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Adéla Zeimannová

What It Means to Be American?: Creating American National Identity

Co znamená být Američanem?: Zrod americké národní identity

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Vedoucí práce (Thesis supervisor): Prof. David L. Robbins, PhD

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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.

Národní identita je komplikovaným konceptem bytí a náležení. Mnohonásobné já, ze kterého se tato identita skládá, jež představuje pohlaví, sociální vrstva, rasa, etnicita apod., představuje výzvu při vytváření jakéhokoli druhu jednotné kolektivní národní identity, která by zahrnovala jedinečnou sadu těchto já a rolí každého jednotlivce. Tato složitost je ještě výraznější při zkoumání národní identity národů, kterými jsou například USA. Vzhledem ke své multikulturní a multietnické povaze se identifikace kolektivní americké identity stává výzvou. Tato práce zkoumá zrod národní identity v USA během revoluční éry, v době první republiky a v letech 1800-1850 ve snaze objevit sjednocující rysy takto komplexní identity a odhalení jejího původu.

Tento text konzultuje teoretický rámec týkající se národa, nacionalismu a národní identity tak, aby vytvořil funkční definici národa a vysvětlil složitost tohoto konceptu, který je pak dále zkoumán v kontextu USA. V kombinaci s historickým přehledem období 1770-1850 se diplomová práce zabývá vlasteneckými pocity a myšlenkami, které se Amerikou v této době šířily. Dále zkoumá první objevení hlasů volajících po jednotné americké národní identitě a následný vznik této sjednocující identity v průběhu let. Dobové sociopolitické a literární záznamy zachycují narůstající vlastenecké cítění, které po další analýze nabízí pohled na vznikající kolektivní americkou identitu s několika sjednocujícími rysy, jimiž jsou americká výjimečnost; individualismus, soběstačnost; mýtus o americkém snu; a nakonec dědictví otroctví.

Zjištění naznačují, že období revoluční války následované érou první republiky a roky 1800–1850 představuje jednu z nejvýznamnějších etap americké historie z hlediska definování její národní identity. Zjištěné sjednocující rysy, které se objevily během zrodu nové společnosti, lze v postmoderní Americe vysledovat až dodnes, což dokládá jejich hluboké zakotvení v americkém kulturním paradigmatu a jejich přímý vliv na americkou identitu.

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1 Introduction

The current situation of the U.S., more than any other, asks for answers on one of the most important questions that has been following the development of the United States from the very beginning. It is the question that Hector St. John Crèvecoeur asks in *the Letters from An American Farmer* (1782): “What, then, is the American, this new man?”¹ The same question that Alexis de Tocqueville seeks to find the answer to in his *Democracy of America* (1835) when he embarks on an intellectual journey of discovering the American national identity. The presidential elections of 2016 and 2020, in addition to the socio-political and cultural situation emphasize the need for finding unifying values and shared character of the nation that would once again stabilize the American national identity. This thesis aims to provide an analysis of the U.S. national identity at its birth, and supply a base for understanding the socio-political and historical changes and the subsequent development of the U.S. and its perception of national identity.

The term national identity, however, is a peculiar concept that is often defined in contradictory terms and is not easily agreed upon to be based on a single model. National identity is closely connected to the ideas of nation. It is needed to put both these phenomena of cultural identification as well as the ideological movement of nationalism in context to gain a full understanding of these concepts and their interaction. The key to comprehend the complexity of these concepts is to look at the main paradigms of understanding nations that have been introduced and established over time and employ this knowledge in understanding the phenomena that followed. The first step would be to look at the definition of a nation. In the simplest terms, nation is defined as a human population with a **name**, sharing **common myths and memories**, being of a **historic territory**, having a **single political and legal system** and a **single economy**. A definition established by Anthony D. Smith, a historical sociologist recognized as one of the leading theorists of nationalism and ethnicity in the world. Much of the analysis and definitions of concepts and principles on the topic of nations and nationalism discussed in this text will rely on his work, especially chapter 1, which will delve deeper into establishing generally accepted ideas on the issues of cultural identification and the phenomena of nation and national identity.

The case of the American national identity poses another set of complications to the already complex concept. The multiethnic, multicultural character of the U.S. society poses a

¹ J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (New York: Fox, Duffield & Company, 1904) 54.

challenging feat of attempting to define the tenets of national identity. Considering these unique qualities, assigning a single shared principle on which the national identity could be based appears almost impossible. In comparison to most of the European nations, who base their national identity on features like common history, language, myths, and culture, the U.S. ‘abandons’ this concept of identity in favor of a principle based in both the spiritual and the political that arises from the notion of ‘one people’ imbedded in the American Declaration of Independence proclaiming that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights.”² The American national identity then appears to be connected to the concept of individual rights instead of to its common history or myths.

Nonetheless, there are certain uniquely American traditions and ideas that have shaped the development of the national identity over the years. One of the most unifying features of the society is the shared experience that has been largely different from others. While the notion of American exceptionalism is a widely debated topic agreed on by many, the characteristics, origin, and consequences in the context of cultural identification has not been as thoroughly scrutinized. Thus, there remains much ambiguity, disagreement, and inconsistency in what the American national character is composed of. To get the clearest and most detailed possible picture of from what the American national identity stems is to consider several diverse elements. First, the historical and socio-political context must be addressed to gauge the full background of the contemporary development of the society. The text will provide the major socio-political and historical events of the age of the creation of the U.S. and the early republic in chapter 2 and 3. The information given in these chapters will be based on both history and socio-cultural works that analyze the then developing American nation. The lives of the public and ordinary people, in addition to the thoughts of influential thinkers and writers of this period like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Alexis de Tocqueville, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, etc., will be addressed. Their ideas on identity and concepts of Americanism will be summarized in chapter 4 and 5. The text will reflect the diversity of the U.S. society of the time and will dedicate subchapters to female and African-American experience to best capture the actual state of the society. The final chapter of the thesis will address the consequences or rather outcomes of the origins and construction of American national identity in the following development of the United States.

² Thomas Jefferson, “The Declaration of the United States,” *archive.org*, <https://archive.org/details/TheDeclarationOfIndependenceAndYourCompleteConstitution>, 7 Jan. 2021.

2 Nation, National Identity and Nationalism

As has been mentioned previously, the topic of nations and nationality is incredibly complex. Its definition, origins and main paradigms have employed professionals and scholars from diverse fields. Historians, anthropologists, political scientists, sociologists, and others have all tried to create a working theory for these phenomena. Anthony D. Smith records three main issues that these debates center around:

1. the nature and origin of the nation and nationalism,
2. the antiquity or modernity of nations and nationalism,
3. the role of nations and nationalism in historical and especially social change.¹

All these issues reflect the ambiguity of the concepts and address the different paradigms that surround it. Each field of research has its own definition of nation and nationalism with different periodization and characterization which poses another set of complications. There are three main competing theories of nation that have developed over time that these contending historiographies provide.

The first debate revolves around what Smith calls “a peculiarly Western conception”² of nation which is the civic model and what could then be termed the “non-Western model,” the ethnic conception of nation. The civic conception of nation favors the idea of sharing a single legal and political system. In other words, the civic model is based on a “common code of laws [that stand] over and above local laws”³ under which all members of the nation are seen as equal, all bound by the same rights and obligations. The matter of common territory, values, traditions, and historical memories comes second in this concept. Standing in opposition to this model is the ethnic model, a conception of the nation developing mainly outside the West. The ethnic concept of the nation is built on the idea of common name, myths, and memories primarily. As a result, the Western concept permits the individual members of the nation to choose to which nation he or she will belong, while the non-Western model does not allow such option. An individual remains a member of a nation of their birth even in the situation of emigration or relocation. Consequently, common descent is emphasized at the expense of any other features.

¹ Anthony D. Smith, *The Nation in History: Historical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2000) 2.

² Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1991) 9.

³ Smith, *National Identity*, 10.

Another set of competing concepts of nation would be the organic versus voluntarist. The organic model is built on the idea of the nation as a growing organism, whereas the voluntarist model is founded on the idea of an existence of a social contract. This view of nation corresponds to the civic-ethnic concept, where once again the defining difference is on the right to choose one's national belonging. Organic nationalism then could be seen as a form of ethnic nationalism with emphasis on ethnic culture, and voluntarist nationalism could be viewed as a form of civic nationalism, whose characteristics are willed rather than innate.

Whichever concept of nation is chosen, the idea of a nation remains contradictory. On one hand, it seems universal, most scholars agree that an individual always must belong to a nation; on the other hand, the idea of nation is very particular because every nation argues for its unique culture, politics, etc. Furthermore, its origins also remain ambiguous: there is no agreement upon whether the nation is to be viewed through the historians' eyes as an "objective modernity" or through the eyes of nationalists as "subjective antiquity."⁴ Which of the perspectives to select as dominant remains a topic of debates. Benedict Anderson reacts to this in his *Imagined Communities* (1991). He proposes another definition of nation and that is the idea of nation as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."⁵ Anderson argues that the community has to be imagined because it is unlikely that the members of a nation can know most of their fellow-members, "meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."⁶ He continues with the assertion that the reason for the imagination of nation as limited is the fact that no matter the size they do have "finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations."⁷ And it has to be imagined as sovereign because it has control over its territories, histories, etc.

Despite the existence of many models and theories of nation there are certain aspects that tie the diverse models together. In fact, the concepts tend to interact in varying degrees and forms, where one or the other predominates. According to Smith, "every nationalism contains civic and ethnic elements,"⁸ from which he concludes that behind these competitive models lie several common beliefs that define what is a nation, from which he develops a working definition based on five fundamental features of national identity which are as follows:

⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nations* (London: Verso, 2006) 5.

⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

⁸ Smith, *National Identity*, 13.

1. an historic territory, or homeland
2. common myths and historical memories
3. a common, mass public culture
4. common legal rights and duties for all members
5. a common economy with territorial mobility for members.⁹

From this the idea of identity can be established. National identity, according to these five features, draws on the existence of collective identity combined with other types of identification like race, class, or religion. Moreover, Smith claims that because of the multidimensional nature of national identity; “it can never be reduced to a single element, even by particular factions of nationalists, nor can it be easily or swiftly induced in a population by artificial means.”¹⁰

This means that each *self* is fundamentally composed of multiple identities – class, religious, gender, ethnic, territorial, etc., each providing a way of defining the self in the world as a part of the collective. This only confirms that the ideas of nation and national identity are largely abstract concepts complex in their structure. According to Smith, there are at least three of these categories or types of which each individual *self* is composed. The most obvious category would be the category of gender; Smith emphasizes its universality and presence in other classifications. Second would be the category of territory, and third type would be social class, though even these categories allow leeway. The multidimensionality of the *self*, a reason behind both its flexibility and persistence, allows it “to combine effectively with other powerful ideologies and movements, without losing its character,”¹¹ suggests Smith.

Having established a working definition of a nation and the main features, and functions of national identity, it is also needed to address its complex origins. Such questions as what are the processes that lead to the formation of nations, why do certain nations emerge, how and when, are the key to understanding the origins of specific nations and their identity, such as the United States. Gathering into groups has been a natural human impulse since the beginning of humanity. “Mankind has always been organized in groups,” argues Ernest Gellner, “of all kinds of shapes and sizes, sometimes sharply defined and sometimes loose, sometimes neatly nested

⁹ Smith, *National Identity*, 14.

¹⁰ Smith, *National Identity*, 14.

¹¹ Smith, *National Identity*, 15.

and sometimes overlapping or intertwined.”¹² The reasons for the formation of such groups are rather simple: a group offers a kind of security, support and assurance that is difficult to achieve individually. Nonetheless, forming a group does not automatically mean that it has become a nation. As was previously discussed, there are several characteristics that a community needs to possess to gain the title of a nation and to form a collective identity around this joint nationality.

The term nation is a fairly modern concept, appearing with the rise of nationalism in the eighteenth century, yet, historically, there have been communities like the ancient Greece or Egypt that earned themselves this title based on a semblance of collective identity present in these groups. As Smith points out, the multidimensionality of nationality complicates differentiation between pre-modern and modern collective cultural identities. Criteria such as the enfranchisement of “the masses” and women as determining characteristics for the emergence of nations are limiting. He argues: “Even if we employ a more multidimensional concept of the nation, like the one I have urged, in practice we shall still be measuring differences between collective cultural identities in pre-modern and modern periods through a number of processes and dimensions.”¹³ Historically, there have been communities that were and often still are referred to as nations, yet as Smith points out “they were in several important respects some way from approximating the ideal type of the nation.”¹⁴

Ancient Greece and Egypt are often seen as examples of ancient nations based on their respective collective identities; nevertheless, not only was Egypt never fully united and consisted of several individual regions despite having officially been under Pharaonic rule, but any semblance of unity was also undermined by the divisions between the elite and the rest of the Egyptian population. Greece, in a similar way, consisted of diverse communities divided by differences in religion, artistic forms, ethnicity etc., each community divided into its own city-state. While both can be characterized as collective cultural communities, often showing signs of pan-Egyptian or pan-Hellenistic/pan-Greek thinking in times of fear of a common enemy, the concept of national identity does not fit their reality, and they are better described as ethnic communities.

Medieval times did not fare much better in terms of nation formation: there was always something missing that the community failed to acquire to fulfill the ideal of nation defined in

¹² Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006) 52.

¹³ Smith, *National Identity*, 45.

¹⁴ Smith, *National Identity*, 45.

modern terms. Many of the ethnic states made efforts of unification, broadening their collective identity; as Smith notes in the case of the English nation, for example, “the ethnic elements of the nation were already well developed.”¹⁵ Medieval England formed a collective identity around a common name, traditions, history, and language, yet what would later come to be termed as the civic elements were missing. No common public educational, economic/administrative system was present. This began to change, not only in England but other medieval communities with the growing “bureaucratic incorporation”¹⁶ as Smith calls it, which made sure that the state administration included not only the elite but also the growing upper middle classes. Coupled with centralizing efforts and mass education the development soon led to the formation of nationalist thinking in the modern sense, reinforced by the broadening collective identity in opposition to the “Other.”

It should also be noted that the development stemmed not only from the efforts from the top (the elites/state), but also from the bottom: the middle and working classes. Development of traditions, customs and culture were as essential as these “large” causes. While some nationalists like Ernest Gellner, argue that “national identity is an elite-led phenomenon that accompanies the rise of the modern state,”¹⁷ as Eric Kaufmann notes, these vertical theories are challenged by theorists like Eric Hobsbawm who point to the presence of horizontal, down-up processes in nationalism, such as the “invention of tradition,” which was one of the largest denominators contributing to the formation of collective cultural identity. Overall, no matter which theory of nation and national identity is applied, the concepts remain an essential part of cultural and political identity—an ideology, a cultural phenomenon crucial for understanding the formation and emergence of communities.

¹⁵ Smith, *National Identity*, 56.

¹⁶ Smith, *National Identity*, 57.

¹⁷ Eric Kaufmann, “Complexity and Nationalism,” *Nations and Nationalism* 23, Vol. 1 (2017) 11. 10.1111/nana.12270.

3 Historical Context

3.1 Colonial Era

To better understand what led to the establishment of American identity and encouraged the ideas of nation-building on the North American continent, it is beneficial to overview the historical events that helped shape the American nation and its thinking. As the theoretical introduction into the realm of nation-building and identity suggests, the process of national identification is a complex ordeal interconnected with various other processes of socio-political matters. In that context, the United States that we all know today might be as difficult to imagine as the once mysterious New World hiding beyond the western horizon, showing glimpses of its treasures to the curious European population.

Sixteenth-century colonial America was home to a vast group of inhabitants varying not only in nationality, religious beliefs, language, values, and customs, but also in clothing and food preferences. The exchange on the new continent was so wide that it was “more than a diffusion of cultures”; according to George B. Tindall and David E. Shi, the New World was a place of “unprecedented biological exchange,” a place where “a diffusion of distinctive social and ecological elements that ultimately worked in favor of the Europeans at the expense of the natives”¹ took place. The New World continued to attract more and more adventurers and explorers from all over Europe, setting off a period of voyages, subsequent settlements and founding of colonies that led to frequent clashes between the European nations fighting over the newly discovered land that promised enrichment to its owners. The land that they “discovered” was, however, long inhabited by natives who did not want to take such an invasion lightly. Much of the sixteenth and seventeenth century was spent on violent clashes between all the cultures that collided together on the continent. It was in this period that the first seed of what would later become the American nation was planted, as Britons decided to join the exploratory pursuit and set their sights on the American continent during the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603). Confronted with the prospect of no male offspring of the queen, “the English planted their overseas empire,”² remarks Tindall. The country was not only shaken by the accession of the Scottish Stuart dynasty in the person of James I, and by his rule, but also by the many religious reformations that preceded and proliferated in his reign. The Protestant reformation, a movement that spread rapidly through all of Europe, did not leave the British

¹ George B. Tindall and David Emory Shi, *America: A Narrative History, Vol. 1* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006) 18.

² Tindall and Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, 48.

dominions unaffected, and it was here that it created changes that would later impact the future of the English colonies.

Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII (reigned 1509-1547), in the 1530s began the English Reformation, which led to the combining of continental Protestantisms (including Calvinism) and Catholicism into Anglicanism (the so-called "Church of England"), and the consequences of which would powerfully impact the future American nation. As Derek Wilson notes, "the country was bitterly divided in matters of religion."³ Which Henry's threats and abuse of power only worsened. Calvinism, in very brief and simple terms, was based on a set of principles challenging Roman Catholicism. An attempt at reforming the then privileged catholic institutions, condemning their wealthy habits and general splendor, and generous (even permissive) criteria for salvation, Calvinism also espoused a doctrine of "Predestination," according to which all people were "damned by Adam's original sin," their redemption and receipt of grace only "open to those whom God had elected and thus had predestined to salvation from the beginning of time."⁴ This strict and uncompromising system inspired many degrees of reformation within, and sometimes even secession from, the Church of England. For some, the moderate "Anglican" version of reformation was sufficient in producing church institutions and processes that were independent of the Papacy and an independent more royally-controlled, without dramatically severing ties with the Catholic tradition. However, for others such reformation was not enough. Inspired by the harsh morality of Calvinism and dissatisfied with Catholic practices, many wished to cut the ties with Catholic influence altogether, creating a radical branch of Protestantism under the name of "Puritanism," from the idea of "purifying" the Anglican church.

Many of these "Puritans" brought their beliefs across the Atlantic. From the beginning of the seventeenth century, English settlers founded several colonies in the area of Chesapeake Bay; one (Maryland, 1634) was actually Catholic, and the largest (Virginia, 1607) was Anglican-dominated; governed, at least initially, remotely from London. They served as sources of precious stones and minerals, however, besides this commercial value they were largely "of minor interest to the English government,"⁵ as William R. Polk records. On the other hand, in New England, the settlement of Plymouth (1620), Massachusetts Bay (1630), and neighboring colonies was taking shape in a different manner. The dominant element, if not a

³ Derek Wilson, *A Brief History of the English Reformation* (London: Running Press, 2012) 170.

⁴ Tindall and Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, 36.

