10-2014

Cowboys, Angels, and Demons: American Exceptionalism and the Frontier Myth in the CW's 'Supernatural'

Joesph M. Valenzano
University of Dayton, jvalenzanoiii1@udayton.edu

Cowboys, Angels, and Demons: American Exceptionalism and the Frontier Myth in the CW's 'Supernatural'

Abstract
The CW network series *Supernatural* (2005–) draws its text from the horror and fantasy genres as well as religious mythology. Concurrently, it transmits a core "American" mythos. As its protagonists keep watch along a supernatural frontier and eradicate threats to the American way of life, this program both reinforces and alters aspects of the frontier myth and the myth of American exceptionalism by depicting its main characters as representations of America writ large whose mission has grown from an appointment by God to being equals to God.

In this manner, *Supernatural* forwards a new American exceptionalism through the notion that America is exceptional because it is not just divinely appointed by God, but is divine itself.

Disciplines
Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion | Social Influence and Political Communication | Television

Comments
The document available for download is the author's accepted manuscript, provided with permission. Permission documentation is on file.

Some differences may exist between this version and the published version; as such, researchers wishing to quote directly from this source are advised to consult the version of record.

Cowboys, Angels, and Demons:

American Exceptionalism and the Frontier Myth in the CW's *Supernatural*

Abstract

The CW network series *Supernatural* (2005-) draws its text from the horror and fantasy genres as well as religious mythology. Concurrently, it transmits a core "American" mythos. As its protagonists keep watch along a supernatural frontier and eradicate threats to the American way of life, this program both reinforces and alters aspects of the Frontier Myth and the myth of American Exceptionalism by depicting its main characters as representations of America writ large whose mission has grown from an appointment by God to being equals to God. In this manner, *Supernatural* forwards a new American Exceptionalism through the notion that America is exceptional because it is not just divinely appointed by God, but is divine itself.

Key Words: American Exceptionalism, Frontier Myth, *Supernatural*, Media Criticism

Cowboys, Angels, and Demons:

American Exceptionalism and the Frontier Myth in the CW's *Supernatural*

Humankind has long been fascinated with questions about the afterlife, end times told in prophecies, and monsters (Poole, 2012). Horror, the filmic genre that includes these elements, has remained a popular and successful way of conveying depictions of fear and the unknown for some nine decades (Kane, 2006). However, the translation of big screen monsters, ghosts, and the religiosity present in many film treatments of supernatural narratives has not enjoyed the same level of success, noted Hills (2005), who attributed this to the viewing nature of the small screen in term of the gaze required for watching film versus the "glances" through which viewers consume television, and the self-imposed censorship of the television industry (p. 112). Religious-oriented narratives, ones that undergird stories about spirits, the dead, and the undead, similarly find difficulty maintaining a sustained presence on television; stories about the Apocalypse are "not well suited to television" (Mitchell, 2001), and a self-censorship of overt depictions of religious faiths results in "flattened" depiction of religion in order not to offend viewers (Roof, 1997).

One program on network television, however, has found long-term (in television time keeping) success despite, or because, it combines the horror genre with clearly Biblical-based storylines that feature angels, demons, and a God based in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. *Supernatural*, broadcast on the "fifth network" CW (DeCandido, 2009) since 2005, features two young brothers from Kansas who roam the United States in order seek and eliminate ghosts, monsters,

and all manner of mythic creatures originating in both Christian and pagan lore. Aired on a network known for targeting a young demographic, *Supernatural* not only succeeds as an example of a horror show on television, but embraces a Catholic version of faith as the hegemonic power in the religious arena (Engstrom & Valenzano, 2010; Valenzano & Engstrom, 2013). Indeed, over the course of the 2012-2013 network television season, *Supernatural* topped all returning series in ratings gains among the 18 to 49 demographic (Adalian & Woocher, 2013). *Supernatural*'s longevity, based on sustained viewership justifying its continual renewal for the past eight seasons, contradicts both Mitchell's observation on apocalyptic television and the idea that stories supporting a particular religious mythology or faith cannot be successful on the small screen.

The centrality of a Judeo-Christian God and the treatment of pagan religions and mythologies, and their respective gods and creatures, in a horror drama about two Midwestern demon hunters does more than break traditional notions of storytelling expectations on television. In addition to acknowledging and legitimizing myths originating in ancient cultures and religious practices, such as the Norse, Greek, and Hindu pantheons and the folklore of non-Western cultures, it simultaneously distinguishes "America" as a site for myth origination. The myths of America, ones rooted in the very beginnings of a nation deemed by its founders as unique and superior to all others, forward an altered answer to the question of purpose and destiny inherent in stories about gods, the notion of an undying soul, and the fear perpetrated by the unknown. The destined fate for America and those

who espouse the beliefs embodied in those myths lies in its favored status bestowed by an all-powerful God.

In that myths, urban legends, and cultural lore, "articulate our experience of ourselves in our social and natural environment" (Austin, 1990, p. 5), they provide clarity and order to an otherwise chaotic world, and unite "members of a society in their struggles against grand challenges and fuels their ongoing quest to achieve 'the good life'" (Chidester, 2009, p. 355). Ultimately, mythic stories create, establish, and reinforce the values held by people in a community (Eliade, 1963); they serve as prisms through which a community views and understands the world, and the heroes they feature serve as a dimension that demarcates cultures from each other (Hofstede, 2001). In sum, myths thus "constitute a powerful epistemological rhetoric that offers compelling explanations for the community's development of fundamental concepts such as identity, morality, religion and law" (Dorsey & Harlow, 2003, p. 62).

Various media disseminate these myths throughout a society, expanding their appeal to the masses by promoting cultural cohesion. As a "cultural storyteller" (Hoover, 1988, p. 241), television serves as a central institution for conveying "the wisdom of the community" (Thorburn, 1987, p. 170). Fictional or dramatic texts mediated as television programs convey what Thorburn termed a "consensus narrative," consisting of a "matrix" of values and assumptions about a culture (p. 167). *Supernatural*, a fictional program which draws its text from the horror and fantasy genres as well as religious mythology, serves as a means of

transmitting a consensus narrative reflective of a core "American" mythos—a mythos tied closely to the Christian tradition.

