

## AN IDEOGRAPHY OF AMERICAN NATIONALISM

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### Abstract:

*The study of American nationalism is a tricky adventure, first because of its deep-seated inconsistency as a self-reliant ideology, and second, because of dispersed and random absorptions of its designations by various and often competing factions and policies. In the first case, it has been said that nationalism could stand as a clarifying description of other self-contained ideologies (e.g., national liberalism); on the other hand, due to its pervasively undetermined ideological contours, any investigation of nationalism results in irresolute paradoxes and baffling contradictions. Still, despite such hindrance, the ideological framing of nationalism might be achieved considering certain valuable traits which hint at its commonsensical profile. In keeping with historical, political and cultural development of nationalism in the United States, one could grasp its certain specific marks as an ideology in the concepts of identity and character, American Creed, Manifest Destiny, assimilationism, American System, messianism. The present study modestly attempts to cope with all the aforementioned traits of American nationalism in order to configure its plausible ideography.*

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### **Intro: the tricky avatars of an ideology**

More than most modern ideologies, nationalism requires attitudes of commitment and engagement consistent with attachment to fatherland, mother-country and/or land of the ancestors, as the cultural norm of reference is at stake. Be it in the form of emotional devotion, actional militancy and/or solipsistic and pseudo-epistemic frame of mind, the nationalist zeal is, paradoxically, the most enticing and, simultaneously, the most elusive by comparison with other ideological pursuits. Essentially related to one of the above-mentioned loyalty patterns, one could not be sure about its distinct ideological marks; instead, other ideologies purport certain traits, so that nationalism functions as a kind of a side effect of that specific ideological approach. In other words, other ideologies provide the rationale, while nationalism is the driving impetus.<sup>1</sup> But this is one side of story: as modern nationalism starting with the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century has revealed, irrationalism and dogmatism would have to be supplemented by constructive and emancipative types of attitudes stimulated by loyalty to one's nation. That is to say, nationalist endeavors have been probably grounded on - and ultimately elevated by - certain cognitive bearings, concrete interests, legitimate ideals and goals, and/or inherited patriotic sentiments. This is all the more so in the case of American nationalism: according to both its supporters and detractors, American nationalism fundamentally rests on a set of guiding principles to be used as justifications for a 'more perfect' future. Consequently, two main

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<sup>1</sup> George Mosse, *Nationality and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, p. 9. It would seem more plausible to assert that, in different historical contexts and considering the issue at hand, nationalism has rather been impactful or instrumental for ideologies such as conservatism, liberalism or socialism. To put it differently, "nationalism is a cultural form readily adaptable to a wide range of contexts and open to a variety of ideological contents" (John Fousek, *To Lead the Free World: American Nationalism and the Cultural Roots of the Cold War*, Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000, p. 4).

traits should be elicited when considering American nationalism: its civic nature and its future-oriented propensity.

The civic character of American nationalism speaks against the long historical traditions of most European countries founded on ethnic nationalism; the ethnic characteristic is descriptive for the preservation of a nation due to its shared historical origins, territory, culture, language, customs, etc. Its counterpart, civic nationalism, would be incorporated to a set of shared ideas, values and beliefs coalescing a collective mindset and guiding large consensus, enthusiasm and future action. While ethnic nationalism is pervasively organic and essentialist,<sup>2</sup> its civic alternative is culturally constructed, in the sense of inspiring a specific political culture. Resulting from a civic endorsement of values and beliefs, the idea of nation has been depicted in various conceptual terms, such as an 'imagined community' (Benedict Anderson), a 'product of modernization' (Ernest Gellner) or an experiment in 'social engineering' (Eric Hobsbawm),<sup>3</sup> to mention but a few of the most notorious renderings. Since the end of the colonial era, civic nationalism in the New World has been continuously constructed as unique in its character and universal in its aspirations; moreover, due to its original composition of multiple 'ethnic strains', the classical scholar of nationalism in the United States, Hans Kohn, called the new federalist and republican political enterprise "the universal nation".<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, there are complementary explanation models to the civic nationalist ideology in the United States which postulate other compositional ingredients stemming from national interests, public good and/or a peculiar sentiment of patriotism. While national interests and public good have been conceived as reasons in the service of assertive

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<sup>2</sup> In fact, ethnicity renders (European) nationalism obsolete and retrogressive, impeding upon other norms and values (Laura M. Herța and Adrian G. Corpădean, "The European Union's Conflict Resolution Mechanisms and Their Impact on the Serbian-Kosovar Reconciliation", in Raluca Moldovan (ed.), *The European Union: Policies, Perspectives and Politics*, New York: Nova Science Publishers, p. 316).