⁵ William R. Polk, *The Birth of America: From Before Columbus to the Revolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006) 126.

numerical majority, in these colonies, consisted of Puritans fleeing Britain because of religious persecution in hopes of establishing an at least partially politically autonomous territorial base where Puritanism could be practiced unhindered. As evidenced from the many letters of correspondence many feared Britain's failing power and believed such flight allowed them "to escape destruction."⁶ Plymouth, providentially outside of England's jurisdiction, and Massachusetts Bay, equipped with a royal charter of substantially devolved self-government, could thus transfer substantially governmental authority to the new continent and to establish their own laws.⁷ What followed was a surge of a number of other successful English colonies, and by the early eighteenth century, in Tindall's words, "the English had outstripped both the French and the Spanish in the New World [meaning, in this case, the North American continent]. British America had become the most populous, prosperous, and powerful region on the continent."⁸ Life in the English colonies generally comprised fishing, farming, and trade—the latter two, especially in the South, substantially including slaves. The (white) settlers frequently had somewhat better living conditions than they previously had in Europe, resulting in significant population rise and overall economic growth by the beginning of the eighteenth century.⁹

By that time, most of the colonies had begun to strengthen, and to claim more prerogatives for, their provincial governing bodies. They remained, however, subject to the overarching legal authority of the British Crown-in-Parliament. As a result, some (often powerful/influential) English colonists occasionally (not incorrectly) were left with the perception that they were not allowed some of the privileges that Englishmen residing in Britain were. Such complexities, and even contradictions, in colonial administration coupled with the effects of Britain's disputes happening all over the world during the eighteenth century eventually led to questioning of the empire's rule and influence in America. In the early eighteenth century, the British government introduced a new colonial policy known as "salutary neglect," "which had at its basis a relaxation of colonial regulations," writes John E. Findling, "This policy," continues Findling, "it was hoped, would allow Britain to concentrate on European matters, and at the same time allow the colonists to buy more British goods and be of

⁶ Andrew Delbanco, *The Puritan Ordeal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) 10.

⁷ David M. Kennedy, Elizabeth Cohen and Thomas A. Bailey, *The American Pageant: A History of the American People, Vol. 1: To 1877* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2010) 54.

⁸ Tindall and Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, 94.

⁹ See Jack P. Greene's *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (1988) for a comprehensive account of British colonization of the New World.

benefit to Britain and its merchants.”¹⁰ In the late seventeenth century, Britain had introduced a mercantilist approach to economy which allowed them to exploit the colonies, control their exports and tax their goods, making trade for the colonists significantly more difficult. To carry out this policy several measures were instilled by the London imperial (or metropolitan) authorities, such as the Navigation Acts, restricting commercial opportunities for colonial merchants, and a number of taxes on colonial goods and British goods distributed in the colonies. The policy of “salutary neglect,” when it was introduced, was implemented largely through non- or reduced enforcement of the mercantilist legislation. The result, throughout the first six decades of the eighteenth century, was a general exemption of American commerce from the Navigation Acts and mercantilist taxes, punctuated sporadically, at moments of pressing fiscal emergency on the part of the British imperial authorities, by what often appeared to British North Americans arbitrary, temporary, local—and infuriating—suspensions of “salutary neglect.” This incendiary oscillation gradually grew over the years as Britain was struggling for financial resources after the Spanish wars (1701-1714, 1727-1729) and the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748), which, as Findling records, “were but a prelude to the almost continuous warfare on both the European continent and in America that ended with Peace of Paris (1763).”¹¹ These conflicts created a great amount of expenses for the imperial government and a growing independence of the colonial governments due to the policy of “salutary neglect”; as a result, Britain was compelled after 1763 explicitly to abandon this policy “in favor of attempts to enforce strictly and even expand the mercantilist laws so neglected in the past,”¹² notes Findling.

Another series of conflicts coupled with Britain’s internal issues and the troubling state of British politics followed, resulting in continued stricter and stricter mercantilist policies imposed upon its American colonies. This naturally led to protest by the American assemblies who, used to the relative imperial laxity of “salutary neglect,” viewed these decisions as dangerous to their liberty and a violation of their economic and prerogatives. The Stamp Act introduced in 1765 caused a first consequential phase of protests against the English King-in-Parliament’s authority, launching a period of unrest and turmoil which eventually led to the War of Independence (1775-1783). At first, since, as Harry L. Watson remarks, “most white Americans were of British descent, they drew their political principal from English history, and

¹⁰ John E. Findling and Frank W. Thackeray, *Events that Changed America in the Eighteenth Century* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998) 21.

¹¹ Findling and Thackeray, *Events that Changed America in the Eighteenth Century*, 36.

¹² Findling and Thackeray, *Events that Changed America in the Eighteenth Century*, 36.

they revered the king as protector of his people and their liberties.”¹³ This loyalty was, however, denounced after 1763 when Britain initiated strict enforcement of its mercantilist policies. The resistance of the colonies began with what Watson describes as a “calmly worded Declaration of Rights and Grievances, which promised loyalty to the king and ‘due subordination’ to Parliament, but insisted that taxation without consent broke fundamental English rights.”¹⁴ The Parliament paid these protests no heed, giving an unintentional foothold to those in America who were calling for direct action. Protests soon spread all over the English North American colonies gaining more and more support of not only officials and assembly men but also from middle- and lower-class inhabitants who believed a revolution would bring them advantage, including, sometimes, liberty and/or equality.

Spurred on by riots in Boston which eventually culminated in the Boston Tea Party conflict of 1773, many American colonists concluded the British threatened their liberty. In the end, it led to Americans’ taking direct action and deciding that they would fight for independence, which they adopted through Thomas Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence. As Watson points out, at this time, “the revolutionaries faced a dual challenge. They had to win a war against the most formidable army and navy of the Atlantic world, and build a republican government and society that would retain popular support and justify their daring rebellion.”¹⁵ Britain was in a similarly difficult position trying to decide whether a war was a feasible option, whether it would not bring more damage than good. However, the British king, George III. and several ministers who previously held a less severe stance in the matter, “now agreed [...] that a firm stand was essential.”¹⁶ Encouraged by what they perceived as false boasts of resistance; bullying that would not go beyond words, the “ministers brought in a series of Acts,” notes Christopher Hibbert, that were “mostly directed at the rebels of Massachusetts, in the expectation that other colonies would come to heel once they realized what might be their lot if they continued recalcitrant.”¹⁷ The colonists, however, did not share this opinion and continued to push for war in the “common cause of liberty.”¹⁸

¹³ Harry L. Watson, *Building the American Republic: A Narrative History to 1877* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018) 149.

¹⁴ Watson, *Building the American Republic: A Narrative History to 1877*, 158-159.

¹⁵ Watson, *Building the American Republic: A Narrative History to 1877*, 182.

¹⁶ Christopher Hibbert, *Redcoats and Rebels: The American Revolution Through British Eyes* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990) 24.

¹⁷ Hibbert, *Redcoats and Rebels: The American Revolution Through British Eyes*, 25.

¹⁸ Harry M. Ward, *War for Independence and the Transformation of American Society* (London: UCL Press, 1999) 2.

3.2 The Revolutionary Era

Thus, the Revolutionary War had begun. What followed were years of largely inconclusive battles between the newly created Continental army (commanded by George Washington) and a much better trained and supplied British infantry force, and of similarly inconclusive engagements between an improvised American navy and the world-renowned British Fleet, both of which were concluded by the decisive intervention of the professional French army and navy beginning in 1778. This military drama took place against the background of a great number of political power struggles in the British parliament, several alliances and a significant change in the colonists' thinking supported by a circulation of an enormous number of pamphlets propagating freedom of the colonies. The Americans stood before a critical challenge; to equip and train their soldiers posed great difficulties. Charles Botta recorded the state of the U.S. army as follows:

severe discipline, [...], not being as yet introduced among them, the soldiers joined or quitted their colors, as best suited their inclinations; [...] their arms were far from being sufficient. [...] They had no uniforms, and no magazines stocked with provisions; they lived, from day to day, without taking thought for the morrow; [...]. The officers wanted due instruction, excepting those few who had served in the preceding wars. They were not even known by their soldiers; for, the organisation of the several corps not being yet completed, the changes in them were continual. Orders were ill executed; every one wished to command, and do according to his own fancy; few deigned to obey.¹⁹

Washington realized all this and began to form the army into a more stable shape with the help of qualified officers, discipline, and proper training, yet the army continued to struggle for the rest of the war. The British military also turned out not to be as invincible as they seemed; poor communication, indecisiveness, and overconfidence were frequent in their campaigns. Coupled with limited knowledge of the terrain and its traps and some poor tactical choices an army that was supposedly the best in the world was subjected to what Tindall describes as “two serious reversals.”²⁰

This event, John Fiske writes, “made more ado in Europe than anything which had happened for many a day.”²¹ The acts and policies of 1774 were repealed, “commissioners were sent over to American to negotiate terms of peace.”²² It was at this point that France took the chance to interfere. Many other colonial powers also used the situation to attempt to oust Britain

¹⁹ Charles Botta, *History of the War of the Independence of the United States of America*, trans. George Alexander Otis (Boston: Harrison Gray, 1826) 176.

²⁰ Tindall and Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, 224.

²¹ John Fiske, *The War of Independence* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1894) 144.

²² Fiske, *The War of Independence*, 144.

from the North American continent and to regain the colonial acquisitions made from them by Britain in 1763, but the intervention of France, the greatest military power on the European continent, was crucial. Fiske records that “the American cause was now prosperous, and something might be made of it.”²³ The French signed a treaty of alliance with the new United States in 1777, and France officially entered the war. Britain now had to deal with not only Americans, but also the French, the Spanish, and the Dutch. The war was dragging out and the British were exhausted with trying to quell attacks from all sides. Finally, “on November 30, 1782, [...] negotiators signed a preliminary agreement in which Britain recognized American independence and set the new nation’s boundaries at the Canadian border, the Mississippi River, and the 31st parallel, north of Florida.”²⁴ The war, however, had not ended yet, due to the various alliances with other nations; the U.S. had to wait until they too signed a treaty with Britain, which as Watson records took another year, “so the final treaty was not signed until September 3, 1783.”²⁵

The war had officially ended, but the American nation would take several years if not decades to recuperate. The United States were now an independent nation; what was left was to create a government that would manage it. The Congress of the Confederation that formed during the War of Independence was an obvious choice to take over this role; however, as Tindall points out it “had little government authority. [...] virtually helpless to cope with foreign relations and postwar economic depression, [...] yet in spite of its handicaps, the Confederation Congress somehow managed to survive and to lay important foundations.”²⁶ Despite only existing to advise rather than command, the Congress managed to establish the first executive departments and set up an administrative body composed of members of committees. The states continued on with their own legislatures, virtually holding more authority than the Congress. This allowed for differences between the states’ taxation and financial policies which led the citizens burdened by the post-war turmoil to riots and calls for stronger central authority which culminated in adapting a constitution that clearly divided the legislative, executive and judiciary powers, ensured a place for each state in the Congress, and extended powers of the national government.

This new political structure ensued in a debate where on one side stood advocates of the central government who assumed the name Federalists, and on the other stood anti-Federalists

²³ Fiske, *The War of Independence*, 145.

²⁴ Watson, *Building the American Republic: A Narrative History to 1877*, 193.

²⁵ Watson, *Building the American Republic: A Narrative History to 1877*, 193.

²⁶ Tindall and Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, 250.

who preferred a less centralized system. Each with different motivations and visions of the future the United States were to enter. The struggles of these two groups made the ratification of the constitution more difficult; nonetheless, by 1790 all thirteen states had finished the ratification. What continued was the U.S. living through its first president, first elections, first handover of power from one president to another and a creation of new departments. But also, through continuing conflict between the Federalists and Republicans, ongoing financial and economic struggle aggravated by Britain's trade superiority and overall social discontent caused by the war.

3.3 First Half of the Nineteenth Century

It was not long before another major conflict broke out. It was the beginning of the nineteenth century and Thomas Jefferson took over the presidency after John Adams, started changing the Federalist policies of the previous administration, cut several taxes, and, most importantly, purchased Louisiana from France to stop it from falling into English hands. But as Eugene M. Wait argues, "Jefferson still feared British influence above all things."²⁷ And as it later turned out his fears were not fully imaginary. Europe was once again at war, Napoleon was sweeping across the continent, defeating Russian and Austrian forces, and colliding with Britain in the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. Britain issued edicts that essentially closed European ports under French control to foreign ships, and Napoleon ordered a seizure of all merchant ships, including American ships, that entered British ports. Thus, the young republic was caught in the middle of power struggle. In the words of Kennedy: "American vessels were, quite literally, caught between the Devil and the deep blue sea."²⁸ Furthermore, "Great Britain, with its naval power assured by the victory of Trafalgar," records Wait, "continued to attack American shipping. [...] the British government became more strict and aggressive. American weakness was taken advantage of by the British. Their frigates stopped American ships off American ports."²⁹ Jefferson was desperate to resolve this issue calmly; thus, in 1807, "in response to his request, Congress passed the Embargo Act, which stopped all exports of American goods and prohibited American ships from leaving for foreign ports."³⁰ This new policy ended up doing more damage than good to the U.S. economy and enraged those states that relied heavily on international export.

²⁷ Eugene M. Wait, *America and the War of 1812* (New York: Kroshka Books, 1999) 3.

²⁸ Kennedy, Cohen and Bailey, *The American Pageant: A History of the American People, Vol. 1: To 1877*, 239.

²⁹ Wait, *America and the War of 1812*, 239.

³⁰ Tindall and Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, 337.

In 1809, Jefferson passed the presidential chair to James Madison who continued in Jefferson's peaceful policy of neutrality/non-intervention, but agreed with Congress to drop ruinous and unpopular embargo and to reopen trade with France and England. Britain, however, did not show any interest and continued with its previous attacks. This led the U.S. to abandon its attempts to maintain a peaceful posture toward the U.K. As the encroachments continued, a war presented itself as the only option. Steeped by fear of a restoration of British subjugation and the need to assert the independence of the young nation, the war was declared. As Wait describes: "the final hostility between the mother and the offspring,"³¹ had broken out. The only place where Americans could create leverage against the British was Canada which, as David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler argue, "did appear susceptible to invasion and conquest."³² With control of inland waterways, American forces were able to take over control of Upper Canada in what Watson describes as "a hard-fought naval battle by Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry [who] secured American command of Lake Erie and anchored America's defense of its northwestern frontier."³³ In the South, war culminated in 1814, after Napoleon's defeat, Britain rejuvenated their strength and shifted focus to the U.S. The British attacked Washington, left to be entered, in the words of Carl Benn, "unopposed," the victorious British "set fire to the White House, Capitol, Treasury, and War Office, as well as various military facilities."³⁴ The Americans were able to strike back in the Battle of Baltimore and of New Orleans. During this last battle, the peace treaty was already being written; peace efforts began shortly after the war was declared in 1812 and continued during the war, with each side using their victories as negotiation assets, until 1814, when, according to Benn, "both sides wanted the war to end if national dignity could be maintained."³⁵ Both did not see the objectives as worthy of continuing the war anymore, thus, a peace treaty was signed preserving the status quo antebellum and the war ended.

Americans were finally free from British influence; the nation had successfully ended their 'second war of independence' as it was called by the enthusiastic congressmen,³⁶ as A. J. Langguth records. The U.S. could now fully focus on their own development and continue building their nationhood, but also on their rising power in the world as the new American

³¹ Wait, *America and the War of 1812*, 74.

³² David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler, *The War of 1812* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002) 58.

³³ Watson, *Building the American Republic: A Narrative History to 1877*, 269.

³⁴ Carl Benn, *The War of 1812* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2003) 59.

³⁵ Benn, *The War of 1812*, 81.

³⁶ A. J. Langguth, *Union 1812: The Americans Who Fought the Second War of Independence* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006)177.

republic, emerging as one of the biggest industrial powers by century's end. The U.S. went through a Market Revolution, reinforced, consolidated, and vastly enhanced by an Industrial Revolution, which aided the spread of capitalism resulting in "urban and rural transformation, a new class structure, new shapes and meanings for homes and workplaces, and dramatically new roles for women,"³⁷ writes Watson. Yet as he points out later, the life in this rising society was not as astonishing as it might seem. They "lived in a society of ranks, with a multitude of steps between the lowliest slave, the struggling laborer, the independent yeoman or artisan, and the gentleman with economic, cultural, and political power."³⁸

However great seemed the success of the American Revolution and of other conflicts, there were still questions left asking who exactly were the "men created equal." With the rise of capitalism, the divide between the rich and poor grew, making it harder and harder to overcome poverty despite hard labor. This was especially true for African Americans, for those freed in the North and doubly for those enslaved in the South. Despite being free in the North, they still faced heavy discrimination in virtually every aspect of their life, in addition to being subjected to violence and occasional re-enslavement. The racial question seemed to be pending more and more, and Americans started to realize it. Supported by literature, newspapers, magazines and pamphlets, a new American culture and thinking had started to form. What followed were, in Watson's words:

rapid fluctuations between prosperity and hard times [that] would frighten and enrage many Americans, as did the influx of immigrant culture and religion. Both concerns sparked political reactions. [...] Perhaps most important, middle-class faith in freedom and perfectibility would inspire hopes for local and national reform, and feed opposition to freedom's greatest enemy – human slavery.³⁹

It was nearing the second half of the nineteenth century and it was obvious there was one more transformational event ahead of the American nation which would significantly affect the structure of the modern nation-state that was to emerge from it.

³⁷ Watson, *Building the American Republic: A Narrative History to 1877*, 277.

³⁸ Watson, *Building the American Republic: A Narrative History to 1877*, 302.

³⁹ Watson, *Building the American Republic: A Narrative History to 1877*, 310.

4 National Identity and Nation-building in the U.S.

The concepts of nation-building and national identity in the context of the U.S. assume another set of complications to its already complex definition. National identification and the establishment of the American nation, as opposed to most of the European nations, is built on different principles due to its unique situation and environment in which the nation had started to develop. Most European nations based their first concepts of national identity on ethnic elements such as common territory, history, myths, language, values, and traditions. Existing for centuries, the nations used these common denominators located in history as the foundation of their identity, uniting their collective identity and thinking for many years to come. Rising nationalism throughout the nineteenth century demonstrated the importance of including mass public culture, common legal and political system, and common responsibilities to the concept of nation. The European concept of nation then became anchored in the idea of nation as a combination of both ethnic and civic elements, creating a multidimensional collective identity.

The U.S. and the American nation, however, emerged from a diametrically different set of circumstances. Compared to the European nations, the U.S. had basically no common myths, traditions, historical territory etc. that would be American in its core to which they could secure their emerging national identity. The land where the U.S. was established in 1776 was not the home of Americans for centuries, like it was the case of, e.g., the Czechs who in the midst of the Czech national revival could reach back toward the seventh century and the first known Czech state to rediscover their culture and national identity. The American population had no such anchor that would validate their sense of belonging to the region nor to the society. Instead, the American national identity had to plant its roots on a set of values and principles stemming not from shared history but their unique circumstances.