In this essay, we argue that *Supernatural* reifies core aspects of the myth of American Exceptionalism and the Frontier Myth. Moreover, we see it as actually changing the definition of America's exceptional character inherent in these cultural myths. Specifically, that change promotes Americanism—as espoused in these two myths—as not only a manifestation of a divinely ordained status in the world, but, through the depiction of its brother protagonists, as evolving into a mythos that places America on an equal plane in terms of power with the divine. In this manner, we view the story of the Winchesters as the story of America as it defeats obstacles that threaten the safety of not only its own homeland but of the world. The 21st century version of this composite American mythos as told in the fantastical stories of the demon-fighting brothers from Kansas thus offers a venue for a consensus narrative that reflects the American identity as told through the small screen. Further, we see these "small" stories, depicted in everyday settings in the present day, as continuing a larger, mythic story originating hundreds of years ago—a story that permeates the nature of contemporary politics of a modern nation grappling with very real shadows that threaten those placed within its protective charge.

To support our argument, we first describe briefly the crux of the narrative of *Supernatural.* We then review the tenets of the two main elements of American mythos, American Exceptional and the Frontier Myth, for which this particular television series serves as a representative anecdote. We uncover how these tenets reveal themselves within the narrative of *Supernatural*. Following this exposition, we

discuss the implications of the incorporation of this American mythos in this popular television program, with the aim of explicating the importance of television as a cultural storyteller and rhetorical tool for the perpetuation of a cultural and national identity.

Supernatural: The Road Story So Far

Supernatural, first aired in the fall of 2005 on the WB Network, began its eighth season in 2012 on the WB's successor network, the CW. Series creator Eric Kripke, wanted to explore American urban legends and folklore using a *Route 66*-style plot wherein two brothers named Winchester explore the back roads of America to fight demons, monsters, ghosts, and other mythical foes (S. Abbott, 2011). Indeed, Petruska (2011) noted the series' achievement of "repeatedly defeating the odds," such as debuting on the WB network and facing competition from science fiction offerings on the three major television networks, all of which eventually were cancelled (p. 220).

Set in the present day United States, *Supernatural* follows the paranormal adventures of brothers Sam and Dean Winchester as they travel the countryside in a black 1967 Chevy Impala, a classic American "muscle car." The aesthetic quality of the series borrows from the horror genre; filmed in dark, muted colors, the action often occurs during nighttime, and settings include haunted houses, cemeteries, and crypts. Special effects associated with monsters and ghosts, such as blood, apparitions, mythical creatures likes vampires and shapeshifters, and "black smoke" representing demons that possess humans, further define the series as decidedly dark.

During its fourth season, *Supernatural* became more strongly focused on Christian mythology (Vollick, 2008). With that move toward a more overtly religious

flavor, an overarching storyline revealed that the Winchester brothers and their family were chosen by the forces of heaven and hell to play central roles in the Apocalypse as foretold in the Book of Revelation. This emphasis on Christian myth and Scripture explored via the American "road story" genre created a fertile ground for the promulgation of American cultural values rooted in the Frontier Myth and a self-perceived national exceptionality. In season five, the Winchesters discover they were to serve as the human vessels for both Lucifer and the archangel Michael so that Armageddon may commence. During their mission to avert the eventual destruction of the world, they discover that God is nowhere to be found; in the absence of their Father, the angels put into motion their plans to begin the Apocalypse, placing humanity at odds with Judeo-Christian divine forces. Ultimately, the brothers stop the Apocalypse, but in order to do so Sam must leap into the prison that once held Lucifer, taking the Archangel Michael with him, and leaving Dean on earth to pursue a "normal" life.

***Supernatural*'s home network, the CW (formerly the WB), targets the 18-to-34-year-old demographic (S. Abbott, 2011; Villareal, 2013). Similar to other programs in the "teen supernatural drama" format, such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel, Charmed,* and *Smallville, Supernatural* features young protagonists whose "hero's journey" reflects the consensus narrative associated with "finding one's place in the world" (Clifton, 2009, p. 120). Unlike the protagonists in other teen-targeted shows on networks such as the CW (and its predecessor the WB) and Fox (DeCandido, 2009, p. ix), the heroes of *Supernatural* aren't superheroes, possess no super strength, nor have alter egos. Instead, the "simple, sturdy Kansas stock" who prevent the very ending of the world as foretold in ancient Scripture had their**

burden thrust upon them as children (Garvey, 2009, p. 88), something quite similar to the divine mission thrust on the young United States by God according to the tenets of American Exceptionalism. Using text from *Supernatural*'s first five seasons—up to and including the resolution of the Apocalypse story arc—we explain how this horror-based television show performs and changes the signature characteristics of both the Frontier Myth and American Exceptionalism.[1]

Dimensions of American Exceptionalism and the Frontier Myth

In the United States, two core cultural myths communicated through film and television concern the American frontier experience and the origins of the nation itself: (1) the myth of American Exceptionalism, which claims the superiority of the American experience and design, and (2) the Frontier Myth, which glorifies American westward expansion. The former is characterized by the idea of the nation as unique, holding a special and sometimes divine place on the world stage; it serves as a source of discourse demarcating oppositional political worldviews regarding foreign policy ("Condoleezza Rice RNC Speech," 2012; "McCain: Obama Doesn't Believe," 2012; Obama, 2009).[2] The latter manifests itself in rhetorical forms like presidential speeches by Theodore Roosevelt, himself a metaphor for the Frontier Myth (Dorsey & Harlow, 2003).

The myth of American Exceptionalism finds its roots in the Puritan tradition, where Massachusetts Puritan leader John Winthrop's famous 1630 sermon, "A Model of Christian Charity," contained the earliest reference to the Massachusetts Bay Colony as a "new Israel." Winthrop called the colony a "city on a hill," a phrase later adapted by President Ronald Reagan to "a shining city on a hill" (Seiple, 2012), and by President

Barack Obama to "a shining beacon" ("Presidential Debate," 2008). Thomas Paine (1995) expressed a similar idea in *Common Sense*, when he wrote that America and Americans created distinct cultural qualities that made them different from their British cousins. These differences, borne out of both providence and geography, gave rise to the notion that the colonists should control their own destiny, because America is different and, for all intents and purposes, *better* than the rest of the world. This superiority, as depicted in *Supernatural*, evolved from a feeling of being better than other people and cultures, to being God-like in its power and presence.

