

Abstract

National identity is a complex notion of being and belonging. The multiple selves, out of which the identity is composed of such as gender, class, race, and ethnicity etc. pose a challenge in creating any sort of unified collective national identity that would encompass each individual's unique set of these multiple selves and roles. This complexity is even more pronounced when a national identity of such nations as the U.S. is examined. Due to its multicultural and multiethnic nature, identifying a collective American identity becomes a challenge. This thesis examines the birth of national identity in the U.S. during the Revolutionary era through the time of the Early republic and the period of 1800-1850 in an effort to discover the unifying features of such complex identity and to uncover its origins.

The text consults theoretical framework on nation, nationalism and national identity to establish a working definition of a nation and to explain the complexity of the concept which is then further examined in the context of the U.S. In combination with a historical overview of the period 1770-1850, the thesis addresses nationalist feelings and thoughts that permeated the country at the time, examining the first emergence of calls for unified American national identity and the subsequent establishment of such unified identity through the years. Sociopolitical and literary narratives of the time capture the rising nationalist feeling which upon further analysis offer a view of the emerging collective American identity with several unifying features such as American exceptionalism; individualism, self-reliance; the myth of the American Dream, and lastly the legacy of slavery.

The findings suggest that the period of the Revolutionary War followed by the era of the Early republic and the years 1800-1850 present one of the most significant stages in America's history in terms of defining its national identity. The identified unifying features that emerged during the birth of the new society can be directly traced in the postmodern America till today, illustrating their deep embeddedness in the American cultural paradigm and their direct influence on American identity.