4.1 National Identity in the time of the Revolutionary War

American national identity started to form in the colonies before the Revolution; however, the Revolutionary War set off its culmination. Before the Revolution, the inhabitants of the British colonies did not struggle with their identity as much of it relied on the British Empire. “The inhabitants of the British colonies in North America,” argues Alexander Ziegler, “maintained their loyalty to the king of England long after they arrived on the continent.”¹ This sense of Britishness and the loyalty to the crown that the early colonizers retained can be

¹ Alexander Ziegler, “From Colonies to Nation: The Emergence of American Nationalism, 1750-1800,” 347, *Chrestomathy: Annual Review of Undergraduate Research, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, School of Languages, Cultures, and World Affairs, College of Charleston* 5 (2006): 347-375.

showcased through many examples. Liah Greenfeld notes the expression of loyalty in the names of the newly established settlements; “Of these ‘New England’ was just the most explicit. ‘Boston’ and ‘Cambridge,’ which did not bother to stress their derivative character, or ‘Virginia,’ the ‘Carolinas,’ and ‘Georgia,’ which commemorated English rulers rather than localities, reflected a similar sense of sameness.”² The identity that had started to form in colonial America was essentially based on this idea of sameness, of being Englishmen away from England, uniting most of the white population of the North American colonies into a homogenous society. This British heritage had become a common denominator among the newly flourishing American society, creating unified cultural and national expression.

Such an expression of identity is traceable in the writings of the colonial thinkers and religious figures who were present at the very beginning of the colonial settlements in North America. The first ever sermon delivered in the first New England colony of Plymouth in 1621 by Robert Cushman, a Separatist minister, and an organizer of the Mayflower voyage, in which he preaches Christian love and charity, includes phrases and words that clearly showcase how early American citizens viewed themselves and their soon-to-be nation. Cushman writes:

New-England, so called not only to avoid novelties, [...], but because of the resemblance that is in it, of *England* the native soil of Englishmen. It being much what the same for heat and cold in summer and winter, it being champaign ground, but not high mountains, somewhat like the soil in *Kent* and *Essex*; full of dales, and meadow ground, full of rivers and sweet springs, as *England* is.³

He reminds the settlers that they “have covenanted here to cleave together in the service of God and the king,”⁴ pointing out their common purpose and emphasizing togetherness. Similarly, Cotton Mather in his *Magnalia Christi Americana*, an extensive ecclesiastical history of New England, talks of New-England as “the Little Daughter” that “may bow down her self to her Mother England.”⁵ Who was, Mather continues:

forced to make a *Local Secession*, yet not a *Separation*, but hath always retained a Dutiful Respect to the *Church of God* in England; [...], being glad, if what is now presented to her, may be of any use, to help forward the *Union* and *Agreement* of the *Brethren*, which would be some Satisfaction to her for her undesired Local Distance from her Dear England [...]⁶

² Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992) 403.

³ Robert Cushman, *The First Sermon Ever Preached in New England: The First Printed and the Oldest American Discourse Extant* (New York: J. E. D. Comstock, 1859) 11.

⁴ Cushman, *The First Sermon Ever Preached in New England*, 36.

⁵ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana: or, The ecclesiastical History of New-England, from its first planting in the year 1620 Unto the Year of Our Lord, 1698*. (London: Thomas Parkhurst, 1702) 12.

⁶ Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 12.

However, this way of identification with England, its land, its people, and its king does not only appear in religious texts but also in widely circulated newspapers and magazines of the colonies.

This collective identity, its specificity and development can be examined through a study of the colonial newspapers which served as a medium of mass communication in the colonies, reinforcing the collective image of the nation through its language. To demonstrate the national feeling among the settlers from the second half of the eighteenth century till the turn of the nineteenth century the results of two content analyses of colonial press focused on language and symbols connected to English and American colonial identity and nationalism will be presented in an abbreviated form. The first content analysis conducted by Ziegler is composed of examining the Charleston newspapers published under the title *South Carolina Gazette* between the years 1750-1775 where four issues from every five years were analyzed to provide a sustained view of American identity and imagining. For the purpose of this analysis, Ziegler created a list of terms which he would look for that would be indicative of support of either British culture and nation or American identity and its developing culture. As has been described in Chapter 2, this period (1750-1800) was a time in which both nations were undergoing immense changes that would permanently impact their identity, culture, and overall future. The newspapers were filled with terms, words and phrases involving these two nations and their conflicts and negotiations. Ziegler's analysis records that "from 1750 to 1770, references to British identity consistently outnumber references to American identity. [...] the ratio of references to British identity to references of American identity lingers around 80 percent to 20 percent."⁷ Richard L. Merritt comes to very similar findings in his symbol analysis of eighteenth-century colonial press. He argues that "it was not until the years after 1764 that the distinction between 'His Majesty's subjects' or 'British colonists' and 'Americans' became a real one in the colonial press."⁸ Thus, for the first hundred and fifty or so years of its history, the U.S. was viewed as an England away from the British Isles and its inhabitants were still closely identifying themselves with their mother country rather than subscribing to a new identity.

The question that follows is then when did this start to change, and when did an American identity come to life? To answer this question a combination of findings in the above-mentioned analyses and the historical overview from chapter 2 will prove to be useful. The

⁷ Ziegler, "From Colonies to Nation: The Emergence of American Nationalism, 1750-1800," 353.

⁸ Richard L. Merritt, "The Emergence of American Nationalism: A Quantitative Approach," *American Quarterly* 17, no. 2, Part 2 (1965): 333, JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/2710802>.

findings of the two colonial press analyses suggest that the years of the 1760s recorded a notable upsurge in usage of “American” terms and references. The newly introduced and unfavorable colonial policies (See chapter 2, pp. 11) were undoubtedly one of the major reasons behind this rising interest to differentiate itself from the home country. These strict colonial policies in combination with Britain’s dire situation in both international and domestic politics increased the growing animosity between the two nations causing the colonies to denounce their loyalty to their English heritage. The growing “Americanism,” however, as Merritt notes, is not “a trend [that] emerged for the first time during the conflicts of that decade. The trend already existed. The crises of the 1760s merely accelerated the pace of that trend toward symbolic separation [...]”⁹

The indisputable turning point comes in 1775, when the conflict with Britain culminates until a revolutionary war breaks out, with Americans fighting for their independence. Thomas Paine, one of the leading pamphleteers of the revolutionary era, writes:

The cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind. Many circumstances have, and will arise, which are not local, but universal, and through which the principles of all lovers of mankind are affected, and in the event of which their affections are interested. The laying a country desolate with fire and sword, declaring war against the natural rights of all mankind, and extirpating the defenders thereof from the face of the earth, is the concern of every man to whom nature hath given the power of feeling; [...] ¹⁰

Paine’s words helped embolden American colonists to action. Brian McCartin records the impact of Paine’s pamphlet: “Fighting between Britain and her American colonies had been going on since April 1775, but rebel leaders had not defined the cause for which they were fighting. Then on January 10, 1776, Thomas Paine published *Common Sense*. This best-selling, forty-seven-page pamphlet defined the cause of America as liberty.”¹¹ Paine believed in the right to defy British rule due to its “abuse of power,”¹² whose usurpation lasted long enough to justify fighting for America’s cause. His arguments in line with Enlightenment ideas on society and government, highlighting human nature and equality at birth and criticizing corrupt monarchy and oppression, moved the American colonists to a rebellion. The response to Paine’s words can be best captured by a letter from a Maryland writer published in the *Pennsylvania Evening Post*: “If you know the author of COMMON SENSE, tell him he has done wonders

⁹ Merritt, “The Emergence of American Nationalism: A Quantitative Approach,” 334.

¹⁰ Thomas Paine, *Common Sense and Other Political Writings*, ed. Nelson F. Adkins (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1953) 3.

¹¹ Brian McCartin, *Thomas Paine: Common Sense, and Revolutionary Pamphleteering* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2002) 5.

¹² Paine, *Common Sense and Other Political Writings*, 3.

and worked miracles, made Tories Whigs, and washed Blackamores white. He has made a great number of converts here. His stile is plain and nervous; his facts are true; his reasoning just and conclusive [...]”¹³ Paine was one of the first who, according to Moncure Daniel Conway, spoke of America as “a nation.”¹⁴ In his magazine, shortly after his coming to America, Paine writes, as Conway records: ““America has now outgrown the state of infancy. Her strength and commerce make large advances to manhood; and science in all its branches has not only blossomed, but even ripened upon the soil.””¹⁵

This growing nationalist feeling can be once again examined through newspaper writing; Ziegler records: “The years 1775 and 1780, in the midst of the Revolutionary War, mark the growth of American national identity in relation to an entrenched British identity.”¹⁶ It is for the first time that the language referring to the colonies changes to viewing the colonists as having their own separate identity instead of as British subjects. Merritt records a 2,3 percent per year increase of use of symbols identifying colonists as American in the twelve years between 1764 to 1775.¹⁷ However, it needs to be pointed out that American nationalism did not develop out of the blue in 1775, but rather had been slowly shaping its form since the first settlements. As Merritt notes, “the crises of the 1760s merely accelerated the pace of that trend [Americanism] toward symbolic separation from the British political community.”¹⁸

At the center of this growing national identity was the sense of American uniqueness. This uniqueness is closely connected with the idea of Providential design, presenting the colonists as the “chosen ones,” the ones elected by God to create a model of “reformed” Christianity. Puritan New England combined its Christian ethics with civil government, creating a theocratic society where they could practice their religion without persecution with the idea of purifying the Church of England and fulfilling their role in the New World. Though they identified closely with the English nation and its ideals they also emphasized their “peculiarity” and distanced themselves from a declining Europe. This ambivalent nature of the identity lasted till the Revolutionary War which at its beginning was viewed as a national issue.

¹³ *The Pennsylvania Evening Post*, Philadelphia, February 13, 1776, page 3, https://www.rarenewspapers.com/view/562739?list_url=%2Flist%3Flist_results_format%3Dstandard%2525page%3D29%2525per_page%3D100%2525q%5Bcategory_id%5D%3D101-the-1600-s-and-1700-s%2525sort%3Ditems.id%2525sort_direction%3DASC.

¹⁴ Moncure Daniel Conway, *The Life of Thomas Paine: With a History of His Literary, Political and Religious Career in America, France, and England*, Vol. 1 (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1893) 65.

¹⁵ Conway, *The Life of Thomas Paine*, 65.

¹⁶ Ziegler, “From Colonies to Nation: The Emergence of American Nationalism, 1750-1800,” 354.

¹⁷ Merritt, “The Emergence of American Nationalism: A Quantitative Approach,” 333.

¹⁸ Merritt, “The Emergence of American Nationalism: A Quantitative Approach,” 334.

As Liah Greenfeld notes in John Adams' remarks: "He did not question that Americans and the inhabitants of Great Britain were one nation. The 'quarrel between the British administration and the Colonies,' on which he commented, was for him 'the great national subject.'"¹⁹ The loyalty to English identity shifted when the colonists realized that as British subjects, they were not allowed the same rights as the British subjects living on the British home soil. Suddenly, their Englishness, which, as Greenfeld writes, "they took such pains to stress, served as a cause and a justification for the resistance of the colonies to the British government, which eventually transformed what had begun as but a 'local secession' into a decided separation."²⁰

By 1783, this separation was officially done. The U.S. was now legally self-governing, but they were left with the task of building a new nation. The likeness, which has been the unifying feature up until this point had been tied to the relation to Britain was now gone; and American identity had to rely on its own resources like common experience, national heroes and myth-making. The Revolutionary War provided great starting material out of which many national heroes and symbols developed. As David Morgan argues, "the head of George Washington is certainly the most widely recognized 'American' image, [...] from the earliest days of the American republic, first General and then President Washington was the 'father' of the American nation."²¹ His image has been transplanted into "the visual language of heroism."²² He, or rather the virtues he represented, quickly became one of the most recognizable features of American identity. Despite this emerging nationalism, the Englishness of the colonists did not suddenly just evaporate. Neither before nor even at the end of the War was the goal separation, but rather autonomy; in fact, months before the Declaration of Independence hopes of reconciliation between the colonies and their mother country were loudly heard from both sides. After the Revolutionary War, the closeness with the mother nation was no longer there, yet British ideals, values and ways of life stayed. The U.S. did not become a nation, in the sense of creating a collective national identity, after 1776; it was rather a number of former colonies, each with its regional culture and loyalties. While it is true that the above-mentioned national symbolism emerged at this time and that it belongs among one of the forming tenets of American identity, the goal of the process that followed the Revolution was not the creation of a homogenous population led by a centralized national government; instead,

¹⁹ Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, 411.

²⁰ Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, 413.

²¹ David Morgan, "Seeing Nationhood: The Images of American Identity," in *Powers: Religion as a Social and Spiritual Force*, ed. by Meerten B. Ter Borg, Jan Willem Van Henten (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010) 84.

²² Morgan, "Seeing Nationhood: The Images of American Identity," 85.

in the words of E. James Ferguson, “Freedom [from Britain] signified to most Americans that each state would free to conduct its affairs without hindrance.”²³

It is not an overstatement that the national identity of the American colonists is a paradox. How can they be proud Englishmen and at the same time pursue independence from the very nation they feel this loyalty for? How can they assert their uniqueness as Americans and at the same time claim their Englishness? The paradox of the American Englishness stems from the very establishment of the British colonies in North America in the first place. The advocates for American independence used this ambiguity to support their arguments:

our ancestors, who first settled these colonies, were at the time of their emigration from the mother country, entitled to all the rights, liberties, and immunities of free and natural-born subjects, within the realm of England. [...] by such emigration they by no means forfeited, surrendered, or lost any of those rights, [...] and their descendants now are, entitled to the exercise and enjoyment of all such of them, as their local and other circumstances enable them to exercise and enjoy. [...] the foundation of English liberty, and of all free government, is a right in the people to participate in their legislative council: and as the English colonists are not represented [...] in the British parliament, they are entitled to a free and exclusive power of legislation in their several provincial legislatures [...].²⁴

In other words, it was their rights as Englishmen that served as the main argument for separation. As rightful British citizens they had the right to participate in the creation of laws; from this, however, as inhabitants of the colonies they were exempted: “America is only a secondary object in the system of British politics,”²⁵ writes Paine. Thus, without representation in parliament they concluded that they were no longer subject to its authority. Their membership in the British nation was treated as more and more inferior, which only added insult to injury and further destabilized their already quaking position to national identity. “They [Americans] had been long resentful of the condescending (as it appeared to them) attitude of their European fellow-nationals,”²⁶ argues Greenfeld. This thinking fueled their sense of uniqueness and superiority; it was they who were living in the colonies, and they therefore felt that they should have full control of their affairs. It was the ideas of English nationalism that prompted the birth of American national identity. Viewing themselves as more English than the English, they pledged to honor the English values of reason and political participation; to them, the

²³ E. James Ferguson, *The Power of the Purse: A History of American Public Finance, 1776- 1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961) 111.

²⁴ Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, 416.

²⁵ Paine, *Common Sense and Other Political Writings*, 28.

²⁶ Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, 416.

Americans increasingly added equality, the ideology of new nation where every individual had the right to exercise his or her liberty.

4.2 The Era of the First Republic

The Revolution initiated a period of fundamental changes for the growing U.S. nation. It created a sense of common nationality, of common American experience. July 4, 1776, became a starting point not only for the American nation but also of the American culture; every July 4 since then, Americans have rallied together to celebrate the importance of this beginning. Tindal argues: “Independence Day quickly became the most popular and most important public ritual in the United States.”²⁷ American national identity soon started to consolidate—as the first nation to arise not from antiquity but from modern ideology, the nation chosen to reinvent the world. However, the difficult times were not over; only the first part of America’s hardships were done. The now independent nation had another battle ahead of itself.

The question of governing and administration permeated the air. As it is covered in Chapter 2 (p. 13-15), these matters were exceptionally challenging for the infant republic; the states used to self-managing viewed centralized government distastefully, yet the dire financial situation and diverse, divergent, often conflicting state politics called for stronger central authority. For the nationalist point of view, this struggle for the ratification of the Constitution and the creation of centralized government, also remains of interest. Surprisingly, the Federalists in favor of centralized national government did not use typically nationalist language in their arguments. As Heidi Tarver notes:

The language of *The Federalist* [a series of federalist pamphlets produced by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay], and of countless publications and speeches which were issued in support of the new national government, is striking for its complete lack of nationalist rhetoric. The Federalists produced arguments for their project which were rational in tone and purely political in nature, revolving around their own definitions of such key concepts as republicanism, democracy and balance of power.²⁸

Instead of exploiting the newly emerged national myths and symbols of the Revolutionary War, the Federalists relied on reason and pragmatism; their arguments were based on the claim that they were trying to strengthen the position of the states rather than to erode it. They fully focused their arguments on rationalizing the need for centralized government and on emphasizing the essential role of the states. James Madison writes:

²⁷ Tindall and Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, 246.

²⁸ Heidi Tarver, “The Creation of American National Identity: 1774-1796,” *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 37 (1992): 80, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41035456>.

The proposed constitution, therefore, even when tested by the rules laid down by its antagonists, is, in strictness, neither a national nor a federal constitution; but a composition of both. In its foundation it is federal, not national; in the sources from which the ordinary powers of the government are drawn, it is partly federal, and partly national; in the operation of these powers, it is national, not federal; in the extent of them again, it is federal, not national; and finally, in the authoritative mode of introducing amendments, it is neither wholly federal, nor wholly national.²⁹

Madison compiles a set of proofs that explains the character of the government proposed by the Constitutional convention and addresses the objections pointed towards it. He presents the government proposed in the constitution as a combination of both national and federal, deemphasizing the role of national so as not to aggravate the opposition.

The attenuation of nationalist tendencies did not last long; right after the ratification of the constitution the nationalist-thinking elite started actively to pursue and support the creation of national identity and unification. Alexander Hamilton, Madison, Washington, and Noah Webster were amongst the most vocal in the nationalist movement. Hamilton was at the forefront of the Federalists, writing powerful compelling arguments for the support of the union. His nationalist agenda was clear from his concise and restrained essays; his vision of America rested on, as he explains in *the Federalist* No. 11, “a vigorous national government,” under which “the natural strength and resources of the country, directed to a common interest, would baffle all the combinations of European jealousy to restrain our growth.”³⁰ He sees the union as necessary in order to be able to compete both commercially and potentially even in the case of war with the European nations. In both cases, “the United States, would bid fair to be much favourable than that of the Thirteen States, without union, or with partial unions.”³¹ At last, he concludes:

Let Americans disdain to be the instruments of European greatness! Let the Thirteen States, bound together in a strict and indissoluble union, concur in erecting one great American system, superior to the control of all transatlantic force or influence, and able to dictate the terms of the connexion between the old and the new world!³²

Hamilton’s part in the nationalist movement did not end there; he was the one who managed most of the process that led to Washington’s presidency, giving out advice on the etiquette of a

²⁹ Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, *The Federalist*, ed. by George W. Carey and James McClellan (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001) 51.

³⁰ Hamilton, Jay, and Madison, *The Federalist*, 54.

³¹ Hamilton, Jay, and Madison, *The Federalist*, 54.

³² Hamilton, Jay, and Madison, *The Federalist*, 54-55.

president and slowly, as Lawrence S. Kaplan argues, “enhance[ing] the dignity of the presidency without arousing the discontent of republicans.”³³

Washington, besides his role as the national hero of the Revolution and the first president, the symbol of the growing nation, also took active part in advancing the nationalist idea. The new form of government had been set up, at least for a while, but Washington and other nationalists recognized, in Tarver’s words, “the continuing pervasive influence of Europe, and in particular of Great Britain, on American culture, and wished to expedite the development of indigenous ‘manners and habits.’”³⁴ In fact at this time, it was difficult even to speak of *American* culture when most of the traditions and manners were established in Europe. With the intent to change this and create a more unified nation, the nationalists planned, with Hamilton and Washington at the forefront, to establish a national university which would produce a uniform collective identity.