Key to understanding this shift is an idea at the heart of the myth of American Exceptionalism: the United States is a special nation with a special divine destiny (McCrisken, 2003). American Exceptionalism also purports that the United States is qualitatively different from the Old World of Europe because its founding documents eliminated the corruption inherent in Europe while maintaining the nation's ability always to move forward. McCrisken (2003) cited a third element of the myth, which maintains that the United States will escape the ruinous fate of past great civilizations because of both its divine mission and perpetual state of improvement.

The rhetoric of American Exceptionalism takes two mutually exclusive forms: the mission of exemplar and the mission of intervention (Bostdorff, 1994; Edwards, 2008; Hodgson, 2009; Hunt, 2009; Lipset, 1996; Mason, 2009). The mission of intervention informs the depiction in the television show, *Supernatural.* An **interventionist rhetoric depicts** an America that must assert its exceptional qualities through active engagement with the world in politics, economics, and culture (Bostdorff, 1994), because "the United States has a divinely ordained mission to lead the rest of the

world" (Walt, 2011). Ultimately, this interpretation of the responsibilities borne of American Exceptionalism calls for an active America that shapes the world it helped to create.

One of the outgrowths of American Exceptionalism is the Frontier Myth. Explored by historians as well as communication scholars with regularity (Dorsey & Harlow, 2003; Hartnett, 2002; Nash, 1991; Rushing & Frentz, 1995; Stuckey, 2011), the Frontier Myth tells the story of "the expansion of American values, the national effort to tame faraway places, the promise of a bounty just over the horizon, and the essential virtue of the American people who explore and settle those frontiers" (Tirman, 2009, p. 30). Scholars find this expansionist vision of the meaning of "America" in an array of cultural art forms and media (C. Abbott, 2006; Dippie, 2004; Edgerton & Marsden, 2011; Slatta, 2010; West, 1996), including the development of the Internet (McLure, 2000; Wills, 2008). **The expansionist behaviors depicted in the Frontier Myth narrative are also indicative of an interventionist interpretation of exceptionalism. The main protagonists in the Frontier myth often intervene in the affairs of others to expand the acceptance of American values, such as justice.**

One finds perhaps the most enduring aspects of the Frontier Myth in its protagonist, the character of the American "cowboy." This character plays a central role in the American notion of individualism (Bellesiles, 2000); the iconic cowboy has become a familiar and popular protagonist in the Frontier Myth. Even European audiences embraced the American cowboy character (Billington, 1981), making it "the most iconic figure of the mythical West" (Slatta, 2010). Despite historical evidence to the contrary, the myth of the cowboy as a brave, free, and just—but violent—equestrian gun-

fighter prospers in cinematic and oral storytelling. Buffalo Bill Cody literally performed the "hero" figure in his famous Wild West show, dramatizing Custer's Last Stand as a "heroic conquest….[that] subdued dangerous wilderness, in the form of hostile Indians" (Kasson, 2000, p. 114).

In addition to the centrality of the hero archetype, Stuckey (2011) identified four elements of Frontier Myth rhetoric that guide our analysis: (1) erasure of indigenous people and other nonwhites; (2) the triumph of American civilization over the wilderness; (3) the allowance for individual aggression when it benefits the larger community's survival, based on Rushing's (1983) work; and (4) the idea of movement, key to the notion of Manifest Destiny. Conquering a wilderness that is a physical manifestation of all we fear, hate and consider "not us" (Rushing & Frentz, 1995) thus serves as an analogy for positive movement toward perfecting the imperfect. **Rather than a hindrance, this worldview sees the frontier as something to be explored and tamed through American expansion and intervention.**

As related concepts, American Exceptionalism and the Frontier Myth emphasize the uniqueness and the mission of the United States. The Frontier Myth emphasizes the importance of the hero, personified in the character of the cowboy who erases those vestiges of cultures that do not conform to the American way of life through individual acts of aggression on behalf of the community he protects**. In doing so, cowboys represent a traditional depiction of an interventionist interpretation of American Exceptionalism. Given its frequent use in storytelling throughout American history, cowboys in Frontier myth stories subtly assert a preference and acceptance for interventionist iterations of American Exceptionalism.**

Supernatural as Representative Anecdote

***Supernatural* offers "a curious hybrid of horror, Western, and melodrama," drawing upon folklore and a critique of religious dogma (S. Abbott, 2011, p. xv). Born into a blue-collar family of hunters—who seek out demons, monsters, ghosts, and all that is evil, dark, and dangerous—the Winchesters' story serves as a representative anecdote of core American myths. Brummett (1984) summarized this Burkean concept: "an anecdote is a dramatic form which underlies the content, or the specific vocabulary of discourse" (pp. 162-163). The show, in effect, serves as a filter through which we can understand how the myths that fuel America's purpose and view of destiny have evolved and altered.**

***Supernatural*, a television program based in the horror genre, offers a representative anecdote articulating the Frontier Myth and American Exceptionalism. In that "the cultural treatment of a myth responds to historical and political contingencies and may appropriate archetypal imagery, consciously or unconsciously" (Rushing & Frentz, 1995, p. 46), in the following sections we deconstruct how the story of the Winchester brothers on *Supernatural* consciously reifies the story of America, specifically the story told through the myth American Exceptionalism. The brothers, through their actions and characterization, as well as their use of symbolic devices for meting out justice, serve as modern-day manifestations of traditional Frontier Myth heroes.**

Its very premise, storylines, and characters cast *Supernatural* as rhetorical text promoting notion of a country and culture chosen by God to literally and metaphorically serve as the world's protectors against evil. That selection has

morphed into equanimity with the divine. Religious elements of American Exceptionalism emerge in the narrative of *Supernatural*, further cementing the identity of the Winchester as distinctly American. Indeed, their very blood both reifies aspects of "America's secular creation story" (Anderson, 2007, p. 1) and redefines the relationship between America and the God who initially endorsed its mission according to that cultural myth. We argue *Supernatural* redefines core American mythologies by altering America's special destiny and relationship to the divine in its depiction of those myths. To understand how those myths have been changed, we unpack how *Supernatural* manifests those myths, particularly through the portrayal of the Winchester brothers as divine cowboys, their actions as displaying interventionism, and, finally, how these heroes represent a progression from a divinely appointed status of protectors of the world to one equal to the very God who bestowed them with that mantle.

