camp at Guantanamo Bay.

For over seven years, we have detained hundreds of people at Guantanamo. During that time, the system of Military Commissions at Guantanamo succeeded in convicting a grand total of three suspected terrorists. Let me repeat that: three convictions in over seven years. Instead of bringing terrorists to justice, efforts at prosecution met setbacks, cases lingered on, and in 2006 the Supreme Court invalidated the entire system.



The Lincoln Memorial, designed by the architect Henry Bacon, and dedicated in 1922 to the memory of Abraham Lincoln. It was built following the design of a Greek temple. A few years later (1936), Barry Faulkner would design and paint the murals for the National Archives using Roman patterns. As many political and cultural agents had already done in the Renaissance (see for instance, the façade of the Cathedral, or the Palace of Charles V, both in Granada), or in the English eighteenth-century (see Joseph Addison’s *Cato* in unit 6), the United States also sought to appropriate the political and cultural capital, the legitimacy and prestige that belonged to Greek democracy and culture, the Roman republic, and the Roman empire. These acts of appropriation took place in the realms of political discourse, but also within the fields of literature, the visual arts and architecture. They are all cases of cultural translation, or cultural transfer.

³ A euphemism for torture

THE BIBLE, TRANSLATION AND ANGLO-AMERICAN CULTURE. THE GETTYSBURGH
ADDRESS AND THE LANGUAGE OF THE KING JAMES VERSION

In the early years of the sixteenth century, Martin Luther gained a much larger audience, and stirred controversy with his pamphlets, by using German to spread his ideas. He also used a common variety of German to translate the Bible. In doing so, he contributed with his translation to the creation of a common variety, which avoided the peculiarities of the different regional dialects. This contributed first to a common sense of purpose for all German Protestants, but it also contributed to create a sense of common linguistic and cultural community. In England, Protestants also produced several translations of the Bible. One of the most influential was the so-called *King James Version (KJV)* or *King James Bible (KJB)*, produced in 1611 (for further details on the *King James Bible* see unit 4.1). The style used in this English translation proved very influential first in England, and then in the British Empire. The following text explores the extremely prolific linguistic and cultural legacy of this translation, and its influence upon the United States.

In this excerpt the author underlines how Lincoln appropriated for his own political agenda the language and the rhetoric of the *King James Version*. The fact that one of the founding figures in the narrative of current American cultural and political identity turned to the language of the *KJV* is very significant. The rhetoric that Lincoln uses is also part of a larger narrative of American identity, in which the Puritans who fled England in the seventeenth century and landed in New England are the modern counterpart of the people of Israel in the Old Testament. Under this narrative, the Puritans who founded the United States were the new chosen people (like the Israelites were the chosen people in the Bible). In the same way as the Israelites had been liberated from the tyranny of the Pharaoh in Egypt, and led by God across the desert to reach the Promised Land, the Puritans who fled Europe in the seventeenth century crossed the Atlantic to reach the shores of America, and found the New Israel. Note also how the text points out that the Bible could be used both by defenders of slavery as well as abolitionists, to argue for their respective cases.

TAST: Read texts 3 and 4, and answer the following questions:

1. What was the Gettysburgh Address? Find information about it and tell the rest of the class.
2. How does Lincoln reproduce, or imitate, the language of the *KJV* in this address?
3. How did those involved in the American Civil War (the North, the South, and the slaves), each of them interpret the text of the Bible for their own purposes? Identify the texts, and comment.

[3]

“Abraham Lincoln’s religious convictions are not clear, but in his Gettysburgh Address he provides one of the greatest examples of the centrality of the King James Version to American culture, in that its lofty sentiments are articulated in the language of the King James Version. Its opening words, ‘Four score⁴ and seven years ago our fathers’, echo ‘The days of our years are three score years and ten’ (Psalm 90:10). ‘Brought forth’ is a common locution in the King James Version, but Lincoln’s words resonate specifically with the repeated assertion that God ‘brought forth’ Israel from the bondage of Egypt, and the use of the same idiom to announce childbirth: Mary ‘brought forth a son’, just as ‘our fathers on this continent brought forth a new nation’. The central verse of the conversionist preaching of the nineteenth century, ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life’ (John 3:16), is echoed in phrases such as ‘shall not perish’, ‘new birth’, and ‘here

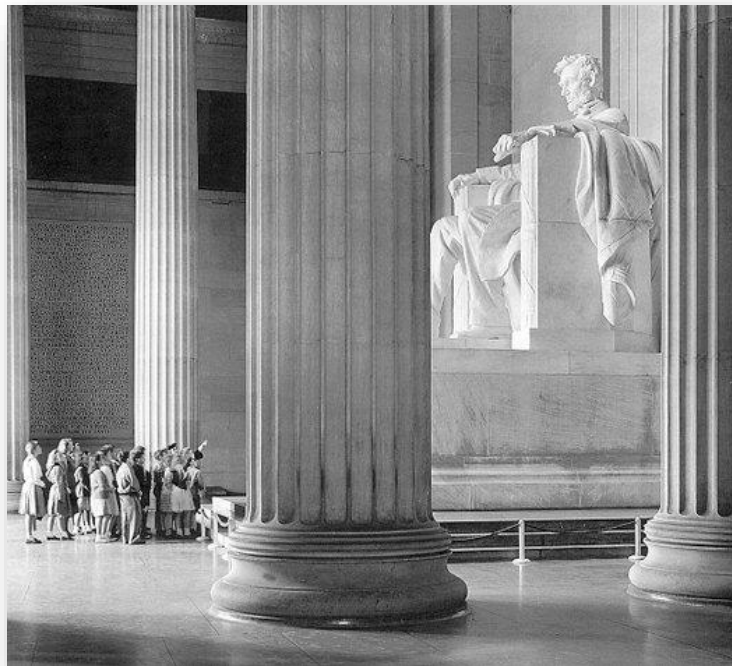
⁴ ‘Score’ here means a group of twenty. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* ‘The combinations threescore adj. and fourscore adj. are common as mere archaistic synonyms for sixty and eighty; the similar combinations with other numerals are rarely used exc. when there is intentional division into groups of 20.’