Washington “made this the chief object of his later life,” argues Albert Castel, “and even sought to advance it after death through the means of his last will and testament.”³⁵ The dire need for a national university was evident; many turned to Europe to seek higher education, and this created a “risk of becoming corrupted by European manners, morals, and monarchism,”³⁶ which they were so desperately trying to erase. Hamilton and Washington advocated for the idea that creating such an institution would provide a locus for “assimilation of the principles, opinions, manners, and habits of our countrymen, by drawing from all quarters our youth to participate in a common education, well deserv[ing] the attention of government.”³⁷ Washington thought that a national university would serve as an ideal institution “for the general diffusion of knowledge,”³⁸ which he believed to be fundamental in enlightening public opinion and for which he pushed for the rest of his life, reaffirming its importance in his farewell address.³⁹

³³ Lawrence S. Kaplan, *Alexander Hamilton: Ambivalent Anglophile* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc, 2002) 82. For more on Hamilton’s role in the Washington presidency and his role during the first republic, see p.81-90 of Kaplan’s text.

³⁴ Tarver, “The Creation of American National Identity: 1774-1796,” 84.

³⁵ Albert Castel, “The Founding Fathers and the Vision of a National University,” *History of Education Quarterly* vol. 4, no. 4 (Dec., 1964): 280, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/367502>.

³⁶ Castel, “The Founding Fathers and the Vision of a National University,” 281

³⁷ Alexander Hamilton, *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, vol.8, ed. by Henry Cabot Lodge (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1904) 217.

³⁸ George Washington, *Washington’s Farewell Address* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1861) 17.

³⁹ For more on Washington’s Farewell Address and its story, see John Avlon’s *Washington’s Farewell: The Founding Father’s Warning to Future Generations* (2017).

The Farewell Address is an open letter to the American people delivered on 17 September 1796 in which he affirmed his principles. His strong nationalist feelings are clearly visible in this, his last act of revolution, in which he proclaims; “the name of AMERICAN, which belongs to you, in your national capacity, must always exalt the just pride of Patriotism, more than any appellation derived from local discriminations.”⁴⁰ In contrast to the language of *the Federalist*, Washington employs strong nationalist language and uses the national myths and symbols to remind the people of their unity in a time when it was once again being challenged. “With slight shades of difference,” he continues, “you have the same religion, manners, habits, and political principles. You have in a common cause fought and triumphed together; the Independence and Liberty you possess are the work of joint counsels and joint efforts, of common dangers, sufferings, and successes.”⁴¹ In Tarver’s words, “through the invocation of the Revolutionary War, Washington here attempts to provide the symbol and the political unit it represents with an experiential basis.”⁴² He uses the common experience of the nation to remind the people of the struggle they were able to endure to reinforce his argument for preserving the nation’s unity and strengthening the sense of community.

Another big advocate for education and a fierce patriot advocating for national unification and a creation of American identity was Noah Webster. Webster was also very cognizant of the fact that American culture still very much relied on its British heritage, which was viewed as a considerable hurdle on the road to American independence. And one of the places where this reliance was most evident was in the language itself. And it was Noah Webster who took it upon himself to change that. Americans were, for a long time, subjected to mockery from the side of the British for their Americanisms and their corrupt dialect. Harry R. Warfel records “the persistent burden of cultural inferiority,”⁴³ from which Americans suffered. It was at this time that Webster wrote what Warfel dubbed as “a clarion call for American linguistic unity and independence.”⁴⁴ In his *Dissertations on the English Language*, he wrote:

As an independent nation, our honor requires us to have a system of our own, in language as well as government. Great Britain, whose children we are, and whose language we speak, should no longer be our standard; for the taste of her writers is already corrupted, and her language on the decline. [...] Now is the time to begin the plan. The minds of the Americans are roused by the events of a revolution; the necessity of organizing the political body and of forming

⁴⁰ Washington, *Washington’s Farewell Address*, 7.

⁴¹ Washington, *Washington’s Farewell Address*, 7.

⁴² Tarver, “The Creation of American National Identity: 1774-1796,” 86.

⁴³ Harry R. Warfel, *Noah Webster: Schoolmaster* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019) 6.

⁴⁴ Warfel, *Noah Webster: Schoolmaster*, 21.

constitutions of government that shall secure freedom and property, has called all the faculties of the mind into exertion; and the danger of losing the benefits of independence, has disposed every man to embrace any scheme that shall tend, in its future operation, to reconcile the people of America to each other, and weaken the prejudices which oppose a cordial union.⁴⁵

He set out to create an American dictionary that would reform the nation and become the base of American national culture. He patiently explained the need for an independent language; while he admitted the common roots of the languages, he emphasized that it is natural for Americans, who are placed at a distance from England, to develop their own language. The American dictionary that comes out of this linguistic endeavor makes sure to criticize the until then very popular work of Samuel Johnson and other British lexicographers. Warfel notes that “he [Webster] asserts that his dictionary is innovative, [...], a bold push to Americanize lexicography.”⁴⁶ He presents several thousand words taken straight from American life, and even in later works suggests a rejection of the British mode of spelling and pronunciation.

This was not, however, Webster’s only nationalist project. He also extensively wrote on education, politics, history, and on American identity and character. His ardent patriotism was even more visible in these works. In his *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language*, he fiercely criticizes Europe and its ways: “Europe is growing old in folly, corruption, and tyranny, [...] laws are perverted, manners are licentious, literature is declining, and human nature debased.”⁴⁷ Later, in his essays “On the Education of Youth in America,” Webster asserts the importance of education; “The education of youth is,” he wrote, “in all governments, an object of the first consequence.”⁴⁸ He believed that “systems of Education” are “an object of vast magnitude,”⁴⁹ especially with Americans’ not having yet formed a national culture and character. The main goal was to “implant, in the minds of the American youth, the principles of virtue and of liberty; and inspire them with just and liberal ideas of government, and with an inviolable attachment to their own country.”⁵⁰ Webster saw education as a way of instilling morals and American virtues into the youth of the nation, believing that through this process a national character could be formed. He notes that because of the long dependence on the British Empire, Americans were used to emulating English culture and mores; there had not been “any

⁴⁵ Noah Webster, *Dissertations on the English Language* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas & Company, 1789) 20, 36.

⁴⁶ Warfel, *Noah Webster: Schoolmaster*, 47.

⁴⁷ Warfel, *Noah Webster: Schoolmaster*, 30.

⁴⁸ Noah Webster, *A Collection of Essays and Fugitiv Writings: On Moral, Historical, Political and Literary Subjects* (Boston: I. Thomas & E. T. Andrews, 1790) 1.

⁴⁹ Webster, *A Collection of Essays and Fugitiv Writings*, 3.

⁵⁰ Webster, *A Collection of Essays and Fugitiv Writings*, 3.

national interest in America; [...], and we had no common interest.⁵¹” But their newfound independence and the formation of the union demand for a creation of collective identity; “[it is] necessary that the citizens of different States should know each-others characters and circumstances; that all jealousies should be removed; that mutual respect and confidence should succeed, and a harmony of views and interests be cultivated by a friendly intercourse.”⁵² He strongly advocates full disposal of British influence. At last, he calls for confidence:

Americans, unshackle your minds, and act like independent beings. You have been children long enough, subject to the control, and subservient to the interest of a haughty parent. You have now an interest of your own to augment and defend: You have an empire to raise and support by your exertions, and a national character to establish and extend by your wisdom and virtues.⁵³

4.2.1 Creation of American Culture: The Image of America Through the Eyes of Intellectuals

The attempts to shape American culture, values, ideas and beliefs continued. The Revolutionary intellectuals sought to create a unified American identity through creating a sense of nationhood and cultural unity. The call for creation of “national character” raised by Webster, as Eve Kornfeld notes, “was echoed, less stridently but no less firmly, by many of the intellectual leaders of the Revolutionary generation.”⁵⁴ In addition to Hamilton’s nationalist rhetoric, Washington’s efforts in establishing a national university, and Webster’s attempts to shape an American language, many authors vowed to establish writing that would, in the words of John Trumbull, “prove to the world, in these new-dawning skies,/ What genius kindles and what arts arise,”⁵⁵ from the pen of American writers. Joel Barlow, a “revolutionary, chaplain, lawyer, statesman, poet, and propagandist,”⁵⁶ as Danielle E. Conger describes him, was one of these men that shared the “desire to proclaim American literary independence in the immediate post-Revolutionary period by drawing on indigenous themes and subjects.”⁵⁷ For one of his most renowned epic poems he chose the figure of Christopher Columbus, “that great man, whose extraordinary genius led him to the discovery of the continent, and whole singular suffering ought to excite the indignation of the world,”⁵⁸ about whom the American public

⁵¹ Webster, *A Collection of Essays and Fugitiv Writings*, 35.

⁵² Webster, *A Collection of Essays and Fugitiv Writings*, 35.

⁵³ Webster, *A Collection of Essays and Fugitiv Writings*, 36.

⁵⁴ Eve Kornfeld, *Creating an American Culture, 1775-1800: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001) 3.

⁵⁵ John Trumbull, *The Poetical Works* (Hartford: Samuel & Goodrich, 1820) 108.

⁵⁶ Danielle E. Conger, “Toward a Native American Nationalism: Joel Barlow’s The Vision of Columbus,” *The New England Quarterly* 72, no. 4 (Dec, 1999): 558, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/366828>.

⁵⁷ Conger, “Toward a Native American Nationalism: Joel Barlow’s The Vision of Columbus,” 558.

⁵⁸ Joel Barlow, *The Vision of Columbus; A Poem in Nine Books* (Paris: Barrois & R. Thomson, 1793),

knew very little, as its hero. According to Kornfeld, “he was convinced that ‘every circumstance relating to the discovery and settlement of America’ ought to hold intrinsic interest for his fellow citizens”;⁵⁹ thus, *The Vision of Columbus; A Poem in Nine Books*, was created and finally published in 1787.

The poem begins with a geographical description of North and South America. Barlow presents the New World as a land sublime and superior to that of Europe: “And hills unnumber’d rose without a name,/ Which plac’d, in pomp, on any Western shore,/ Taurus would shrink, the Alps be sung no more.”⁶⁰ Praise, replete with invocations of American place names, is used to present the gloriousness of this new realm that Columbus discovered:

From sultry Mobile’s rich Floridian shore,
To where Ontario bids hoarse Laurence roar,
O’er the clear mountain-tops and winding streams,
Rose a pure azure, streak’d with orient beams;
Fair spread the scene, the hero gazed sublime,
And thus in prospect hail’d the happy clime.⁶¹

“Barlow,” argues Robert D. Richardson, Jr., “sees the New World as equal to the old, not as dependent upon it, certainly not as a debased form of it.”⁶² He uses native American histories and myths to create a brand of antiquity different from the Roman and Greek antiquity of Europe to which the English tied their intellectual and cultural identity. In Richardson’s words, “Barlow is trying to show that America need not look to Europe or to antiquity for gods, heroes, law or civilization; he aimed, deliberately, to write a poem that would show that there was American myth adequate to the American adventure.”⁶³ He celebrates Aztec and Incan inventions and innovation, laws and values; their ruler, “immortal Capac,”⁶⁴ an enlightened leader, created a society based on peace and noble virtues. These virtues that Barlow emphasizes in Capac were, argues Conger, “widely admired in Europe, [...] Even by European standards, then, America is superior, for an empire clearly demonstrating Enlightenment ideals thrived in the New World, providing an indigenous source for American pride.”⁶⁵

Barlow’s vision of American heroism continues through depiction of the Revolutionary War and its heroes. The “great Washington” rises to enliven the “charms of freedom and the

“Introduction,” 1.

⁵⁹ Kornfeld, *Creating an American Culture, 1775-1800: A Brief History with Documents*, 16.

⁶⁰ Barlow, *The Vision of Columbus; A Poem in Nine Books*, 34.

⁶¹ Barlow, *The Vision of Columbus; A Poem in Nine Books*, 40.

⁶² Robert D. Richardson, Jr., “The Enlightenment View of Myth and Joel Barlow’s ‘Vision of Columbus,’” *Early American Literature* 13, no. 1 (Spring, 1978): 42, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25070863>

⁶³ Richardson, Jr., “The Enlightenment View of Myth and Joel Barlow’s ‘Vision of Columbus,’” 42-43.

⁶⁴ Barlow, *The Vision of Columbus; A Poem in Nine Books*, 69.

⁶⁵ Conger, “Toward a Native American Nationalism: Joel Barlow’s *The Vision of Columbus*,” 567.

fire of fame.”⁶⁶ Barlow pays great attention to American history and its triumphs, choosing American independence as its centerpiece. Names and deeds of American heroes both military and political are frequently highlighted:

The hero's laurel springing by its side;
His sword hung useless, on his graceful thigh,
On Britain still he cast a filial eye;
But sovereign fortitude his visage bore,
To meet their legions on the invaded shore.
Sage Franklin next arose, in awful mein,
And smiled, unruffled, o'er the approaching scene;
[...]
Nash, Rutledge, Jefferson, in council great,
And Jay and Laurens oped the rolls of fate;
The Livingstons, fair Freedom's generous band,
The Lees, the Houstons, fathers of the land,
O'er climes and kingdoms turn'd their ardent eyes,
Bade all the oppress'd to speedy vengeance rise;
All powers of state, in their extended plan,
Rise from consent to shield the rights of man.
Bold Wolcott urged the all-important cause;
With steady hand the solemn scene he draws;
Undaunted firmness with his wisdom join'd,
Nor kings nor worlds could warp his stedfast mind.⁶⁷

Barlow expands on the Revolutionary mythmaking, glorifying American heroes and their values. His language, rich in American idioms, describes the Revolutionary vision of America as a society and culture of peace and harmony.

The building of nationhood and national culture through literature continued. James Fenimore Cooper was another writer who deserves to be credited with advancing the ideas of American culture and values in American literature and writing. As Renata R. Mautner Wasserman notes, he was not “the first American writer, but he was the first to receive wide national and international recognition, [...], when he entered the tense dialogue with the European discourse of the New World which underlies the creation of an American literature of nationality.”⁶⁸ He first established an image of the new American nation through his series of *Leatherstocking Tales* (1823-1841). The main protagonist of these tales is an Anglo-American man, Nathaniel Bumppo, a woodsman partially raised by Native Americans, who learns about himself and life through his experiences as he grows with his lifelong Mohican

⁶⁶ Barlow, *The Vision of Columbus; A Poem in Nine Books*, 174.

⁶⁷ Barlow, *The Vision of Columbus; A Poem in Nine Books*, 174-175.

⁶⁸ Renata R. Mautner Wasserman, “James Fenimore Cooper and the Image of America,” in *Exotic Nations: Literature and Cultural Identity in the United States and Brazil, 1830-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) 154.

friend Chingachgook. Natty is an embodiment of communion with nature: to him the forest “is a symbol of freedom, serenity, and honesty; it is also the temple of a benignant and personal deity. By implication civilization, or more precisely the ‘clearings,’ is corrupt,”⁶⁹ argues Gordon Mills. Cooper builds the new image of America through the connection to this American otherness. The myths of the Noble Savage and the New Eden, as Elaine Barry records, were “enormously popular in Europe.”⁷⁰ Primarily read as adventure stories, Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales* created a “collective fantasy about the frontier,”⁷¹ as Henry Nash Smith defines it, with the myth of the friendship between the white man and the Indian as a centerpiece. The relationship between the white Americans and Native Americans was nowhere near the romantic portrayal of blood-brothers as Cooper presents it. In the words of D. H. Lawrence, “there is no reconciliation. There is no mystic conjunction between the spirit of the two races. [...] Fenimore Cooper has probably done more than any writer to present the Red man to the white man. But Cooper’s presentation is indeed a wish-fulfilment.”⁷²

Cooper’s other work, like *Notions of the Americans* (1828) or *The American Democrat* (1838), change the image of the new nation that he previously established in his *Leatherstocking* series. As Wasserman notes, “*Notions* counteracts the exoticism of those tales, which, as fiction, bear at best an oblique relation to the new reality Cooper wants known, understood, and valued.”⁷³ The national epos presented in *the Leatherstocking Tales* is deconstructed and replaced by an image of America as the new land and nation, described “in terms valuable on their own and not tailored to a tradition of defining Europe’s civilized self in relation to American primitivism,”⁷⁴ remarks Wasserman. His role as a writer gradually changed from that of chronicler of an American history which legitimates the existence of the new nation to that of a commentator who exposes the virtues and vices of society on both sides of the Atlantic, suggesting to his respective audiences that the new nation “promises to redeem the European past but also prefigures a successful future for a polity whose institutions are at the same time

⁶⁹ Gordon Mills, “The Symbolic Wilderness: James Fenimore Cooper and Jack London,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 13, no. 4 (Mar., 1959): 331, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3044314>.

⁷⁰ Elaine Barry, “History, Fiction, and Myth: The Sub-Texts of Fenimore Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales*,” *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 7, no. 2 (December, 1988): 12, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41053498>.

⁷¹ Barry, “History, Fiction, and Myth: The Sub-Texts of Fenimore Cooper’s *Leatherstocking Tales*,” 12.

⁷² D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. by Ezra Greenspan, Lindeth Vasey and John Worthen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014): 43-44.

⁷³ Wasserman, “James Fenimore Cooper and the Image of America,” 158.

⁷⁴ Wasserman, “James Fenimore Cooper and the Image of America,” 159.

derived from the best European political and social thought and independent of its political, cultural, and economic power.”⁷⁵

As Cooper explains in the preface, his intention was to present what he calls “a hasty and general sketch of most things of interest, and to communicate what is told in as unpretending and familiar a way as the subjects themselves would conveniently allow.”⁷⁶ He warns that “a great number of readers will be indisposed to believe that the United States of America are of the importance which the writer does not disguise he has attempted to shew that they are of the rest of the world.”⁷⁷ He, reassuringly, creates a connection between the Old and the New World, insisting that the “moral development of the new nation originates in the Old World; America’s difference grows out of the familiar; it does not subvert it.”⁷⁸ However, as it turns out, Cooper underestimated the response of his audiences. Awaiting understanding and interest the book received criticism for being offensive. He defends the newly established rules and values of the American society in comparison with Europe, presenting America as a refined and civilized nation in accordance with European notions. Nonetheless, in his efforts to create a practically flawless nation he glosses over several issues that would hinder its civilized image. His image of America threatens the European perception of the persistent power of the nation, by depicting, in Wasserman’s words, “a modern state whose new forms of political, economic, and social organization might supplant those of Europe.”⁷⁹ This America, however, does not last. When Cooper returns from his seven-year absence, he is, once again, forced to reexamine the image of America that he had tried to create. And as H.L. Mencken notes, “what he discovered, searching the national scene, was that the democratic panacea,” which he so vehemently defended, “after all, was a fraud like any other.”⁸⁰ This led to his very critical account of the dangers of democracy, earning him the name of “a sniffish and unpatriotic fellow.”⁸¹

Barlow’s and Cooper’s images of America helped substantially with describing the American experience both to American and European audiences. Yet, the author who had, prior to Alexis de Tocqueville, the most significant role in creating the image of American life and national identity is undoubtedly J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur. Born in 1735 in

⁷⁵ Wasserman, “James Fenimore Cooper and the Image of America,” 160.