The Winchester Brothers as Cowboys

Series creator Eric Kripke acknowledged the five-year story arc as his original design, and that he wanted to depict strong average Americans as central to the narrative: "I always loved the idea that you have this very epic, highfalutin' prophecy about chosen ones and end times, and then you have this blue collar guy, who's American and stubborn and cocky, walk up to it and say 'Prophecy is for wussies. Go to Hell!' and kick it in the ass; just totally puncture it" (Knight, 2010, p. 9). Kripke's explanation of his vision for the show evidences how the Frontier Myth contributes to *Supernatural*'s approach to the construction of the good-versus-evil theme: "Putting a cowboy in the middle of *The Lord of the Rings* is something I've always really wanted to do because that stuff is a little self-

important, so you inflate the self-importance of it and then you immediately deflate it by saying 'Yeah, but that crap ain't American" (Knight, 2010, pp. 9-10). Kripke uses the descriptor of "cowboy" for the show's central theme, providing a clear link between *Supernatural* and this American archetype, but his emphasis on the power of the cowboy to reject and overturn divine authority cannot go unnoticed.

The Winchesters come from Lawrence, Kansas, located in the traditional heartland of the United States. Being from the Midwest himself (Ohio), Kripke understood the "Midwestern attitude" and "loved the idea of blue collar, Midwestern heroes" ("Ask Eric," 2009, p. 95).[3] Coupled with the reiteration of the Winchester brothers as "blue collar" and the statement, "There's humanity and a bunch of supernatural sons-of-bitches and humanity will always win" (Knight, 2010, p. 10), Kripke himself reveals that *Supernatural* relies on a certain pro-American, pro-exceptionalist stance. He also intimates that humanity trumps all supernatural forces, including the more religious entities like God, gods, angels, demons and the Devil.

Two other aspects of the protagonists and their mission illustrate a close connection to the cowboy motif. The brothers' very name—Winchester—invokes the famed American gun manufacturer the Winchester Repeating Arms Company, whose Winchester rifle is known in popular history as "The Gun That Won the West" (Library of Congress, 2006). Word play on the name Winchester appears in the episode "It's a Terrible Life," in which Sam and Dean are transported by the angel Zachariah into an alternate reality where their names are Wesson and Smith, respectively—allusions to the Smith and Wesson gun manufacturing company, which declares their guns have been "made in the USA since 1852" (Smith & Wesson, 2012). Additionally, in season one the

Winchesters find a magical gun, the "Colt"—made by another famous gun maker, Samuel Colt—which supposedly can kill anything, including demons.

Finally, the car the Winchesters drive is itself a contemporary version of a cowboy's horse. The vehicle, a black 1967 Chevrolet Impala, which Dean carefully restored and maintained takes the form of the modern day horse. In stories of the Old West, horses often come to the assistance of their riders, and in the episode "Swan Song," the culminating episode of the five-season story arc designed by Kripke, the Chevy plays a pivotal role in the brothers' victory in averting the Judeo-Christian Apocalypse. As told by the "prophet" Chuck at the start of the episode, this *American*-made car would become "the most important object in pretty much the whole universe" (Kripke & Nutter, 2010).

The Winchesters' constant state of movement in their Impala (horse) around the country provides the impression they literally are on the frontier, or periphery, of American society. Their surveillance of that frontier is required in order to vanquish the beasts and evil that everyday Americans do not know about.[4] Additionally, it illustrates the quality of movement and progress so inherent to the Frontier Myth in much the same way Stuckey (2011) noted the Donner Party's trapped status represented a fear of stagnation in American society. Rather than waiting for "fate" to come to them, the Winchesters—ever-on-the-move—reify the cowboy archetype; they seek out that which threatens to do harm to the people they protect. In this manner, they intervene on behalf of the innocent, which signifies an interventionist version of an exceptional America.

The Winchester Brothers as an Interventionist America

The interventionist version of American Exceptionalism calls for an active United States to intercede in the affairs of others and to help those others progress toward

democracy and American values. The monsters and demons in *Supernatural* represent threats to the social order, a requisite of the horror genre (Cowan, 2008) and an important part of the historical fabric of American culture (Poole, 2011). As cowboy characters, Sam and Dean actively seek and destroy supernatural threats to the American way of life, without regard to their own comfort. In this manner, the Winchesters represent the American military deployed around the world. Indeed, recent public relations efforts on television and the Internet on the part of the U.S. military play on this theme of doing good, with the U.S. Navy actually employing the slogan "America's Navy—A Global Force for Good" (Navy Recruiting Command, 2012).

The Winchesters, symbolizing the United States and its values, perform two types of intervention: preservation and erasure. The preservation function involves their efforts to intervene when a community has been duped into some perversion of American values, or when those values are threatened by an external force, such as demons or ghosts. Episodes in which the brothers take a "job" serve as stand-alone tales where they arrive in a town to save the local citizenry from a ghost, werewolf, vampire, or some lesser-known "Other" drawn from non-American cultures. In these stories, the Winchesters restore peace for the locals, thereby preserving the community and its values through their actions. The brothers' success in doing so provides an implicit acceptance of their authority to dispatch threats to the American way of life, further reconfirming their superior American judgment.

On some occasions, the brothers' preservationist interventions also serve to recalibrate the thinking of local citizens who, through either good intentions or no fault of their own, fall prey to bad behavior that countermands American and communal values.

For example, in "Faith," the brothers intervene to stop a faith healer's wife who has used black magic to bind a "reaper" (an escort of souls to the afterlife) to her service. She uses the reaper to save the lives of her husband's clients, a seemingly good behavior in that it saves lives and brings people closer to God, but at the price of someone else's life whom she chooses illustrating a perversion of the American value of justice. In "Houses of the Holy," the brothers confront the ghost of a recently murdered Catholic priest and again demonstrate their power to judge the good actions of others, a role reserved primarily for a God or gods. The ghost appears to members of his congregation, refers to himself as an angel, and calls on them to kill specific members of the community who have committed grievous crimes. Sam and Dean eventually convince the ghost he is not an angel, nor is he doing God's work. Thus, *they* define who can be an angel.