gave their lives that that nation might live'. In his second inaugural address, delivered a month before his assassination, Lincoln observed the tragic fact that in the American Civil War both sides 'read the same Bible'; for Protestants on both sides, that meant the KJV:

Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces, but let us judge not, that we be not judged... The Almighty has his own purposes. 'Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh'. If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God may always ascribe to Him?

In these noble words, which are suffused with the language of the KJV (and include a quotation from Matthew 18:7), Lincoln shows that he is fully alert to the use both sides could make of the Bible. On the contentious issue of slavery, southern proponents could and did cite 'of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall she buy... and they shall be your possession' (Leviticus 25:45); northern opponents of slavery, on the other hand, could and did cite 'Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage' (Galatians 5:1). Biblical images of emancipation had obvious appeal to African Americans, in whose culture the KJV became deeply embedded, notably in the tradition of spirituals that celebrated Moses leading the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, Daniel's escape from the lions' den, Jonah's escape from the belly of the whale, and the notion of peace in a Christian heaven."

(Gordon Campbell, *Bible. The Story of the King James Version. 1611-2011*. Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 205-208)



The interior of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington

ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S GETTYSBURGH ADDRESS

The Gettysburgh Address is probably one of the most important speeches in American history, and as such it still plays a central role in the narrative of American national and political identity. It was delivered in the middle of the American Civil War (on Nov. 19th 1863), during Lincoln's dedication of a memorial (the Soldiers' National Cemetery) to the victims of the Battle of Gettysburgh, in Pennsylvania. As the text by Gordon Campbell has demonstrated, it relies to a certain extent on the language of the KJV, and there are also clear echoes of the Declaration of Independence, and the American Constitution. Consequently, part of its egalitarian message also hails from the principles of the American Founding Fathers, and it is part of the larger narrative of Anglo-American cultural and political identity.

You can find the transcript, as well as some audio files with performances of the speech, here: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gettysburgaddress.htm>

[4]

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation, so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate, we can not consecrate, we can not hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.



QUENTIN TARANTINO'S *PULP FICTION* AND *EZEKIEL 25:17*. TRANSLATING THE KING JAMES VERSION INTO POSTMODERN POPULAR CULTURE

TASK: read texts [5] and [6] and watch the clips, then comment on how Tarantino uses the language of the Bible for his own particular purposes. How do the passages used in the movie resonate within the new context? Would this be a case of cultural, intra-linguistic translation? If so, justify your answer and explain.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJCa6Bp6vOo>

In this scene, the two gunmen Jules (Samuel L. Jackson) and Vincent (John Travolta) work for a crime boss. They are about to do a job for him, taking revenge on someone who tried to swindle their employer. Before shooting his victim, Jules asks "Have you read your Bible?" and, he goes on like this:

[5]

"There's a passage I got memorized, seems appropriate for this situation: Ezekiel 25:17: "The path of the righteous man is beset on all sides by the inequities of the selfish and the tyranny of evil men. Blessed is he who, in the name of charity and good will, shepherds the weak through the valley of darkness, for he is truly his brother's keeper and the finder of lost children. And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger those who attempt to poison and destroy my brothers. And you will know my name is the Lord when I lay my vengeance upon you."

The quotation is not accurate, and only the last two lines of the quotation come from the Bible. But the rest of his quotation is full of echoes from the language of the Bible, and here a gunman who is taking revenge on behalf of his boss, appropriates for himself the

voice of the vengeful God of the Old Testament. Other phrases that he uses which have biblical echoes are “my brother’s keeper” (Gen 4:9), “shepherding the weak” or “the finder of lost children”. This amounts to a striking displacement, a wild decontextualization of the language of the Bible, which now appears used side by side with a slang version of current American English

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3PeyiU3uWJ8> (starts at around 2:25)

Towards the end of the movie, Jules and Vince witness a hold-up in a restaurant. And again, Jules recites his version of Ezekiel 25:17, and adds:

[6]

"I been sayin' that shit for years. And if you heard it, that meant your ass. I never gave much thought to what it meant. I thought it was just a cold-blooded thing to say to a motherfucker 'fore you popped a cap in his ass. But I saw some shit this mornin' made me think twice. You see, now I'm thinkin', maybe it means you're the evil man. And I'm the righteous man. And Mr. Nine-millimetre here [Vince], he's the shepherd protecting my righteous ass in the valley of darkness. Or it could mean you're the righteous man and I'm the shepherd and it's the world that's evil and selfish. I'd like that. But that shit ain't the truth. The truth is you're the weak. And I'm the tyranny of evil men. But I'm tryin', Ringo. I'm tryin' real hard to be the shepherd."