⁷⁶ James Fenimore Cooper, *America and the Americans: Notions Picked up by a Travelling Bachelor* (London: R. Bentley; Bell and Bradfute, 1836) ix-x.

⁷⁷ Cooper, *America and the Americans: Notions Picked up by a Travelling Bachelor*, x.

⁷⁸ Wasserman, “James Fenimore Cooper and the Image of America,” 162.

⁷⁹ Wasserman, “James Fenimore Cooper and the Image of America,” 166.

⁸⁰ James Fenimore Cooper, *The American Democrat* (New Brunswick: Transaction Large Print, 2010) viii.

⁸¹ Cooper, *The American Democrat*, viii.

Normandy, France, baptized Michel-Guillaume-Jean de Crèvecoeur, he immigrated to America in 1759.⁸² And it is a question of this French immigrant that has gone a long way to shape and problematize the discussion of American identity from the eighteenth century onwards. His *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), depicting the American experience, are cited to this day in anthologies, textbooks and studies of American identity. Letter III. is paid unprecedented attention in most of these texts with the question Crèvecoeur poses at the beginning of the Letter appearing as centerpiece. The question that Crèvecoeur asks in this letter—“What, then, is the American, this new man?”⁸³—has been, as Henry Nash Smith writes, “repeated by every generation from his time to ours. Poets and novelists, historians and statesmen have undertaken to answer it.”⁸⁴ But why have the words of this Frenchman meant so much for the definition of American experience?

The creation of nationhood and national identity has been one of the prime tasks of the founding generation who, as Morgan notes, realized that language and imagery held immense power in this project.⁸⁵ Forming national myths and images fueled the establishment of the emerging American character and protected American democracy. Be it language, literature or art, Morgan records a great number of efforts among American artists and their audience to visualize American identity.⁸⁶ Thus, the success of Crèvecoeur’s book in this era should not be surprising given its relevance in helping to establish the national myths. The book is not an objective description of early America, but rather a romanticized vision of a country that Crèvecoeur and his contemporaries sought after. He describes the life of the people in the New World, their manners, customs, values and thinking, presenting America as a land of opportunity to the European audience. Any newcomer, Crèvecoeur writes, from whatever part of Europe feels this as soon as they step onto the continent:

He begins to feel the effects begins to feel the effects of a sort of resurrection; hitherto he had not lived, but simply vegetated; he now feels himself a man, because he is treated as such; the laws of his own country had overlooked him in his insignificance; the laws of this cover him with their mantle. Judge what an alteration there must arise in the mind and thoughts of this man; he begins to forget his former servitude and dependence, his heart involuntarily swells and

⁸² Bruce Mazlish, “Crèvecoeur’s New World,” *The Wilson Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (Autumn, 1982): 141, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40256374>.

⁸³ J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer* (New York: Fox, Duffield & Company, 1904) 54.

⁸⁴ Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978) 3.

⁸⁵ Morgan, “Seeing Nationhood: The Images of American Identity,” 81.

⁸⁶ Morgan, “Seeing Nationhood: The Images of American Identity,” 83.

glows; this first swell inspires him with those new thoughts which constitute an American.⁸⁷

The New World, in Crèvecoeur's view, promised something that the Old could not—and that was freedom, freedom from the influences of the Old World, from their institutions, their oppression and their desolation and decline. In America, on the other hand, “every thing is modern, peaceful, and benign.”⁸⁸ There is, he argues, “no war to desolate our fields: our religion does not oppress the cultivators: we are strangers to those feudal institutions which have enslaved so many. Here nature opens her broad lap to receive the perpetual accession of new comers, and to supply them with food.”⁸⁹ Crèvecoeur paints an idyllic image of America, half-real and half-imagined, presenting the nation to a European (and also an American) audience as a place of metamorphosis; the people are removed from “ancient prejudices and manners,”⁹⁰ receiving a “new mode of life.”⁹¹ To him, America is the “most perfect society now existing in the world. Here man is free as he ought to be.”⁹²

“This is the Crèvecoeur,” argues Mazlish, “who figures in the anthologies. It is the Crèvecoeur who was writing for Europeans, not Americans, [although, in an English translation of 1784 he was read by, and influenced, many more Americans than ever was the case with Europeans], trying to impress them with the wisdom of the choice he and others were making in settling in the New World.”⁹³ However, what most of the anthologies and the Revolutionary intellectuals left out is that this optimism sours as the *Letters* near the end. As A. W. Plumstead argues, “For many writers of his day, the American Revolution was an inevitable, necessary birth pang in securing freedom for a new nation, a necessary fight to rid Americans of the very kinds of European tyranny Crèvecoeur castigates in his book, [...]”⁹⁴ Thus, the passages that reveal the dark sides of America such as slavery, foolish aristocracy, and the ruinous impact of the Revolutionary War are either glossed over or omitted. And it is mainly his positive letters that are highlighted. In this way, as Malizsh records, he “helped create the myth of what it was to be an American, and that myth, in turn, helped shape [American] reality.”⁹⁵ The darker side of American character and conditions, to which he alluded in the later letters, has been

⁸⁷ Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 77.

⁸⁸ Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 7-8.

⁸⁹ Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 7-8.

⁹⁰ Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 54.

⁹¹ Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 54.

⁹² Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 50.

⁹³ Mazlish, “Crèvecoeur's New World,” 145.

⁹⁴ A. W. Plumstead, “Crèvecoeur: A ‘Man of Sorrows’ and the American Revolution,” *The Massachusetts Review* 17, no. 2 (Summer, 1976): 292, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25088634>.

⁹⁵ Mazlish, “Crèvecoeur's New World,” 147.

camouflaged or ignored, to uphold the culturally valuable myth of American exceptionalism that shapes a significant part of the national identity.

Many other artists, authors and intellectuals followed Crèvecoeur's thought, but not many others have been granted such attention. Still others tried to contribute to the creation of national identity in written or visual form. "As they attempted to define and shape American identity through a national culture," notes Kornfeld, "the intellectuals of the early Republic discovered their need for 'the Other.'"⁹⁶ So far, the American identity largely spoke of the white man, leaving many living in America exempt. To unify the heterogenous society and create a sense of collective community and nationhood, in addition to inventing language, myths and imagery of who is the American, the images of who is not began to appear. There is a multitude of categories defining otherness—gender, class, ethnicity, race—that the intellectuals had to cope with when they decided to delve into this problematic.

4.3 The Image of the "Other"

After the Revolutionary War, America was propelled into a series of revolutions (or at least deconstructions/reconstructions) that began and matured as the new nation undertook to give steadily more nuanced formulation and expression to itself. The excitement around the success of the War induced not only political re-cognitions but also social ones. The excitement around the success of the War induced not only political revolutions but also social revolutions. As Tindall records, somewhat over-generally, "the spirit of independence was converted into equality"⁹⁷ and everyone who had taken part in the War wanted some of this independence too. The newly emerging state governments presented an opportunity for more common people to take part in political decisions, as the new legislatures offered more and more representation to ordinary citizens who had previously had to rely on wealthier (more "prominent," better-connected, often better-educated and sometimes, as a result, more "intellectual") representatives. Yet these new possibilities were available almost exclusively only to white males. And the same fate affected the simultaneous construction of theoretical American "nationhood" and "cultural identity": very little or no attention was paid to the "Other."

⁹⁶ Kornfeld, *Creating an American Culture, 1775-1800: A Brief History with Documents*, 8.

⁹⁷ Tindall and Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, 239.

American (white) women of the eighteenth century were still very much consigned to the domestic sphere. As Linda K. Kerber records, “Their daily activities took place within a feminine, domestic circle: infants were delivered by midwives, the sick were cared for by nurses, women who traveled stayed overnight at boardinghouses owned or run by females.”⁹⁸ The other spheres were strictly reserved for their male counterparts; women could not vote nor hold an office, they had limited prospects in terms of education and ownership and lastly divorce was an almost impossible ordeal. However, the demands of the Revolutionary War, as of many wars, at least temporarily and locally blurred some dividing lines, enabling women to step out of the confinement of their own homes. Many accompanied troops to camps; but even in these extraordinary circumstances, largely confined themselves (or were confined to) traditional gender roles that society imposed on them, serving as cooks, nurses and cleaners. There were a few exceptions where a woman joined a regiment such is the case of Deborah Sampson, who in 1782 disguised herself as a young man and enrolled in the Fourth Massachusetts Regiment under the name of Robert Shurtliff. As Tiffany K. Wayne records, “She went on campaigns to hunt down raiding parties of Tories. She fought against Indians in western New York.”⁹⁹ She maintained her disguise until she became sick with fever and her doctor discovered her secret. Her situation was taken positively by the officers, and she stayed in the regiment until she was honorably discharged in October 1783.¹⁰⁰ Such cases, however, were extremely rare.

During the War images of women were often used symbolically for the colonies or the nation. “These images,” writes Michelle Navarre Cleary, “symbolically reinforced the revolutionaries' attempt to represent a diverse people as a unified body politic.”¹⁰¹ The images are part of a long tradition that began long before the Revolution. With the discovery of the New World, images that presented this new land to the European imagination appeared, showing a personified image of America as an Indian Queen. Represented, according to E. McClung Fleming, as “an emblem of the western hemisphere [...] with the attributes of a Caribbean culture.”¹⁰² By the year 1765, with the growth of American national consciousness,

⁹⁸ Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980) 7.

⁹⁹ Tiffany K. Wayne, *Women's Rights in the United States: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Issues, Events, and People* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2015) 163.

¹⁰⁰ Wayne, *Women's Rights in the United States: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Issues, Events, and People*, 163.

¹⁰¹ Michelle Navarre Cleary, “‘America Represented by a Woman’ – Negotiating Feminine and National Identity in Post-Revolutionary America,” *Women's Studies* (Jan., 1998): 5, <https://via.library.depaul.edu/snl-faculty-pubs/1>.

¹⁰² E. McClung Fleming, “The American Image as Indian Princess 1765-1783,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 2 (1965): 65, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1180453>.

a need for a new symbol emerged. An image of an Indian Princess appeared that represented the fourth continent “complementing Asia, Africa, and Europe. [...] based on popular notions about the barbarous Indians of the semi-tropical, Caribbean region.”¹⁰³ This image was also often accompanied by the imagery of natural wealth, such as gold and jewelry. When the Revolution broke out the figure assumed a set of strictly American symbols such as a rattlesnake, a bow and arrow, occasionally the American flag. The conflict spurred a series of images where she is often pictured alongside Britannia, the allegorical figure of the British empire on both sides of the Atlantic. The British present Britannia as a well-meaning mother guiding or reprimanding her daughter. Americans, on the other hand, show the violence of Britannia towards an America that does not want to conform. A cartoon from 1774 titled “The Able Doctor” depicts, Lester C. Olson remarks, “the violence of England's response when America does not swallow English law.”¹⁰⁴ In the satirical piece:

Lord North, considered the architect of Britain's American policy, tries to force America to consume tea. However, a resistant America spits the tea back in his face. As Lord North grasps her throat, Lord Mansfield holds down her hands and Lord Sandwich secures her ankles and looks up her skirt, America defends herself with the only means available--her mouth.¹⁰⁵

Similar provocative depictions followed from both sides. The female figure remains mostly an exclusive representation of the new nation, representing a unified body fighting for independence which has been taken from her.

Thus, women have figured as part of national identity since the beginning, but their role has been constrained to the national imagery. This, by the end of the War, served as one of the reasons to give women more opportunities to exercise their rights outside of this field. The revolutionary era temporarily disrupted the traditional gender roles which after the War translated into a broad range of activism including women’s rights, antislavery campaigns and equality activism. One of the biggest new roles that appeared with the creation of the new nation can be illustrated by the idea of what Susan Ware calls “republican motherhood.” Women became the main figures responsible for the dissemination of “the qualities of virtue, piety, and patriotism necessary to the young country’s future.”¹⁰⁶ This forwarded discussions of women’s

¹⁰³ Fleming, “The American Image as Indian Princess 1765-1783,” 67.

¹⁰⁴ Lester C. Olson, *Emblems of American Community in the Revolutionary Era: A Study in Rhetorical Iconology* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution P, 1991) 112.

¹⁰⁵ Olson, *Emblems of American Community in the Revolutionary Era: A Study in Rhetorical Iconology*, 112.

¹⁰⁶ Susan Ware, *American Women’s History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) 28.

education and opened new opportunities of occupation as a teacher. According to Kerber, “The woman now claimed a significant political role, though she played it at home. This new identity had the advantage of appearing to reconcile politics and domesticity; it justified continual political education and political sensibility.”¹⁰⁷ However, the role remained significantly limited and did not grant any direct political influence. In the words of Susan Ware: “The American Revolution did not radically change the lives of most American women, especially when it came to political rights and legal status. And yet it provided openings, especially for elite white women, to play larger roles in the new democracy.”¹⁰⁸ The work of women’s advocates, thus, had to continue well into the twentieth century.

Abigail Adams writes to her husband in 1782, expressing her dissatisfaction with the way women and their patriotism is being treated:

Excluded from honours and from offices, we cannot attach ourselves to the State of Government from having held a place of Eminence. Even in freest countrys our property is subject to the control and disposal of our partners, to whom the Laws have given a sovereign Authority. Deprived of a voice in Legislation, obliged to submit to those Laws which are imposed upon us, is it not sufficient to make us indifferent to the publick Welfare? Yet all History and every age exhibit Instances of patriotic virtue in the female Sex; which considering our situation equals the most Heroick.¹⁰⁹

Dissatisfied with their role as domestic authorities controlled by their husbands and unable to comment on life outside of the family, women’s desire for rights quickly rose. Their fight for equality, however, met with resistance. Male patriots, as Navarre Cleary argues, “regarded women’s independence as a threat to national stability.”¹¹⁰ They feared that disrupting the necessary social order would create a chain effect that would end in national disintegration. Women advocates such as Judith Sargent Murray were then left with taking this argument and using it to her advantage, proving that women did deserve further independence while agreeing with the subordination of the existing system. She used the role of women in the revolutionary imagery and their role as Republican mothers to justify their significance in the society. Murray set family as the base of social hierarchy, presenting women as providers of “social and political stability by virtue of their roles as domestic authorities and through their subordination to their

¹⁰⁷ Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, 12.

¹⁰⁸ Ware, *American Women’s History: A Very Short Introduction*, 26.

¹⁰⁹ Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, 35.

¹¹⁰ Navarre Cleary, “‘America Represented by a Woman’ – Negotiating Feminine and National Identity in Post-Revolutionary America,” 13.

husbands who connect the home to the larger world,”¹¹¹ argues Navarre Cleary. Thus, their identity became even more connected with the domestic sphere; however, Murray saw the value of this identity as significant for the nation as a whole. While the efforts of advocacies such as Murray’s and other post-revolutionary developments forwarded the access of women to politics, they did not award women with any political role. It was in the first half of the new century with the Seneca Falls convention of 1848 that the question of women’s rights finally started to gain a prominent place in the political discussions of the time. Until then the question of women’s identity as Americans, as citizens and as political beings remained confined by the roles that the patriarchal system saw as beneficial and non-threatening.

Despite the great role of gender in the formation of American identity, there was one more powerful cultural category that quickly became the most significant: and that was race. As Kornfeld notes, “For many American thinkers in the early Republic, the Indian was the Other. Their confidence in the future of American ‘civilization’ depended in large part on the construction of a ‘savage’ Indian Other.”¹¹² From the time of the first settlements on the American continent, the relationship of Euroamerican colonists to native Americans remained ambiguous: newly-arrived Europeans needed the aid of aborigines and valued their alliances, but they also continued expansion of white settlement without native consent under the pretense of “civilizing.” Natsu Taylor Saito remarks:

As the political and military power of the United States increased, American policies shifted from operating within a legal paradigm that recognized American Indian sovereignty to one in which Indigenous peoples were increasingly racialized as “savage” and therefore exempt from otherwise applicable protections of law.¹¹³

The image of the indigenous peoples among white Americans was also, quite unsurprisingly, quite ambiguous. Europeans, according to Kornfeld, created and propagated an image of America as a degenerate land with primitive inhabitants, implying that “the European immigrants might also degenerate in the ‘primitive’ American environment.”¹¹⁴ Some Euroamerican intellectuals fought to dispute these claims, simultaneously refuting the claims of completely degenerate natives while distancing themselves from their “savage” identity.

¹¹¹ Navarre Cleary, “‘America Represented by a Woman’ – Negotiating Feminine and National Identity in Post-Revolutionary America,” 15.

¹¹² Kornfeld, *Creating an American Culture, 1775-1800: A Brief History with Documents*, 67.

¹¹³ Natsu Taylor Saito, *Meeting the Enemy: American Exceptionalism and International Law* (New York: New York University Press, 2010) 85.

¹¹⁴ Kornfeld, *Creating an American Culture, 1775-1800: A Brief History with Documents*, 69.

The images of native Americans as “savages” served as a justification for the raw power and violence used by the settlers and their governments to declare native lands as “uninhabited by human beings, and therefore ‘vacant,’”¹¹⁵ notes Saito. Among other colonists, George Washington endorsed this justification, arguing, as he writes in a letter to James Duane, that the natives are like “Wild Beasts of the Forest.”¹¹⁶ Viewing the indigenous peoples as beasts of prey, wolves, irredeemably savage, justified, from the perspective of most whites, the uncivilized treatment that the colonists imposed on them. Washington and others believed that the gradual extension of policies and pressure would “cause the savage, as the wolf, to retire.”¹¹⁷ This view, argues Saito, “was widely disseminated by public orators, “news” reports, and popular novels.”¹¹⁸ Accounts of the natives’ wars, violence and brutality were exaggeratedly and often malignly reported, and credulously believed. Richard Drinnon records the prevalent ideas about indigenous peoples as “beastly degradations of human life, [...] They scalped men, butchered women and children, and were ‘by disposition’ cruel and bloody-minded. Furthermore, they had no capacity or potential for citizenship not to mention civility.”¹¹⁹

Thomas Jefferson in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), an encyclopedic survey of the revolutionary state, assumes a more ambivalent position. He catalogues the natives under the heading Animals, subscribing to the view of indigenous people as part of wild but unspoiled nature. Jefferson is one of the intellectuals who made an effort to respond to the European claims of America’s degeneracy, he directly rebuts claims made by French naturalist Georges Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, in his *Histoire Naturelle* (1749-89). Buffon’s arguments about the primitivism and savagery of the natives supported by biological explanations led to establishing, in Kornfeld’s words, “the naturalizing, timeless, reductionist shape of the European narrative”¹²⁰ about indigenous peoples and America. Jefferson defends the native inhabitants:

The Indian of North America being more within our reach, I can speak of him somewhat from my own knowledge, but more from the information of others better acquainted with him, and on whose truth and judgment I can rely. From these sources I am able to say, in contradiction to this representation, that he is neither more defective in ardor, [...]: that he is brave, when an enterprize

¹¹⁵ Saito, *Meeting the Enemy: American Exceptionalism and International Law*, 88.