In both of these examples, the Winchesters intervene in a situation where community members administered a perverted form of justice. As stand-ins for America, the Winchesters' actions in these situations embody a repudiation of vigilante justice as enacted by the individuals in those episodes. Justice, then, becomes fair only when impartial judges, or those truly appointed by the divine, make such decisions. In effect this is a point of departure from the traditional conception of the cowboy in that the Winchesters discourage others' invocation of the hallmark behavior of their archetype while behaving as vigilantes themselves, but only because **they are the only ones** *divinely appointed* to do so. **In effect, they consider themselves as the ultimate authority on when intervention and action is called for, and thus serve as judge, jury, and even executioner for the behavior of others who try to dispense vigilante justice of their own.**

In other cases, the Winchesters directly eradicate monsters from the area. According to Stuckey (2011), this work typically involves "the erasure of indigenous peoples and other 'nonwhites'" (p. 232). The episode "Wendigo" serves as an example of such erasure as the Winchesters eliminated a creature drawn from Native American folklore. Regarding this erasure of the "Other," *Supernatural* performs a similar function with respect to non-Christian, and, in particular, non-Catholic faiths, by portraying them and their mythologies as villainous (Engstrom & Valenzano, 2013). The Winchesters target the pagan faith in particular on several occasions, and in each case, the brothers work to destroy the pagan god—usually characterized as evil and threatening, rather than benevolent—and thus erase it from the community, making it easier for the local citizens to practice their more "contemporary" and "acceptable" Christian faiths.

Three episodes serve to illustrate the erasure of pagan gods who demand human sacrifices. In "Scarecrow," Dean and Sam destroy a pagan god, the Vanir, worshipped by descendants of immigrant Northern Europeans. This pagan god keeps the town prosperous, but only if appeased by an annual human sacrifice. In "A Very Supernatural Christmas," the brothers defeat Western European pagan gods of the winter solstice who travel to a different town each year to claim a few human sacrifices. In "Fallen Idols," Sam and Dean encounter and destroy *Leshii*, an Eastern European pagan god of the forest, who had been taking the form of celebrities to claim human sacrifices from the local community. By vanquishing these evil, pagan gods, Sam and Dean erase them from religious tradition and "cleanse" the communities they terrorized.

Interventionist activity takes another turn in the middle of *Supernatural*'s fourth season, when the Winchesters begin to understand the angels and humanity have different

goals. In the episode "On the Head of a Pin" they realize that some angels are working to bring about the Apocalypse, and begin to see themselves on a different mission from those divine characters. In the first episode of the fifth season the brothers are tortured by Zachariah, an angel who also wants to bring about the end times. During the fifth season they continue to combat and kill these angels, thus eradicating those they do not see as serving the good of humanity. The very fact that humans like Sam and Dean can kill angels, the emissaries of God, illustrates how they eradicate and erase not just pagan gods and entities, but even those tied to Christianity.

Eric Kripke's label of Dean as a "cowboy" (Knight, 2010, p. 9), and his repeated emphasis on the "American" element of the overarching Apocalypse story, illustrates *Supernatural*'s utility as a vehicle for depicting American cultural myths. The reification of evil—portrayed as pagan gods and other supernatural forces that seek to kill humans—becomes a way to operationalize anti-American sentiment, further allowing for an interpretation of the interventionist view. Allusions to a central figure of the Frontier Myth, the cowboy, as the personification of "America" thus undergirds *Supernatural*'s overall narrative as the story of two Midwestern brothers who fight evil and protect humanity from the forces of heaven and hell, demonstrating America's independence from God and religion.

The Winchester Brothers: Beyond an Exceptional America

One of the key elements of the myth of American exceptionalism involves the role of the Judeo-Christian God, who chose the nation for a special destiny. In *Supernatural*, the Winchesters are told by angels that God—who never appears in the show and is actually revealed to be absent from Heaven—chose the brothers to be

primary actors in the Biblical prophecy of Armageddon, even though they still have the free will to avert it. The Winchesters, viewers learn, are not only well known in the "hunting" world (a subculture of fellow protectors in *Supernatural*), but are special brothers with a special destiny chosen by God. They, however, go from fulfilling that special destiny to actively working against its fulfillment. We read this evolution as advancing American exceptionalism—in the form of the Winchesters—from its original conception: Rather than a nation appointed by and subservient to God, it has exceeded its mandate and found a means to place God and his angels in the category of an evil Other. **The only true force for good, then, is the Winchesters and the America they represent.**

The entire Winchester family, not just Sam and Dean, holds a special status in the history of humankind, going back to the creation story written in the Old Testament. In "The Song Remains the Same," the archangel Michael, who has taken the form of a young John Winchester, explains to Dean about the Winchester family lineage: "It's a bloodline stretching back to Cain and Abel. It's in your blood, your father's blood, your family's blood" (Gamble, Weiner, & Boyum, 2010). America, embodied by the Winchesters, initially appears appointed by the divine entities of the Judeo-Christian tradition, until **it believes it is itself equal to, and even better than, God.**

During the fifth season the Winchesters actually die and go to Heaven to look for God. In the episode "Dark Side of the Moon," the caretaker of Heaven's garden, Joshua, reveals to the brothers that God intervened and saved the brothers from Lucifer in the fifth season's opening episode, "Sympathy for the Devil," by transporting them away from the Devil as he rose. By having God play a role in ensuring the destiny of the

brothers in their fight against evil, *Supernatural* illustrates the divine ordination that justifies interventionist practices and firmly entrenches a powerful Judeo-Christian deity as directing the actions the Winchesters (as America), albeit one whose plan the brothers ultimately reject.

The "divinely ordained mission to lead the rest of the world" (Walt, 2011, p. 74) thus has become a burden the United States initially accepts as part of God's plan but then tries to direct toward its own goals**. This burden is depicted in *Supernatural* through the burden of hunting monsters the brothers inherent from their familial forebears.** In the War on Terror, even with the "Coalition of the Willing," the United States sees itself as still standing virtually alone as the main combatant against a vaguely defined "terror." In *Supernatural*, that terror takes the form of all manner of creatures with ill intent, including angels, which one might presume would help humans rather than desire their destruction; during the series' end-of-the-world supra-plot, it took the form of an eternal battle between angels and demons, with humankind caught in between.

In "Sam, Interrupted," the analogy between America's burden and the burden of the Winchesters in parallel battles against evil becomes even more apparent when viewed through the prism of American Exceptionalism. Though a "regular" monster episode, the heaven-vs.-hell narrative continues as Dean and Sam check themselves into a mental institution to investigate a series of mysterious deaths among the patients. They soon discover that they are looking for a wraith, which is a monster that eats human brains. During a conversation with Dr. Cartwright, the psychiatrist "treating" him, Dean alludes to the burden of the Winchesters/America when he tells her he is hunting a monster. **The doctor responds by asking why others could not do it, and Dean replies that "no one**

else is that dumb." When pressed on how many people he must save, Dean, sounding like an evangelical, says "all of them" (Dabb & Loflin, 2010).

This exchange encapsulates the Winchesters' duty to fight monsters and save the world, just as interventionist American Exceptionalism portrays the United States as having a duty to fight evil and save the world. Critics of this approach to American foreign policy often call on the nation to let others "save" countries and intervene, much like the doctor in this excerpt questions why Dean believes he is the only who can save everyone. Additionally, this interaction underscores the fundamental assumptions of the interventionist interpretation of the American Exceptionalism myth, one where cowboys intervene because they have to.

When viewed as a representative anecdote for American exceptionalist discourse, the Winchesters do not just reify America's appointment by God. Rather, in becoming equal to God through their ability to alter their own destiny away from any predetermined narrative, their story suggests that the United States has evolved beyond its role as divine missionary. "America" has developed into a power that can defeat (1) gods, those from "other" mythologies, and (2) "the" God—or at least the plan God had for it. Combined with the portrayal of the Winchester brothers as protectors, *Supernatural* pits them against fantastic and otherworldly foes in the form of mythic creatures, monsters, and deities to create a new iteration of the Frontier Myth hero. It then uses this hero to subtly, but significantly, alter aspects of American exceptionalism. Depictions of malevolent angels, traditionally believed to be agents of good and allies of mankind, whom humans can destroy further enhances the image of a country that sees itself as no longer needing God or gods. In this manner, then, the Winchesters go from

mere mortal cowboys burdened with the task of fighting evil, to changing the course of the world by preventing its demise. **The resulting message promotes interventionist aspects of the myth of American Exceptionalism, but not because God appointed America to do so; rather, it is because America as a God has the responsibility to do so.**

Conclusion

Although *Supernatural* premiered well after the attacks on September 11, 2001, the subsequent War on Terror was still in full bloom. Despite the government's attempts to declare the contrary, it depicted the War on Terror as a fight between the West and Islam. George W. Bush (2001) even hinted at the religious undertones of the conflict in his address to the nation on the night of September 11 when he invoked the Puritan ethos: "America was targeted because we're the brightest beacon of freedom and opportunity in the world." President Ronald Reagan referenced the "brightest beacon" phrase, traced to Jonathan Winthrop, in his Farewell Address to the Nation (Reagan, 1989). Invoking aspects of the Frontier Myth and religious undercurrents of American Exceptionalism, Bush also referred to the conflict in Afghanistan as a "crusade," where he wanted the perpetrators found "dead or alive" (Knowlton, 2001), a phrase he directly tied to the familiar "Wanted" posters from the American Old West.

"*Supernatural* is more than a show about fighting demons," proclaims the back cover of *In the Hunt: Unauthorized Essays on* Supernatural (Supernatural.TV, 2009). We concur, as we see the Winchester brothers as more than simply fictional characters combating urban legends in a science fiction/horror TV show. We

contend that *Supernatural* offers a rich text for examining how national discourse permeates all levels and genres of cultural work. The Winchesters' heroism involves great personal sacrifice for no reward or glory. The ending to the series' five-year Apocalyptic story arc in which Sam sacrifices himself to save the world as his brother Dean lets him go reflects the personal cost of being a hero, which conveys "the painful reality of sacrifice for the greater good" (S. Abbott, 2011, p. xiii). In this manner, *Supernatural* presents the hero's journey as America's journey: as blue-collar heroes, the Winchesters represent the epitome of an adult American citizen.

When viewing the Winchesters-as-America as an overarching narrative in *Supernatural*, one can apply the Winchester brothers' acceptance and well-honed abilities as monster hunters to the way in which "America" came to realize its divine appointment and special place on earth. One finds historical similarities in the journey from youth to hero in the isolationist policies of a "young" America coming of age in the early twentieth century. The acceptance of the "beacon on a hill" mantle became a rhetorical touchstone used by Ronald Reagan and, even more strongly, post-9/11, when George W. Bush reminded Americans of their place in the world.

When combined with the explicit way in which series creator Eric Kripke saw the brothers facing down Armageddon and putting an "American cowboy" in the middle of an epic struggle between good and evil, we view *Supernatural*'s story of two boys fighting ghosts, demons, and monsters as a narrative field for telling the story of America. This nation, too, was young once, faced incredible obstacles, yet emerged strong, courageous, and determined to serve as a force for good in a world

that needs its protection from radical supernatural Others. Further, based on our analysis, we see *Supernatural* as offering an alternative version of American Exceptionalism, one in which the connection to the divine/God has been replaced with the idea Americans are themselves equal to God, or at least able to function as the ultimate arbiter of good vs. evil when God is absent. This notion—that America is THE force for good in the world and *for* the world changes the mythological mantle of American destiny and purpose.

***Supernatural's* transmission of a consensus narrative that (re)defines core aspects of national mythology—embodied in the Frontier Myth and American Exceptionalism—becomes significant when considering its younger demographic, a segment of the population becoming more apt to participate in national affairs (Conley, 2012). In the continuum of the coming-of-age motif common among other narratives of young heroes/superheroes, *Supernatural* has its protagonists accepting and taking on the responsibilities they were born into and then "doing the job" they were trained for by their father, enacting what Rushing and Frentz (1995) call a "sacred ritual of initiation" common in the Frontier Myth (p. 45). As others have noted, the theme of self-discovery serves as a thread in teen dramas in this vein: while they fought evil, the main characters on *Angel* struggled to define themselves personally and professionally, and the teenagers on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* had to learn how to make adult decisions (Comeford & Burnett, 2010). Even as he became a force for good, the vampire Angel could not escape who he was (S. Abbott, 2005).**

Similarly, the Winchesters can never escape their responsibility as hunters, and therefore must carry out their destined fate to save the world. The adventures

of two American brothers who sacrifice the "American dream" to protect Americans and the world itself, provide a consensus narrative that depicts what "real" Americans do: make sacrifices to protect people from evil. Just as media narratives in the form of teen dramas can provide young people information about what it means to be an adult (Meyer, 2005), we see *Supernatural* as having the potential to serve a similar function regarding what it means to be an American. This line of inquiry we offer as a path for future research regarding the presence of rhetorically infused content that serves as a socializing agent.