¹¹⁶ Camilla Townsend, *American Indian History: A Documentary Reader* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) 87.

¹¹⁷ Townsend, *American Indian History: A Documentary Reader*, 87.

¹¹⁸ Saito, *Meeting the Enemy: American Exceptionalism and International Law*, 89.

¹¹⁹ Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-hating and Empire-building* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980) 75.

¹²⁰ Kornfeld, *Creating an American Culture, 1775-1800: A Brief History with Documents*, 68.

depends on bravery; education with him making the point of honor consist in the destruction of an enemy by stratagem, and in the preservation of his own person free from injury; or perhaps this is nature; [...] that he will defend himself against an host of enemies, always chusing to be killed, rather than to surrender, though it be to the whites, who he knows will treat him well: that in other situations also he meets death with more deliberation, and endures tortures with a firmness unknown almost to religious enthusiasm with us: that he is affectionate to his children, [...]: that his vivacity and activity of mind is equal to ours in the same situation; hence his eagerness for hunting, and for games of chance. The women are submitted to unjust drudgery. This I believe is the case with every barbarous people.¹²¹

He contests Buffon's views that the natives are degenerate and cruel, emphasizing their bravery and courage instead. Nonetheless, the text at the same time never doubts their subordinate position, strictly adhering to the superiority of Euro-Americans and viewing the natives as "barbarous people." This ambiguous image of the indigenous peoples remained predominant in nineteenth-century (and even twentieth-century) America, with the image of the "savage" predominant, although occasionally images of the "noble savage" or statements of respect of their culture and morality recurred. Yet the positioning of distance from the "Other" remained, allowing the white Americans to forge their identity on the differences separating them from these "savages."

This image, as Saito records, "was reflected not only in popular American novels and political pronouncements, but it was also incorporated into the framework of domestic law."¹²² Viewing the land as uninhabited, i.e., understanding the natives as animals rather than humans, justified the appropriation of the lands inhabited by indigenous peoples—as, occasionally, did missionary assertions of the obligation to Christianize the infidel. Euroamerican colonial, federal, and state governments viewed these lands as uncultivated wastelands that needed to be made accessible to and safe for "productive" by (white) American citizens. "Any claims the Indians may have had to those lands under natural law," remarks Saito, "were simply irrelevant to the discussion."¹²³ Legally defenseless against these policies due to their not being regarded as citizens, and thus having no standing rights, Native Americans were repeatedly forced to surrender their land to white settlers—and repeatedly subjected to violation and/or unilateral (white) revision even of the "agreements" and "treaties" by which vastly reduced indigenous land holdings had been "guaranteed" at the time of initial seizure. Also repeatedly, this white hunger for land led to forced removal of tribes to indigenous territories and reservations. They

¹²¹ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (London: John Stockdale, 1787) 96-97.

¹²² Saito, *Meeting the Enemy: American Exceptionalism and International Law*, 90.

¹²³ Saito, *Meeting the Enemy: American Exceptionalism and International Law*, 90.

were commonly forced to assimilate, “encouraged” (usually meaning compelled) to follow a European lifestyle; “many children,” records Ware, “were sent away to federally funded boarding schools, such as the Indian School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, founded in 1879. [...] expected to [...] conform to Anglo values and customs, including dressing in non-Indian clothing and speaking English.”¹²⁴ Despite such assimilation they were never viewed as part of (white) American society. “Because Indians were not ‘free white persons,’” writes Tindall, “they were also treated as aliens rather than citizens.”¹²⁵ The hostility of the white race toward Native Americans (and its resultant counterpart on the indigenous side) long continued. Because they were regarded as “savages,” the depredation, exploitation, and killing of indigenous individuals and groups were frequently justified and left without punishment. The American revolutionaries and their Euroamerican successors thus based a large part of their identity on the idea of spreading (white) “civilization” in the New World. As is illustrated above, the treatment of native Americans was in contradiction with white Americans’ idea of civilizing and protecting individual liberties of white, male Americans.

Similar was the treatment of the rising numbers of enslaved Africans. Both were, as Saito suggests, “in opposition to whom ‘We the People’ could be defined.”¹²⁶ Enslaved Africans were in a similar position as the indigenous peoples: they were regarded as “uncivilized” “Other” by many white American colonists/citizens, which again, from the Caucasian perspective, justified longterm subordination and enslavement. The (non-African) notion that African peoples are inferior is of ancient origin. Already in the time of ancient Greece, any (non-Greek) foreigner (whatever the race) deemed different was regarded as inferior, a “barbarian.” The racial divide in the Americas, and by arguably remote derivation in the U.S., dates to the first colonies settled by Spanish and Portuguese colonists who in the name of God enslaved and slaughtered the indigenous peoples. Thus, the “civilizing” mission came to be reconciled with dehumanization of the natives from the very beginning. Saito argues that “much of the Spanish justification of the 1500s relied on the Aristotelian notion of ‘natural slaves’— some people were simply inferior, and it was their lot in life to serve others.”¹²⁷ Aristotle’s theory rested on the idea of the existence of certain markings that signified a slave from birth. He offers several characterizations; some, Nicholas D. Smith notes, can be described as psychological, such as “[the] natural slave lacks deliberation and foresight,” while others

¹²⁴ Ware, *American Women’s History: A Very Short Introduction*, 69.

¹²⁵ Tindall and Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, 268.

¹²⁶ Saito, *Meeting the Enemy: American Exceptionalism and International Law*, 95.

¹²⁷ Saito, *Meeting the Enemy: American Exceptionalism and International Law*, 96.

may be physical, as in “the natural slave is identified by his aptitude for bodily labor.”¹²⁸ To Aristotle, nature clearly marks out the natural slaves, justifying their enslavement. Thus, according to the Euroamerican interpretation, Europeans must be inherently superior, leaving the racialized “Other” either to be colonized or “civilized” under European guidance.

Many North American Europeans, both before and after their territory became the U.S., subscribed to similar views. Jefferson in his *Notes* remarks: “I advance it as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstance, are inferior to whites, both in body and mind.”¹²⁹ While Jefferson once again made an effort to dispute Buffon’s claims of the inferiority of the New World as “unvarnished” fact, Bruce Dain argues that he “gave American Indians considerably more sympathy and reasonable, if romanticized, understanding than he gave to African Americans.”¹³⁰ His opinion on African Americans and slavery also seem very ambiguous. On one hand he declares that all men are created equal and that “improvement of the blacks in body and mind, in the first of their mixture with the whites, has been observed by everyone, and proves that their inferiority is not the effect merely of their condition of life.”¹³¹ On the other hand, Jefferson concedes that even if people of African descent are viewed as human, they are too inferior to become a part of the society. He believed that:

Deep rooted prejudices entertained by the whites; ten thousand recollections, by the blacks, of the injuries they have sustained; [...] the real distinctions which nature has made; [...] will divide us into parties, and produce convulsions which will probably never end but in the extermination of one or the other race.¹³²

Therefore, the natural differences between the races meant that emancipation is not possible. In Dain’s words, “Jefferson defined membership in *Homo sapiens* [...] in conventional Lockean terms, by possession of imagination and reason, which he clearly thought blacks lacked.”¹³³ According to Jefferson, in addition to the hatred that they possessed against the nation that enslaved them, this inferiority prevented African American from becoming proper citizens.

¹²⁸ Nicholas D. Smith, “Aristotle’s Theory of Natural Slavery,” *Phoenix* 37, no. 2 (Summer, 1983)110, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1087451>.

¹²⁹ Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 239.

¹³⁰ Bruce Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: America Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002) 28.

¹³¹ Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 235.

¹³² Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 229.

¹³³ Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: America Race Theory in the Early Republic*, 31.

The dilemma that slavery presented was, however, not lost on some in the Revolutionary generation. Even before the Revolutionary War, slavery came under scrutiny. The spirit of independence evoked by the Revolution incited further debate on the topic. As Tindall remarks, “the Revolutionary generation of leaders was the first to confront slavery and consider abolishing it.”¹³⁴ Matthew Mason argues that white Americans came to the idea of abolition through two main roads: “In the midst of the political contention and war with Britain, [...], a multitude of clergymen – especially but not exclusively New England Congregationalists – preached that God was punishing the colonists for their iniquities.”¹³⁵ This ideology soon developed into the belief that slavery was a national sin for which the colonists suffered, and for which any political or social formation which they might in future succeed in constituting might suffer even more greatly. The other reason for abolition was born out of the paradox that slavery posed in American society. The nation where everyone was supposed to be equal committed atrocities against human liberty they claimed to protect. Dain describes the dilemmas that slavery and race posed to the eighteenth-century America as a “trap of its time.” He declares: “Never before and never since could an American be simultaneously a slaveholder, revolutionary leader, and standard bearer of democracy and ‘all men are created equal.’”¹³⁶ Early abolitionists realized this and argued for gradual emancipation while directly condemning slave-holders as tyrants. Gradual emancipation consisted of freeing slaves upon reaching a certain age as to not cause unrest among slave-holders. Slavery, at the time, was an immense source of commercial wealth in America and for these economic reasons as well as political ones regarding the rights of slave-holders it was extremely difficult to pass immediate emancipation. Thus, even though abolition was successful in the Northern states, it had to be gradual, otherwise it would severely destabilize a country that had no resources to pay out the slaves’ freedom in a similar way that Britain did in the 1830s. Mason records that by 1804, “every Northern state had committed itself to abolition, [...] with the result that well into the 1840s some ‘free states’ “still had some few slaves living within their borders.”¹³⁷ However, Southern states—much more economically invested in slave agriculture, with much larger Black populations, and (therefore) much more deeply penetrated by racist mythology—saw even gradual emancipation as unfeasible. The racial divide strengthened as the number of freed slaves in the North increased and as Southern slave rebellions provoked fear and enhanced

¹³⁴ Tindall and David Emory Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, 240.

¹³⁵ Matthew Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University Of North Carolina Press, 2006) 13.

¹³⁶ Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: America Race Theory in the Early Republic*, 38.

¹³⁷ Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic*, 14-15.

repression in the “heartland” of U.S. slavery. Justified as a “necessary evil,” the injustices in the South continued. Even freed African Americans did not enjoy the rights and prerogatives of (male) American citizens, largely excluded, as free Blacks were, from “We the People” in the same way as Black slaves. The idea of race came to the center of discussion. “Initially,” argues Saito, “people identified themselves by ethnicity, nationality, or religion, not by race; racialized identity only became central as it became associated with particular privileges or burdens.”¹³⁸ Since there were states that were free (that is, had abolished slavery as an institution, even without opening civil and political rights to former slaves) and states that continued in slavery, the need to create clear distinctions of identity became crucial. Who was to be enslaved and who was to be freed? Color began to be discussed as a category containing distinctions which might help sustain racial subordination which slavery had formalized and institutionalized—many with even a “drop” of African blood in their body condemned to be “scientifically” categorized as “black” and thus to remain “inferior.” Saito argues that as this racialization emerged, “it did more than ensure a particular structure of domination and subordination in the United States.”¹³⁹ It created a strict hierarchy with whites as the “ideal type,” granting special privileges and at the same time inflicting burdens. Soon the circumstances of African Americans began to change in both the North and the South. As Gordon S. Wood records:

Whites in the North began copying the South in separating the races in ways they had not done earlier. Free blacks were confined to distinct neighborhoods and to separate section of theaters, circuses, churches, and other places. Most Americans, both Northerners and Southerners, were coming to think of the United States as ‘a white man’s country.’¹⁴⁰

These ideas came to be so deeply imbedded into the American notion of identity and construction of society that it would take another hundred years and a Civil War till slavery was finally abolished and another century for the African-America civil rights advocates to gain full social and political rights —(to paraphrase Benjamin Franklin) “if they can keep them.”

These changes were also reflected in the idea of “blackness.” Michael A. Morrison and James Brewer Stewart note that despite emancipation the interest in persons of color remained. Whites were treating freed slaves as if they were still enslaved, essentially making the category

¹³⁸ Saito, *Meeting the Enemy: American Exceptionalism and International Law*, 99.

¹³⁹ Saito, *Meeting the Enemy: American Exceptionalism and International Law*, 101.

¹⁴⁰ Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 542.

of emancipated slaves an empty status.¹⁴¹ The language and practices shaped by slavery and emancipation created a rhetoric which anticipated further complications around the “Other” that the U.S. would have to solve. The belief that freed African Americans had to be managed by the white population as the moral authority was a large part of the narrative of post-emancipation nationalism. This, Morrison and Stewart argue, caused even bigger racialization of difference.¹⁴² Thus, many old ideas and beliefs persisted. Slaves were legally freed but left without many “normal”/white means of provision. Since citizenship was so closely related to race, often implying that racial difference was inherent, African Americans and the question of their citizenship remained a point of contention. They were constantly met with judgement from the whites, criticized either for their dependence upon the former masters or for not conforming to the Anglo-European system. Morrison and Stewart note this systematic prejudice based on the stratification of the society. Left to look for a “strategy that would enable them to become full and equal inheritors of the republican promises of opportunity for self-making and for citizenship,”¹⁴³ African Americans were left to debate and contend for their own identity and role within the nation.

Overall, the Revolutionary era was a time of doubt and uncertainty for the many African Americans living in the U.S. While it is true that many blacks were able to escape slavery and gain freedom, as Donald R. Wright remarks, “the Revolutionary era did little to reduce the nation’s reliance on slaves.”¹⁴⁴ The number of slaves after the Revolution rose by roughly forty percent.¹⁴⁵ With the success of gradual abolition laws the number of freed slaves also rose, but they remained ostracized by the rest of the society, and the other thousands of slaves remained enslaved. The institution of slavery was so deeply ingrained in the founding documents, institutions, practices, and regulations of the land that it was conceded by most authorities to be, *de facto* and *de jure*, both constitutional and (where state laws allowed) legal. “Without mentioning the words *slave* or *slavery*,” argues Wright, “the Constitution made the institution legitimate and gave slaveholders greater means to protect and defend their human property.”¹⁴⁶ Thus, the Revolution broadened rather than improved the position of African Americans, a

¹⁴¹ Michael A. Morrison and James Brewer Stewart, *Race and the Early Republic: Racial Consciousness and Nation-Building in the Early Republic* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002) 77.

¹⁴² Morrison and Stewart, *Race and the Early Republic: Racial Consciousness and Nation-Building in the Early Republic*, 78.

¹⁴³ Morrison and Stewart, *Race and the Early Republic: Racial Consciousness and Nation-Building in the Early Republic*, 82.

¹⁴⁴ Donald R. Wright, *African Americans in the Colonial Era: From African Origins through the American Revolution* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2017) 186.

¹⁴⁵ Wright, *African Americans in the Colonial Era: From African Origins through the American Revolution*, 186.

¹⁴⁶ Wright, *African Americans in the Colonial Era: From African Origins through the American Revolution*, 186.

growing number of whom nevertheless now saw freedom as their rightful prerogative. The racial hierarchy that came from the revolutionary idea of identity was strengthened and became more pronounced. The paradox of slavery and the ideology of the “Other” becomes even more ironic when it is taken into account that “a third of the men who signed the document declaring their right to independent nationhood on the self-evident truth that all men are created equal owned other humans.”¹⁴⁷ Slavery was justified through the revolutionist ideology of race; seen as intellectually inferior, therefore incapable of moral self-regulation, and thus fit only for manual labor and service occupations closely and harshly regulated by whites, African Americans were excluded from most aspects of participation in the general (i.e. white) society, regarded by most Caucasian Americans as undeserving of the equality that the revolutionaries spoken. The presumption of superiority of white American identity, reinforced by racialized language, the institution of slavery and its scars, would continue to be a critical paradox of a society that claimed to be “freedom’s home”¹⁴⁸ for at least another two hundred years.

4.4 National Identity Continued: 1800s-1850

The quest for national identity continued. Despite the efforts of the Revolutionary leaders and intellectuals, a unified national character had yet to be developed. Their attempts to establish a national university having failed, their unauthoritative narratives and histories of the great American heroes were not enough to unify the highly diverse society. Political, regional and racial tensions grew. In Kornfeld’s words:

The Confederation Congress was paralyzed by a pervasive distrust of strong central power, and the Constitutional Convention of 1787 crystallized continuing fears of centralization. As a party system desired by none emerged out of the Federalist-Antifederalist debates, the intellectuals’ hopes for national political harmony evaporated.¹⁴⁹

The dream of cultural unity started to appear more and more out of sight. However, the beginning of the new (nineteenth) century offered new opportunities for the developing national identity. Until this time the American society still heavily relied on Old-World models in their cultural independence. According to Jaap Verheul, “the revolutionary generation had defined

¹⁴⁷ Wright, *African Americans in the Colonial Era: From African Origins through the American Revolution*, 185.

¹⁴⁸ Saito, *Meeting the Enemy: American Exceptionalism and International Law*, 103.

¹⁴⁹ Kornfeld, *Creating an American Culture, 1775-1800: A Brief History with Documents*, 6.

nationhood characteristically in terms of political, social and economic participation”;¹⁵⁰ but cultural identity stumbled. Sydney Smith, a British critic, jeered in 1820:

In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book? or goes to an American play? or looks at an American picture of statue? What does the world yet owe to American physicians or surgeons? What new substances have their chemists discovered? [...] – Finally, under which of the old tyrannical governments of Europe is every sixth man a Slave, whom his fellow-creatures may buy and sell and torture?¹⁵¹

The Revolutionary leaders and the subsequent generations, still viewed by the rest of the world as too timid and divided to create a unified national character and culture, faced difficulties in disputing these claims, still viewed as too timid and divided to create a unified national character and culture by the rest of the world. A new beginning was brought by the results of the War of 1812.

Dubbed the Second War of Independence,¹⁵² the seemingly unimportant conflict became one of the defining moments for the future of the young republic. In what was largely a conflict over merchant rights and economic disputes between Britain and the U.S., Americans had little chance of success in defeating the greatest military power in the world, having neither a standing army nor a stable navy. Like President Madison, the leading officers of the young republic had minimal experience in war. In Christie E. Pearce’s words, “based on statistics alone, it was nonsensical for the United States to declare war on Britain—but as the adage goes, those who have the motive lack the means.”¹⁵³ Motivated by the need to prove themselves against their former oppressor, the Americans went ahead with a war that could mean devastation. Powered by the fear of renewed British subjugation and of the threat of some indigenous peoples’ revenge by joining Britain in this campaign, a majority of (white) Americans endorsed proceeding with the war. The conflict ended up being more a war of words than weapons. “The war,” Verheul argues, “marked the beginning of a true communication revolution in which a host of new periodicals, newspapers and new publishing houses connected

¹⁵⁰ Jaap Verheul, “‘A Peculiar National Character’: Transatlantic Realignment and the Birth of American Cultural Nationalism after 1815,” *European journal of American studies* 7-2 (2012): 3. <http://journals.openedition.org/ejas/9638>.

¹⁵¹ Robert E. Spiller, “The Verdict of Sydney Smith,” *American Literature* 1, no. 1 (Mar., 1929): 6, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2919726>.

¹⁵² For a detailed account of the War of 1812, see Nicole Eustace’s *1812: War and the Passions of Patriotism* (2012).