In this essay, we focused on the rhetorical aspects of *Supernatural*, particularly how its serves as a representative anecdote for an American mythos combining interventionist American Exceptionalism and the purposive characters from Frontier Myth. The evil from which the Winchesters protect people is embodied in an Other that includes a multitude of actualized threats and shadows drawn from human religious tradition and experience. *Supernatural*'s treatment of pagan gods and even angels, agents of "the" God, endorses the perspective that gods—of any kind—are *not* good, but self-interested and exploit humanity, so any religious messages need to be questioned. The richness of this text invites researchers to investigate how today's horror/science fiction genre, in the form of contemporary movies and television programs such as *Supernatural* or Fox's *Fringe* (2008-2013), reflect fear of dangers originating in "Other" cultures. Such media artifacts may appear innocuous and created simply to entertain and make a profit but nevertheless serve as ideal venues for uncovering how the myths that make us who we are change to explain more contemporary events.

References

Abbott, C. (2006). *Frontiers past and future: Science fiction and the American West.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.

Abbott, S. (Ed.). (2005). *Reading* Angel: *The TV spin-off with a soul*. New York: I. B. Tauris.

Abbott, S. (2011). Introduction: Then: The road so far. In S. Abbott & D. Lavery (Eds.), *TV goes to hell: An unofficial road map of* Supernatural (pp. ix-xvi). Toronto: ECW Press.

Adalian, J., & Woocher, M. (2013, May 28). The 2012-13 TV season in one really depressing chart. *Vulture.com*. Retrieved from http://www.vulture.com/2013/05/201213-tv-season-in-one-depressing-chart.hmtl

Anderson, M. C. (2007). The mythical frontier, the Mexican Revolution and the press: An imperial subplot. *Canadian Review of American Studies*, *37*, 1-22.

"Ask Eric." (2009, April/May). *Supernatural Magazine*, *1*(3), p. 95.

Austin, N. (1990). *Meaning and being in myth.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Bellesiles, M.A. (2000). Guns don't kill, movies kill: The media's promotion of frontier violence. *Western Historical Quarterly*, *31*(3), 284-290.

Billington, R.A. (1981). *Land of savagery, land of promise: The European image of the American frontier in the nineteenth century.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Bostdorff, D. M. (1994). *The presidency and the rhetoric of foreign crisis*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.

Brummett, B. (1984). Burke's representative anecdote as a method in media criticism. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication, 1*, 161-178.

Bush, G. W. (2001, September 11). Statement by the President in his address. *George W. Bush White House Archives.* Retrieved from http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911-16.html

Chidester, P. J. (2009). 'The toy store of my life': Myth, sport and the mediated reconstruction of the American hero in the shadow of the September 11th terrorist attacks. *Southern Communication Journal, 74*(4), 352-372.

Clifton, J. (2009). Spreading disaster: Gender in the Supernatural universe. In Supernatural.TV (Ed.), *In the hunt: Unauthorized essays on* Supernatural (pp. 119-142). Dallas: Benbella Books.

Comeford, A., & Burnett, T. (Eds.). (2010). *The literary* Angel: *Essays on influences and traditions reflected in the Joss Whedon series*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Condoleezza Rice RNC speech. (2012, August 29; updated September 4). *Politico.com*. Retrieved from http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0812/80402.html

Conley, R. (2012, November 8). Young voter turnout increases from 2008 to 2012. Retrieved from http://redallterpolitics.com/2012/11/08/young-voter-turnout-increases-from-2008-to-2012/

Cowan, D.E. (2008). *Sacred terror.* Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.

Dabb, A., & Loflin, D. (Writers), & Conway, J.L. (Director). Sam, interrupted. [Television series episode]. In T. Aronauer & J. Michaels (Producers). *Supernatural*. Burbank, CA: CW Network.

DeCandido, K. (2009). Not just a pretty face (or two). In Supernatural.TV (Ed.), *In the hunt: Unauthorized essays on* Supernatural (pp. ix-xii). Dallas: Benbella Books.

Dippie, B. (2004). Drawn to the West. *Western Historical Quarterly, 35*(1), 5-26.

Dorsey, L.G., & Harlow, R.M. (2003). 'We want Americans pure and simple': Theodore Roosevelt and the myth of Americanism. *Rhetoric and Public Affairs, 6*(1), 55-78.

Edgerton, G., & Marsden, M. (2011). Introduction: *The Journal of Popular Film and Television* legacy of Western scholarship. *Journal of Popular Film and Television, 39*(2), 38-40.

Edwards, J. A. (2008). *Navigating the post-Cold War world: President Clinton's foreign policy rhetoric.* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Eliade, M. (1963). *Myth and reality* (W.R. Trask, Trans.). New York: Harper & Row.

Engstrom, E., & Valenzano, III, J. M. (2010). Demon hunters and hegemony: Portrayal of religion on the CW's *Supernatural*. *Journal of Media and Religion, 9,* 67-83.

Gamble, S., & Weiner, N. (Writers), & Boyum, S. (Director). (2010). The song remains the same. [Television series episode]. In T. Aronauer & J. Michaels (Producers). *Supernatural*. Burbank, CA: CW Network.

Garvey, A. (2009). 'We've got work to do': Sacrifice, heroism, and Sam and Dean Winchester. In Supernatural.TV (Ed.), *In the hunt: Unauthorized essays on* Supernatural (pp. 87-96). Dallas: Benbella Books.

Hartnett, S. J. (2002). *Democratic dissent and the cultural fictions of antebellum America.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Hills, M. (2005). *The pleasures of horror*. New York: Continuum.

Hodgson, G. (2009). *The myth of American Exceptionalism.* New Haven, CT: Yale

University Press.

Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hoover, S. M. (1988). *Mass media religion: The social sources of the electronic church.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Hunt, M. H. (2009). *Ideology and U.S. foreign policy*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Kane, T. (2006). *The changing vampire of film and television: A critical study of the growth of a genre*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Kasson, J. (2000). *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, memory and popular history.* New York: Hill and Wang.

Knight, N. (2010). Supernatural: *The official companion season 5*. London: Titan Books.

Knowlton, B. (2001, September 11). Terror in America/'We're going to smoke them out': President airs his anger. *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/19/news/19iht-t4_30.html

Krauthammer, C. (2009, April 10). It's your country too, Mr. President. *Realclearpolitics.com*. Retrieved from http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2009/04/its_your_country_too_mr_presid.html

Kripke, E. (Writer), & Nutter, D. (Director). (2010). Swan song. [Television series episode]. In T. Aronauer & J. Michaels (Producers), *Supernatural.* Burbank, CA: CW Network.