¹⁵³ Christie E. Pearce, “Nationalism and the Pressures of War in 1812,” *Oglethorpe Journal of Undergraduate Research* 3, no. 1 (2014): 1, <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/ojur/vol3/iss1/4>.

the American citizens and formed a national forum of opinion that was vital for the construction of a national identity.”¹⁵⁴

Despite the war’s having been ended in a draw by a treaty that did not grant any new lands and merely restored the situation between the two nations before the hostilities (*status quo ante bellum*), it was considered a success in the context of its impact on American culture. Donald R. Hickey records several sayings and symbols generated by this conflict:

“Free Trade and Sailors’ Rights was bandied about by various groups until the Civil War, and ‘Don’t give up the ship’ and ‘We have met the enemy and they are ours’ are still heard today. [...] ‘The Star-Spangled Banner’ was a popular patriot tune that Congress made the national anthem in 1931. The U.S. Frigate Constitution—‘Old Ironsides’—became the nation’s most famous warship and a symbol of its rising naval power. The trophy ship *Macedonian* was kept in service until 1871, a powerful reminder of how a U.S. frigate had once bested a British frigate and brought it home as a prize of war.”¹⁵⁵

In other words, the war had given the young republic confirmation of the worthiness of the journey upon which they had embarked in the previous century. Nationalism soared to new levels; supported by exaltation of new war heroes and of their “moral” victories, the inexperienced republic reinforced its national feelings and continued to shape their national character. John Quincy Adams noted the national feelings after the war:

The longer I live, the stronger I find my national feelings grow upon me; and the less of my affections are compassed by partial localities—My system of politics more and more inclines to strengthen the Union, and its Government...But it is the contemplation of our external Relations, that makes me specially anxious to strengthen our National Government – The conduct and issue of the late War has undoubtedly raised our national character in the consideration of the world.¹⁵⁶

Finally secure in their independence, “Americans exuded confidence [...] as the century advanced,”¹⁵⁷ argues Paul S. Boyer. The nation grew geographically, expanding its territories, first acquiring Louisiana, then Florida, and later Oregon, Washington, and Idaho.¹⁵⁸ The population experienced similar growth, as high fertility, expanded social options for many

¹⁵⁴ Verheul, “‘A Peculiar National Character’: Transatlantic Realignment and the Birth of American Cultural Nationalism after 1815,” 4.

¹⁵⁵ Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012) 309.

¹⁵⁶ John Quincy Adams to John Adams, August 1, 1816, *Founders Online, National Archives*, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-03-02-3154>.

¹⁵⁷ Paul S. Boyer, *American History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 35.

¹⁵⁸ William L. Barney, *A Companion to the 19th-Century America* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2001) 90-92.

Americans, and continued immigration enabled “a fivefold increase since 1790.”¹⁵⁹ This flood of settlers and newcomers westward called for an expansion of transportation infrastructure (“internal improvements,” as they were called at the time): “steamboats, canals, improved roads, better-designed wagons, and then railroads,”¹⁶⁰ connected the newly formed communities, notes Claude S. Fischer. These developments fueled economic growth; both agriculture in the South and industry in the North increased the value of their exports, laying the base for the future era of industrialization.

The national and international achievements of the U.S. also incited a transformation of American culture. Thinkers, artists and writers vowed to capture, and celebrate, the evolving national experience. The newly established security of the nation due to events in the early decades of the nineteenth century allowed for the introduction of multiple new ideologies and movements that in the words of Barry Hankins: “helped shape the new nation in powerful ways.”¹⁶¹ This wave of intellectual development has been connected to, among other things, the “Second Great Awakening” (1790-1840), a period of intense religious activity and efforts of elevating the young nation’s cultural and social standards and practices. One of the most important movements frequently associated with the Second Great Awakening was Transcendentalism,¹⁶² which emerged from New England. Following in the footsteps of European Romanticism, the mind, i.e., individual consciousness, thought and spirituality, stood at the center of transcendentalist ideology. Inspired by Kant’s philosophy and influenced by the teachings of Unitarianism, the transcendentalist movement challenged traditional Christian forms of belief in divinity and “went even further than Unitarianism to the belief that one need only look inward to one’s own personal objective beliefs and definition of truth to form spiritual and moral beliefs,”¹⁶³ argues Tiffany K. Wayne. The unofficial leader of the New England “Transcendentalists,” Ralph Waldo Emerson, was a former Unitarian minister whose contributions in both literature and philosophy make him a figure of utmost cultural influence. And it was he who, in his oration entitled “The American Scholar” (1837), called, along with other such as James Fenimore Cooper, for a creation of confident national culture that was, as

¹⁵⁹ Boyer, *American History: A Very Short Introduction*, 36.

¹⁶⁰ Claude S. Fischer, *Made in America: A Social History of American Culture and Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011) 121.

¹⁶¹ Barry Hankins, *The Second Great Awakening and the Transcendentalists* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004) 1.

¹⁶² For a detailed history of the transcendentalist movement see *American Transcendentalism: A History* (2007) by Philip F. Gura.

¹⁶³ Tiffany K. Wayne, *Encyclopedia of Transcendentalism* (New York: Fact on File, 2006) vii.

Boyer emphasizes, “rooted in American experience.”¹⁶⁴ Emerson’s work and the work of his contemporaries was responsible for much of the further development of American national identity and nationalism of the era.

4.4.1 Intellectual Development During the Years 1800-1850

Similarly to Crèvecoeur, Alexis de Tocqueville, a Frenchman born in 1805 in Paris, examined the lives and experiences of Americans. His two-volume *Democracy in America* (1835) is, in contrast with Crèvecoeur’s *Letters*, a much more explicit and objective record of American culture and society. Writing around fifty years after Crèvecoeur, Tocqueville describes an America which has changed; yet, in that Jacksonian America, he is able to recognize a number of similar sentiments and values among the American people that Crèvecoeur romanticized years before. In Tocqueville’s report on the state of democratic national character, the influence of the previously-discussed authors of national identity and myth can be recognized. Tocqueville also employed “national character as a central explanatory concept,”¹⁶⁵ as James Jasinski suggests, on which the nation continued to build its image of itself far into the nineteenth century, and beyond. Tocqueville also records the unprecedented zeal of the American people to create a new culture and shed their pasts. In his notebooks, published as *Journey to America*, he echoes Crèvecoeur’s observations:

The Americans, in coming to America, brought with them all that was most democratic in Europe. When they arrived they left behind on the other side of the Atlantic the greater part of the national prejudices in which they had been brought up. They became a new nation which adopted new customs and new mores and something of a national character.¹⁶⁶

But he also much more explicitly voices the anxieties surrounding democracy and the question of forging a nation out of such a diverse collection of peoples as had, even by his time, arrived in the United States. The unique national culture continued to be built, creating a peculiar set of values that constituted the American national identity and its exceptionalism. After the intellectuals of the Revolutionary era began the task of establishing a collective American cultural identity, the quest continued, and proliferated particularly after 1812 and the so-called

¹⁶⁴ Boyer, *American History: A Very Short Introduction*, 43.

¹⁶⁵ James Jasinski, “Constructing American Identity/Identities,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 72, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41940200>.

¹⁶⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Journey to America*, trans. by George Lawrence, ed. by J. P. Mayer (London: Faber & Faber, 1959) 263.

Second War of Independence.¹⁶⁷ Tocqueville documents the changes that followed, as American nationalist thought rose to new heights. “New ideas about national culture and romanticism,” Jaap Verheul argues, “broadened and changed the definitions of nationality which now included the arts, science and culture as areas of national pride.”¹⁶⁸ Tocqueville notes the cultural paradigm that permeates the nation:

To evade the bondage of system and habit, of family-maxims, class-opinions, and, in some degree, of national prejudices; to accept tradition only as a means of information, and existing facts only as a lesson used in doing otherwise and doing better; to seek the reason of things for oneself, and in oneself alone; [...] they are constantly brought back to their own reason as the most obvious and proximate source of truth. It is not only confidence in this or that man whatsoever. Every one shuts himself up in his own breast, and affects from that point to judge the world.¹⁶⁹

He records the unusual individualistic character of Americans, each an individual of his or her own mind, “each unique, separate, and self-governing.”¹⁷⁰ The influential ideas that shaped what Tocqueville calls the “philosophical method of Americans” stems from the concept of personal autonomy promoted by radical protestant groups. What must never be forgotten is that, as Tocqueville notes, “religion gave birth to Anglo-American society. In the United States religion is therefore commingled with all the habits of the nation and all the feelings of patriotism.”¹⁷¹ This religion has been, he continues:

brought with them into the New World a form of Christianity, which I cannot better describe, than by styling it a democratic and republican religion. This sect contributed powerfully to the establishment of a democracy and a republic; and from the earliest settlement of the emigrants, politics and religion contracted an alliance which has never been dissolved.¹⁷²

Thus, to Americans, the two—Christianity and liberty—are inherently connected. Furthermore, “[E]ven the religion of most of its citizens is republican, since [...] every man is allowed freely to take that road which he thinks will lead him to heaven; just as the law permits every citizen to have the right of choosing his government.”¹⁷³ The American religion that Tocqueville describes is based on the idea of rejecting external guidance of the spiritual, promoting personal,

¹⁶⁷ See Chapter 2 (pp. 14-15) for a brief historical account of the War of 1812.

¹⁶⁸ Jaap Verheul, “‘A Peculiar National Character’: Transatlantic Realignment and the Birth of American Cultural Nationalism after 1815,” 26.

¹⁶⁹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. by Henry Reeve (New York: Pratt, Woodford & Co., 1848), Volume II, Book One, Chapter I, 1-2.

¹⁷⁰ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 3.

¹⁷¹ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 4.

¹⁷² Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Volume I, Chapter XVII., 328.

¹⁷³ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Volume I, Chapter XVIII., 453.

internal relation to God and (to a much lesser extent) to “his” (as opposed to one’s own) church. Similarly, “[d]emocratic dogma demands that each individual rely on his/her own judgment, in support of his/her own best interests as s/he understand them, [...] and the antinomian commitment to self-scrutiny trains the individual to rely only on her/his own judgment, insulated from outside ‘noise.’”¹⁷⁴ Thus, each individual has the freedom to rely on his or her own thought, his or her own self and consciousness.

However, besides recognizing the essential goodness of Americans and recording their unique characteristics, Tocqueville also warned against “new forms of despotism (such as that of public opinion)”¹⁷⁵ which he thought had to be feared just as much as absolutism. Many of Tocqueville’s American contemporaries, however, cared less about his concerns and warnings, but as Oliver Zunz notes, “fed up by the antagonism of the British, [...] were, on the whole, thrilled to find a foreign visitor liking them.”¹⁷⁶ The reception of his observations focused on his account of the unprecedented commitment to individualism and voluntarism, which Americans used, as Zunz argues, to “make sense of their own practice.”¹⁷⁷

After all, Tocqueville was a visitor, not an American; thus, many of his ideas that did not promote the circulating national myths or shine light on the darker sides of American society were overshadowed, in American reaction to them, by an emphasis on American exceptionalism and unique American identity in his thoughts. Unlike Tocqueville, Ralph Waldo Emerson, an American-born intellectual of the same era, received greater attention for his theories regarding American character and was (and still is) often described as one of the most influential American writers of the nineteenth century. As Randall Fuller argues, “Emerson is more properly understood as a figure of unparalleled cultural influence, an author whose far-reaching concerns and resonant vocabulary helped make available large tracts of late-nineteenth-century American thought to many who never even read his essays.”¹⁷⁸ His work on the topic of self-reliance and individualism greatly influenced the idea of national identity of his time. To him, as to many other Americans, as Tocqueville observed, being responsible for

¹⁷⁴ David L. Robbins, *American Souls* (Prague: Karolinum Press, forthcoming 2022) 17.

¹⁷⁵ Oliver Zunz, “Tocqueville and the Americans: *Democracy in America* as Read in Nineteenth-Century America,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Tocqueville*, ed. by Cheryl B. Welch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 363.

¹⁷⁶ Zunz, “Tocqueville and the Americans: *Democracy in America* as Read in Nineteenth-Century America,” 366.

¹⁷⁷ Zunz, “Tocqueville and the Americans: *Democracy in America* as Read in Nineteenth-Century America,” 370.

¹⁷⁸ Randall Fuller, *Emerson’s Ghosts: Literature, Politics, and the Making of Americanists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 30.

one's own actions and believing in his or her own "genius" and ability is the basis of individual, and societal, freedom. Emerson's idea of self-reliance rests on the recognition of one's Self; no law, no rules can be as valuable as one's own consciousness and voice of the moment. "No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature,"¹⁷⁹ writes Emerson in what is perhaps his best-known essay "Self-Reliance," (1841). "Rely upon yourself, and believe in God-rely upon no man or men, how holy soever they may be, [...]. This is the base of his doctrine – the foundation upon which all his teachings rest,"¹⁸⁰ writes George Searle Phillips, one of Emerson's first biographers, in 1855.

Emerson emphasized the practice of self-discovery and self-realization that leads to individualism, self-reliance. As Emerson wrote: "The paucity of population, the vast extent of territory, the solitude of each family and each man, allow some approximation to the result that every citizen has a religion of his own, — is a church by himself, — and worships and speculates in a new, quite independent fashion."¹⁸¹ To Emerson, "every man is furnished, if he will heed it, with wisdom necessary to steer his own boat, — if he will not look away from his own to see how his neighbor steers his."¹⁸² Thus, one cannot rely on others for guidance because it is only his or her own soul that can lead him or her the right way. Ultimately, freedom and, essentially, democracy has its roots, according to Emerson, "in the sacred truth that every man hath in him the divine Reason, or that, though few men since the creation of the world live according to the dictates of Reason, yet all men are created capable of so doing. [...] To this truth we look when we say, Reverence thyself. Be true to thyself."¹⁸³

Through the influence of Emerson and his interpreters, self-reliance quickly came to be widely regarded as the equivalent of individualism, establishing itself as one of the forming factors of American identity. The significant value that Emerson places on the individual and his or her abilities defines the American spirit. His ideas of individualism helped forge the myth which has become the very basis of American identity to this day, and that is the myth of the American dream. This dream has been "present from the start," as James Truslow Adams argues; and with each generation its significance rose, while its central values remained the same.

¹⁷⁹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-reliance," in *Essays: First series* (Boston: James Munroe & Company, 1850) 44.

¹⁸⁰ George Searle Phillips, *Emerson: His Life and Writings* (London: Holyoake & Company, 1855) 4.

¹⁸¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals Of Ralph Waldo Emerson 1820-1876, Vol. X*, ed. by Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes (London: Constable & Co. 1914) 337.

¹⁸² Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Emerson's Complete Works: Natural History of Intellect, and Other Papers* (Boston: Riverside Press, 1894) 27.

¹⁸³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals Of Ralph Waldo Emerson 1820-1872, Vol. III*, ed. by Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1910) 390.

Freedom, equality of opportunity, individualism and self-reliance stand at its core. Adams argues that it is in Emerson that one gets the “whole of the American spirit,”¹⁸⁴ attributing the survival of the Dream to Emerson and pronouncing him as “one of its prophets.”¹⁸⁵ Emerson was widely popular in his time and long after his death. His lectures and the collections of essays based on them made his thought and influence available to a wide (primarily middle-class) audience, granting him and his ideas greater and greater attention until he came to be characterized by some as the man with “no contemporary.” None of the great American figures were, argues Phillips, “made up of the fine materials which belong to the nature of Emerson and none who has such bold and startling thoughts, who dares to think for himself; who puts under his foot all creeds and traditions, and seeks the spirit at first-hand.”¹⁸⁶

Writers such as Tocqueville and Emerson shaped thought around the ideas of American national culture for much of the nineteenth century. Their contributions highlighting the individualistic nature of American character and unique American experience remain one of the most influential to this day. While each presents matters from different perspectives—Tocqueville from the outside and Emerson from the inside—the observations of both have been immensely influential in understanding American mentality and the ideas of liberty and democracy. The feelings of national pride and the image of national identity generated by this period and its intellectual activity as embodied by these authors were, however, partially overshadowed by the paradox of the Other in the creation of the new burgeoning national character. Both native Americans and African Americans were still excluded and exempt from the optimistic visions of the future, leaving the issue of slavery and racialized national character for the next generations of the rapidly growing American society to deal with. It would take another great war, the Civil War (1861-1865), before these tensions began to be seriously addressed, and even then, the formation of American collective identity did not reach its fullness and logical end. The U.S. continues its journey of self-discovery till today, constantly reinventing itself and its identity.

¹⁸⁴ James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America*, (Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1931) 198.

¹⁸⁵ Adams, *The Epic of America*, 198.

¹⁸⁶ Phillips, *Emerson: His Life and Writings*, 4.

5 American National Character and Its Implications for the Future of the U.S.

The concepts of national identity and character developed during the Revolutionary era and the early Republic have had traceable influence in the subsequent development of American national culture and values. Crèvecoeur's meditations on the topic of what it means to be American and who this new man is remain one of the most influential beliefs in the sphere of American nationalism. As Gary Gerstle argues, "Crèvecoeur's account of 'individuals of all nations' being forged 'into a new race of men' has resonated with Americans ever since."¹ European immigrants who came to America sought to become American, to forget the values and customs of the Old World and become a part of the newly emerging nation that promised so much of what their native countries could not. One could fully realize his or her own potential without the corruptness of the Old World, giving the new man a plethora of choices regarding how to create his life in the New World. These rather imaginative beliefs in America as the land of opportunity and in the American the nation as the protector of liberty are imbedded in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, defining the revolutionists' thought on the future of the new republic. And as Sheldon Hackney notes, "the answer to the question of what it means to be an American usually begins with a belief in the universal values"² expressed in these foundational documents. The Revolutionary period and the era of the new republic thus represent one of the most significant epochs in the history of the United States. The marks that the Revolutionary era has left upon the society can be traced and defined by four concepts; American exceptionalism; individualism in addition to the idea of self-reliance; the myth of the American Dream; and, lastly, the legacy of slavery embodied in the emergence of white supremacy and a racialized image of identity.

5.1 American Exceptionalism

The notion of freedom and democracy as the core American values comes from the ideology of American exceptionalism. This part of the national identity can be traced back to the first settlers' emerging ideas concerning the New World they set out to occupy. John Winthrop in 1630 wrote: "For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes

¹ Gary Gerstle, "Liberty, Coercion, and the Making of Americans," *The Journal of American History* 84, no. 2 (Sep., 1997): 524, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2952569>.

² Sheldon Hackney, "The American Identity," *The Public Historian* 19, no. 1 (Winter, 1997): 18, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3378975>.

of all people are upon us.”³ The leader of the first generation of New England colonists expressed his visionary views of the future America as a select society tasked with the mission to set an example for the rest of the world. From this idea the ideology of American exceptionalism eventually developed. However, this concept is not as simplistic as it may seem at first; it is a compendium of a series of ideas, each with its own significance and role in the shaping of American identity.