Library of Congress. (2006, January). The Winchester rifle: 'The gun that won the West.' *Science Reference Guides*. Retrieved from http://www.loc.gov/rr/scitech/SciRefGuides/winchester-rifle.html

Lipset, S. M. (1996). *American exceptionalism: A double-edged sword.* New York: W.W. Norton.

Mason, D. S. (2009). *The end of the American century.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

McCain: Obama doesn't believe in American exceptionalism. (2012, August 30). *NBCNews.com*. Retrieved from http://video.msnbc.msn.com/msnbc/48836058

McCrisken, T. B. (2003). *American exceptionalism and the legacy of Vietnam: U.S. foreign policy since 1974.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

McLure, H. (2000). The wild wild web: The mythic American West and the electronic frontier. *Western Historical Quarterly, 31*(4), 457-476.

Meyer, M. (2009). 'I'm just trying to find my way like most kids': Bisexuality, adolescence, and the drama *One Tree Hill*. *Sexuality & Culture*, *13*, 237-251.

Mitchell, C.P. (2001). *A guide to Apocalyptic cinema.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Nash, G. (1991). *Creating the West: Historical interpretations, 1890-1990.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Navy Recruiting Command. (2012). [United States Navy web site]. Retrieved from http://www.navy.com

Obama, B.H. (2009, April 4). News conference by Barack Obama. Retrieved from http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/News-Conference-By-President-Obama-4-04-2009

Page, S. (2010, December 21). America's place in the world to play part in 2012 elections. *USA Today*. Retrieved from http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2010-12-21-1Aexceptional21_CV_N.htm?csp=34news

Paine, T. (1995). *Common sense*. New York: Barnes and Noble Books.

Petruska, K. (2011). Crossing over: Network transition, critical reception, and *Supernatural* longevity. In S. Abbott and D. Lavery (Eds.), *TV goes to hell: An unofficial road map of* Supernatural (pp. 219-229). Toronto: ECW Press.

Poole, S. (2011). *Monsters in America: Our historic obsession with the hideous and the haunting*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.

Presidential debate at the University of Mississippi in Oxford. (2008, September 26). Retrieved from http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=78691

Reagan, R. (1989, January 11). Farewell address to the nation. *Americanrhetoric.com*. Retrieved from http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ronaldreaganfarewelladdress.html

Roof, W. C. (1997). Blurred boundaries. In Michael Suman (Ed.), *Religion and prime-time television.* Westport, CT: Praeger.

Rushing, J. H. (1983). The rhetoric of the American Western myth. *Communication Monographs, 50,* 14-32.

Rushing, J. H. & Frentz, T. H. (1995). *Projecting the shadow: The cyborg hero in American film.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Seiple, C. (2012). The essence of exceptionalism: Roger Williams and the birth of religious freedom in America. *The Review of Faith and International Affairs, 10* (2), 13-19.

Slatta, R.W. (2010). Making and unmaking myths of the American frontier. *European Journal of American Culture, 29,* (2), 81-92.

Smith & Wesson. (2012). [Company web site]. Retrieved from

http://www.smith-wesson.com

Stuckey, M.E. (2011). The Donner Party and the rhetoric of Westward expansion. *Rhetoric and Public Affairs, 14* (2), 229-260.

Supernatural.TV. (2009). *In the hunt: Unauthorized essays on* Supernatural. Dallas, TX: Benbella Books.

Thorburn, D. (1987). Television as an aesthetic medium. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication, 4*, 161-173.

Tirman, J. (2009). The future of the American frontier. *The American Scholar, 78*, 30-40.

Valenzano, III, J. M., & Engstrom, E. (2013). Homilies and Horsemen: Revelation in the CW's *Supernatural. Journal of Communication and Religion, 36* (1), 50-72.

Villareal, Y. (2013, March 26). CW network revamp aims to draw wider audience. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from http://articles.latimes.com/2013/mar/26/business/la-et-fi-ct-thecw-20130326

Vollick, S. (2008, April 3). The religious significance of the show *Supernatural*. *Telewatcher.com.* Retrieved from http://telewatcher.com/science-fiction/the-religious-significance-of-the-show-supernatural

Walt, S. M. (2011). The myth of American Exceptionalism. *Foreign Policy, 189*, 72-75.

West, E. (1996). Selling the myth: Western images in advertising. In R. Aquila (Ed.), *Wanted dead or alive: The American West in popular culture* (pp. 269-271). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Wills, J. (2008). Pixel cowboys and silicon goldmines: Videogames of the American West. *Pacific Historical Review, 77*(2), 273-303.

Winthrop, J. (1630). A model of Christian charity. Retrieved from

http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/sacred/charity.html

Footnotes

[1]Episode titles and original airdates included in our sample, in order of discussion: "It's a Terrible Life," March 26, 2009; "Swan Song," May 13, 2010; Faith," January 17, 2006; "Houses of the Holy," February 1, 2007; "Wendigo," September 20, 2005; "Scarecrow," January 10, 2006; "A Very Supernatural Christmas," December 13, 2007; "Fallen Idols," October 8, 2009; "On the Head of a Pin," March 19, 2009;"The Song Remains the Same," February 4, 2010; "Dark Side of the Moon," April 1, 2010; "Sympathy for the Devil," September 10, 2009; "Sam, Interrupted," January 21, 2010. All available on DVD.

[2]Republican pundits, such as former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and former governor of Alaska and vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin (Page, 2010) and syndicated columnist Charles Krauthammer (2009), criticized President Obama for diminishing the idea of America's special place in the world.

[3]Kripke also identified Lawrence, Kansas, specifically, as the Winchesters' hometown because of its location near Stull Cemetery, which he cited as one of the "Gates of Hell" ("Ask Eric," 2009, p. 95). Further, Kansas is the name of the classic rock group whose "Carry on Wayward Son" (on the 1976 album *Leftoverture*) serves as a recurring opening theme song for the series.

[4]The Winchesters' avocation as "hunters" also invites interpretation of their characters as being similar to the frontiersmen of early American literature, such as James Fenimore Cooper's heroic Natty Bumppo/Hawkeye from *The Leatherstocking Tales*. Similarly, the legends surrounding real-life American heroes, such as Daniel Boone and tales of his slaying of a bear and life in the wilds of Kentucky, could be folded into a broader persona that forwards a good-doing, altruistic hunter/protector.