The idea of viewing America as distinct is firmly connected first with the desire to set itself apart from the Old World and its “mother” nation(s). The founding of the U.S. began, in the representations of some Americans, a new era of world history, in which a new political (and, as some argued, a new moral) formation was emerging, established on a set of new values which significantly superseded those of the Old World. One of the greatest distinctions on which the American society prided itself was the establishment of “governments [that] are instituted among men, deriving their powers from the consent of the governed,”⁴ rather than the oppressive and corrupt tradition of the divine right of kings: sovereignty was thus delivered into the hands of the people. This belief continues to carry weight in the American (self-)narrative today as it did in the early U.S. Hilde Eliassen Restad records that polling shows that “Americans display the highest degree of national pride among Western democracies.”⁵ Eighty percent of respondents agreed with the statement: “the United States has a unique character because of its history and Constitution that sets it apart from other nations as the greatest in the world.”⁶ The sense of superiority over Europe in of early America relied upon this new concept of polity.

Another factor in American exceptionalism is its alleged “fight for civilization.” As has been discussed, “civilization” usually implies “good” while the “uncivilized” signifies “evil/barbarous.” Thus, that which is in opposition to the values and cultures of “Western civilization” is often almost automatically deemed “barbaric.” Many of the policies and actions initiated during the Revolutionary era were justified in the name of “civilizing” the New World. The American “civilizing” mission thus created another image of superiority over the rest of the world. As the nation whose paradigm is “freedom,” “a ‘right’ that can be realized only

³ Michael Parker, *John Winthrop: Founding the City upon a Hill* (New York: Routledge, 2014) 11.

⁴ Thomas Jefferson, “Declaration of Independence,” *Archives.gov*, <https://archive.org/details/TheDeclarationOfIndependenceAndYourCompleteConstitution>, 3 May 2021.

⁵ Hilde Eliassen Restad, *American Exceptionalism: An Idea that Made a Nation and Remade the World* (London: Routledge, 2015) 5.

⁶ Restad, *American Exceptionalism: An Idea that Made a Nation and Remade the World*, 5.

through the structures of formal democracy adopted exclusively by ‘civilized’ states,”⁷ America figures as the model of a “civilized nation.” The deeply rooted belief that the U.S. represents, what Saito calls “the most advanced stage in the evolution of human civilization and therefore possesses a unique historical responsibility to bring its model of progress and development to the less fortunate”⁸ is essential to the concept of American identity. Once again, with this view of America and Americans as the protectors of democracy and —and, thus, of “civilization”—persisting throughout American history till today, the U.S. conducts “civilizing missions” all over the world. The rhetoric around the September 11 attacks is also closely related to the idea of “us versus them” and the concepts of “civilization” imbedded in the respective national identities of Americans and “Others.” The enemy “Other” is projected as “evil,” and thus “uncivilized,” justifying such assertions as the “right to engage in ‘preemptive self-defense.’”⁹ Furthermore, as Saito notes, to Americans the idea that civilization is at stake means that freedom and democracy are as well.¹⁰

The last prominent feature of American exceptionalism that arose during the Revolutionary era is the idea of uniqueness. The belief that the U.S. is better than any other nation in the world, invokes strict hierarchy among nations, with the U.S. on top. The exceptional nature of American experience has roots in the early era of colonization of the continent. Godfrey Hodgson argues that “it did guide the Founding Fathers and their early-nineteenth-century successors. In the nineteenth century Americans believed that theirs was what Jefferson called ‘the empire for liberty’ and instinctively applauded when Lincoln said that their country was ‘the last, best hope of earth.’”¹¹ Americans view their nation as both morally and politically exceptional, the best and the most powerful in the world. Such proclamations have been further supported by Cold War rhetoric of the “fight against communism” and later in the “defense against terrorism.” American exceptionalism thus can be viewed as a significant part of American identity, in which it figures as a unifying feature, an agreement on the role of the U.S. in world history.

⁷ Saito, *Meeting the Enemy: American Exceptionalism and International Law*, 18.

⁸ Saito, *Meeting the Enemy: American Exceptionalism and International Law*, 55.

⁹ Saito, *Meeting the Enemy: American Exceptionalism and International Law*, 15.

¹⁰ Saito, *Meeting the Enemy: American Exceptionalism and International Law*, 16.

¹¹ Godfrey Hodgson, *The Myth of American Exceptionalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) 10.

5.2 American Individualism and the American Dream

The fact that from the outset the U.S. has been viewed (at least by Americans) as a unique society is widely accepted, the initiator being the events of the Revolutionary War that prompted the nation to define its “raison d’être” so specifically. Closely connected with the idea of American exceptionalism is the concept of individualism. S.M. Lipset argues that “the time of the Revolution, have placed an overriding emphasis on the importance of individualism, especially individual freedom of thought and action.”¹² This idea of individualism with emphasis on individual rights to act according to one’s own thought is only partially descriptive of the individualism that permeates American values. The “American Creed,” as the system of values is sometimes called, stems from the revolutionaries’ idea of personal liberty moderated by civic responsibility. However, the second part often gets overshadowed by the individualistic side in analyses. Thus, a more fitting description of Americanism consisting of “rejection of the state and impatience with restraints upon economic activity,”¹³ as Fischer argues, is “voluntarism.” Voluntaristic culture, as opposed to the egoism and withdrawal from society that individualism suggests, means “believing and behaving as if each person is a sovereign individual: unique, independent, self-reliant, self-governing, and ultimately self-responsible.”¹⁴ It is the answer to the tensions between the individual and the community that have been described by many observers of the young republic. Voluntarism, America’s own brand of individualism, thus, creates a “prerequisite for sustaining freedom and democracy,”¹⁵ argues Fischer. Moreover, American individualism, or rather voluntarism, asserts the beliefs of American exceptionalism, suggesting that the society is formed by “unique, a priori persons”¹⁶ who freely choose their communities and commit themselves to collective rules. These ideas are key features of American culture and have been since the Revolution.

Strongly associated with these ideas is the myth of the “American Dream,” another defining feature of American culture and identity. First formulated by James Truslow Adams in *The Epic of America* as a “dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement,”¹⁷ the concept

¹² Edward Grabb, Douglas Baer and James Curtis, “The Origins of American Individualism: Reconsidering the Historical Evidence,” *The Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers canadiens de sociologie* 24, no. 4 (Autumn, 1999): 513, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3341789>.

¹³ Claude S. Fischer, “Paradoxes of American Individualism,” *Sociological Forum* 23, no. 2 (Jun., 2008): 363, DOI: 10.1111/j.1573-7861.2008.00066.x.

¹⁴ Fischer, *Made in America: A Social History of American Culture and Character*, 10.

¹⁵ Fischer, *Made in America: A Social History of American Culture and Character*, 104.

¹⁶ Fischer, “Paradoxes of American Individualism,” 370.

¹⁷ Adams, *The Epic of America*, 404.

has been present in the minds of Americans since the very beginning. Related to the ideas of individualism, freedom, and self-reliance, the Dream promised Americans a revival/rebirth in the New World. Shedding their Old-World identity, they would be allowed to become the “new men” of whom Crèvecoeur speaks in his *Letters*. The long tradition of this idea began with the Pilgrims and has continued to be omnipresent in American thinking to the present. The persistence of this belief can be traced, as John Kenneth White and Sandra L. Hanson suggest, “to the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and its promise that citizens of the new nation were already endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, including life and liberty, and that these same people were entitled to engage in many varied pursuits of happiness.”¹⁸ These proclamations affirm the long-lasting omnipresence of the Dream in American culture. Research shows that even in the twenty-first century, Americans still believe in the American Dream. Eighty-two percent of Americans in an online survey conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2017 responded that they either had already achieved or were on their way to achieve the Dream, and seventy-seven percent agreed that freedom of choice is essential to their view of the concept.¹⁹ Since the first mentions of the pursuit of happiness, “Americans have looked to their leaders, [...]” argue White and Hanson, “to reaffirm the promise of the American Dream, with its guarantees of fuller liberties and a better life for all.”²⁰ In other words, the durability of the Dream persists, affirming how deeply rooted are the values that the Dream represents within American culture, and how important an element they remain in American national identity.

5.3 White Supremacy and the Legacy of Slavery

Generally understood as a form of racial segregation, “white supremacy” suggests that a co-called “white” population dominates—and should dominate—over so-called “nonwhites,” creating a strict systematic and hierarchical qualification of race for membership in a community. Tense race relations in America (and in the U.S. as part of it) are nothing new. They began with the first colonists’ settlements in the New World and have continued in the form of a power struggle ever since. The origins of the ideology of “white supremacy” stem from the concepts of “civilization” and the “Other” discussed in chapter 4 of this text. Based

¹⁸ John Kenneth White and Sandra L. Hanson, *The American Dream in the 21st Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011) 2.

¹⁹ Samantha Smith, “Most Think the ‘American Dream’ Is Within Reach for Them,” *Pewresearch.org*, October 31, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/10/31/most-think-the-american-dream-is-within-reach-for-them/>.

²⁰ White and Hanson, “The Making of and the Persistence of the American Dream,” 2.

on “evidence” “supporting” secular or scientific racism and physical typology, a classification of races emerged. The new American nation —and significantly contributed to the elaboration and dissemination of—the mythology of “white superiority,” defining itself as the “civilizing power” of the New World, using the racialized “Other” to affirm its own (white) national identity. This “racial determinism” soon developed into a fully dichotomized hierarchy of color and class. The institution of slavery, in combination with this racialization, shaped and instilled a deeply embedded notion in the minds of “white” Americans that, in the words of George M. Fredrickson, “all Negroes were permanent aliens who must be strictly excluded from the true community of participating freemen and their families.”²¹ Thus, even with the gradual abolition laws and then the complete emancipation of enslaved blacks, racial equality was out of reach, making the American dilemma that emerged as a result of the doctrine of natural equality even more pronounced.²² While, as has been discussed, the Northern states proceeded with gradual abolition in the first half of the nineteenth century, the South, with its economic dependency on slavery, viewed that option as impossible. Instead, the racializing of the Black “Other” (among other “Others”) and of the national identity continued in order to justify and rationalize the preservation of the “economic and socially indispensable” institution of Southern slavery. Fredrickson notes the two ways that the dilemma was countered: either one had 1) to reject the self-evident truths affirming that each member of the human race was created equal or by “demoting blacks from the category of ‘men’ to whom the Declaration applied – i.e., by defining them as sub-human creatures”;²³ or 2) to use arguments that presented slavery as a “necessary evil” to suppress the guilt and paradox of its existence. This, once again, reinforced the idea of America as a homogenous white nation, alienating the “the “Other” (Black or otherwise) from the concept of U.S. national identity.

American national anxiety around Black slavery culminated in the decades leading up to the Civil War; but, in many ways, that anxiety, focused after 1865 on (free) African Americans and their future, has continued and intensified throughout the succeeding century and a half. According to Fredrickson, “White supremacy attained its fullest ideological and institutional development in the southern United States between the 1890s and the 1950s”²⁴; whether, however, the racist ideologies associated with “white supremacy” have been overthrown—

²¹ George M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study of American and South African History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) 126.

²² Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study of American and South African History*, 143.

²³ Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study of American and South African History*, 144.

²⁴ George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) 99.

whether, as Fredrickson argues, “their demise also means that the virus of racism has been exterminated or that it has merely mutated into new and still-virulent forms”²⁵—remains a question. Prejudice, discrimination, and white supremacy are still powerfully present in the U.S. In recent surveys, a majority of Americans reported seeing racism as a “big problem in our society,” similarly, a fifty-five percent majority of Americans reported that they either strongly support or somewhat support the Black Lives Matter movement.²⁶ Thus, a revenant of the country’s history, “civilizing”/“Othering”/racist mythology, and “white” cultural paradigm still haunts the “postmodern” American society of the twenty-first century. In addition, Fredrickson argues, the “tendency to push the principle of differentiation by race to its logical outcome”²⁷ has, given time, spawned numerous (potentially more virulent) variants in the U.S. Among those variants has been the creation of “a kind of Herrenvolk society in which people of color, however numerous or acculturated they may be, are treated as permanent aliens or outsiders.”²⁸ Such tendency, unfortunately, appears to have domesticated itself, ironically, in a “dark space” in the “American character.”

²⁵ Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History*, 100.

²⁶ Samantha Neal, “Views of Racism as a Major Problem Increase Sharply, Especially Among Democrats,” *Pewresearch.org*, August 29, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/29/views-of-racism-as-a-major-problem-increase-sharply-especially-among-democrats/>.

²⁷ Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study of American and South African History*, xi.

²⁸ Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study of American and South African History*, xi.

6 Conclusion

“E pluribus unum”—From many, one—such is the motto on the Great Seal of the United States: a phrase that allegedly embodies American national character. Yet, to define the diverse group of people that form the American society is more complex. The ever-present question of what it means to be an American, due to the plethora of views of national identity and nationalism, presents a challenge. To be able to answer the question in a sufficient way, one needs to look at the history of the formation of American national identity, with special focus on the birth of that identity. And even then, the quest for identity is not finished, because the nation continues constantly to reinvent itself.

The concepts of nation and national identity remain problematical, due to contradictions, between one species of model and another, of features insisted upon by those two different species of models and their modelers. Generally speaking, between the two species of most widely accepted models, there is a distinction that one species (the civic model) presents the nation as a community brought together by a social contract, a voluntarist union based on civic features, preferring common laws and responsibilities to common traditions and customs. The other species (the ethnic model) conceives the nation as dependent on common territory, values, traditions, customs, and innate characteristics. The first sees the nation as constituted by individual choice; the second, by collective determinism, by fateful, predetermined membership in an exclusive genetic group. Since the models are direct opposites, they do little to quell the ambiguity and contradiction that accompany the concepts of nation and national identity. Ultimately, one thing remains a fact upon which many scholars agree and that is; an individual must belong to a kind of community no matter on which species of models it is based. Participating in a community, whether by choice or by prior deterministic selection, means being a part of a collective identity which combines other types of identification such as race, ethnicity, class, gender or religion, establishing the individual *self* as a multitude of identities.

Such concepts, however, in the context of the U.S. become even more complicated. Due to the U.S.’s unique experience and characteristics, the creation of a collective American identity poses another challenge. Unlike its European counterparts which base a large part of their identity on ethnic features, the U.S. cannot rely on such common denominators simply because the nation has not existed for the centuries that the European countries have. Without the possibility of looking back hundreds of years to find a basis for a national identity upon which they can unite and build, Americans are left with connecting their identity to a set (or

sets) of values and ideas. These values and ideas have preoccupied American thinking since the very beginning of the (non-ethnic/non-“national”) “nation,” with their “elective affinity” adherents continuously developing and reestablishing their ideas/values, their affinities, and themselves. The Revolutionary War figures as one of the most significant historical events that directly influenced the formation of American national identity. That is not to say that the settlers in the various British North American colonies did not possess any collective identity, but rather that it was during the Revolutionary era that a national identity that can be defined as American had started to materialize.

As Tarver remarks, the Revolutionary period was “a period of rapid change, of intense political debate and struggle a nation began to emerge in its political, economic dimensions.”¹ It was, as Tarver dubs it, “a process through which inhabitants of what is now the United States came to recognize themselves as Americans.”² Their identity required, even at that period, as much flexible and imaginative reinvention as did that of those who had had relocated, or were in the process of relocating, from metropolitan Europe to the distant, disconnected colonies—many at first identifying themselves as British subjects; then as relations with Britain soured, seeking to create their own “American” identity. The years leading up to the Revolutionary War recorded a rise in “American” multi-national “nationalism,” hinting at the growing success of ideational, as well as political, secessionism. The idea of the New World as the promised land and of the colonists as the chosen people to establish a model society was revisited and used to propagate the American purpose. The Revolution also opened the doors to creation of American heroes and myths that became one basis for a collective identity now severed from its British/European roots. The process was not as fast as many had imagined it would be; being no longer under British sovereignty did not mean that British values and traditions would immediately disappear from U.S. soil, although many “Loyalist” British subjects did. Thus, for quite some time after the War, “American” national identity remained ambiguous, partly “Patriotic” but also partly English. This prompted a wave of U.S. “nationalist” activism, mobilization of what passed for an “elite” to pursue creation of a unified national identity. Efforts to establish a national character centered, Kornfeld argues, “on the creation of an American language, literature, education, or history, [because] many American intellectuals believed that only a national culture could give Americans a sense of identity and unity.”³ Many

¹ Tarver, “The Creation of American National Identity: 1774-1796,” 56.

² Tarver, “The Creation of American National Identity: 1774-1796,” 56.

³ Kornfeld, *Creating an American Culture, 1775-1800: A Brief History with Documents*, 3.

of the efforts are recorded in the writing of several revolutionary intellectuals, from Joel Barlow and his mythmaking in the *Vision of Columbus*, to observers like Crèvecoeur.

The Revolution and the period of the early Republic was followed by the turn of the century, the War of 1812 and rapid progress of the American society in multiple spheres of life at once. The period of 1800-1850 figures as another transformative era that shaped the nation's character. First, the need to consolidate the new nation generated a renewed period of mythmaking and hero creation; Americans were encouraged, and started, to view themselves fully as "Americans" for the first time. The new century brought about new challenges: the euphoria of the successful revolution had decreased and a need for reaffirmation of a national identity appeared. The U.S. used the War of 1812 to strengthen its legitimacy and credibility at home and abroad, asserting its independence after a second war with their once "mother" (or "master," if you will) country; this demonstration helped to shape the country's future development and to reinforce its national identity. The breath-taking geographic expansion and broad-based socio-cultural development of the country allowed for and energized the emergence of new ideological movements that promoted nationalist feelings and simultaneously elevated the literature and the plastic arts. Intellectuals such as Tocqueville and Emerson were amongst the most influential. Tocqueville's observations of American individualism and his records of American experience continue to shape the image of the U.S. to the present day. Similarly, Emerson's theory of self-reliance, the embodiment of American individualism, and his remarks on the spiritual and liberty helped reaffirm nineteenth-century American philosophy; and in a like manner, his thoughts continue to mold the modern development of American character.

However, to unify such a diverse society and create a unified image of an American, while attempting to define what he or she ought to be, remained a difficult task despite enormous efforts. Thus, *faute de mieux*, those efforts proceeded to define what the American was not by defining the "Other." Native Americans and African American slaves offered such opportunity. Described as "savage" and inferior, these "Others" stood in stark contrast to "true (white) American" protectors of "civilization" and "liberty." This created a racialized image of identity and in addition helped justify the treatment that the natives and enslaved people received, creating a strict hierarchy in the society and nourishing the roots of racism and white supremacy. Similarly, until this point American identity was mainly focused on the male figure, excluding women as unsuited for political life. The publicly valorized and acclaimed role of/responsibility for the creation of a "moral foundation" for national stability, particularly by

the correct rearing of children in the domestic sphere, was “reserved” for women—thereby killing, with high praise, any ambitions that (educated, mainly upper middle-class) women might harbor to exercise influence in the male-monopolized public sphere. All of these ideas and beliefs are traceable down to and actively operative in twenty-first century American culture and society. So deeply ingrained in the American concept of identity are they, that they continue to shape it centuries after its first emergence.

The cultural conflicts of the Revolutionary era and the period 1780-1850 present one of the most significant stages of America’s history, having direct impact on its future development. Paradoxically, the concepts of American exceptionalism, democratic individualism, racism, and “Othering” all emerged simultaneously from the birth pangs of the new society and culture, and persist in the postmodern American society till today, showcasing their deep embedding in the American cultural paradigm and directly influencing the ever-changing identity of the American character.

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