<sup>3</sup> See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London and New York: Verso, 1983; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983; Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

<sup>4</sup> Hans Kohn, *American Nationalism: An Interpretive Essay*, New York: Macmillan Company, 1957, p. 138.

nationalism, patriotism has been invoked as the very devotion towards the American nationalist idea. Reflecting upon the mainstream strategies of the United States in the 20<sup>th</sup> century foreign affairs, Hans Morgenthau distinguished between emotionalist nationalism visible in foreign policy actions such as humanitarian interventions and pacifist intentions, and substantial realist and rational nationalism to be elicited from strategic national interests; however, Morgenthau noted, the legitimacy of national interests have been severely obscured by “subnational, other-national and supranational interests”.<sup>5</sup> One can push forward the distinction between ‘embodied nationalism’ enclosed within certain ethnic limitations pertaining to common territorial, linguistic and cultural homogeneities, and what I would call ‘pledged nationalism’ founded on a principled civic consent regarding the ever-changing nature of ideas, values and beliefs and fundamentally future-oriented. Accordingly, civic nationalism has been designed and imagined as inclusive of all potential and heterogeneous realities, as a promise of the self-fulfillment of future generations.

Though, it should be noted that the nationalist ethos in the United States, albeit civic in character, is far from being perfect: along the historical way of its development, American nationalism has unveiled its penumbras, evils and inner contradictions. In what follows, I will examine the overall merits and shortcomings of American nationalism *as an ideology*; therefore, I consider that certain conceptual ascriptions would stand for a comprehensive interpretation of the ideology. Thus, the conceptual core of American nationalist ideology should include the ‘chosen nation’ precept, the expansionist Manifest Destiny, the divided nation thesis, the normative and scientific assumptions of the ‘enlightened nation’, and its ‘messianic’ urge, respectively.

### **The Chosen Nation: on the conceptual brands of American exceptionalism**

Starting in the late colonial period and reinforced during the revolutionary turmoil at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, fecund intuitions and ideas about the privileged status of the New World settlers, the uniqueness

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<sup>5</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, “Another ‘Great Debate’: The National Interest of the United States”, in *The American Political Science Review*, vol. XLVI, no. 4, 1952, p. 973.

of their experience and the predestination of their new political design have started to ferment around an original ideology of nationhood. Primordial impetuses have been amalgamated by a strong civic ethos which could aptly be characterized as individualistic and libertarian; in contrast with the character of nationalism in countries like France<sup>6</sup>, Germany or Russia, the American project lacked the ethnic and collectivistic traits.<sup>7</sup> I think it was precisely this civic enthusiasm regarding the foundation of the new nation that further generated a subset of correlative ideas, i.e., the exceptional nation, the ideological construction of American identity and character and, eventually, the unshakeable belief in the birth of the new 'chosen nation'.

First and foremost, American exceptionalism has been explored in several ideological directions, as being essentially descriptive with regard to evolutions and developments of American liberal individualism, pluralist and inclusive democratic ethos, as well as internationalist hope of universalism and peace under the inspiration of the American nationalist paragon. As an epithet of nationalism, American exceptionalism derived from the incipient set of values and beliefs that could unify apparently anomic individuals within the borders of a new nation. As such, roughly between the 1790s and the late 1820s, the exceptionalist values which made American nationalism possible had been seized within the transformative practices that guaranteed the effectiveness of the revolutionary war marking the shift from colonialism to unionism. These values included, *inter alia*, limited government, opportunity and individual ambition, voluntarism and initiative, emancipation, participation, entrepreneurialism and commercialism.<sup>8</sup> They did not only instill a sense of shared ideas and mentality, but also decisively contributed to the shaping of the American Creed. In the ruminations of American intellectuals and ideological

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<sup>6</sup> See Adrian G. Corpădean, "La France pendant l'entre-deux-guerres et la Quatrième République - la tentation de la construction européenne pour l'Europe centrale et orientale", in *L'Europe Unie*, no. 6, Paris: Prodifmultimedia, 2012, pp. 76-84.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Liah Greenfield, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 14 and Wilber W. Caldwell, *American Narcissism: The Myth of National Superiority*, New York: Algora Publishing, 2006, p. 22. In the case of France, Greenfield observed a combination between civic and collectivistic endeavors within the groundbreaking of modern French nationalism.

<sup>8</sup> Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000, pp. 15, 22-23.

framers, the American Creed has been frequently associated to exceptionalism, due to its specificity, ingeniousness and boldness. They thought that no other nation could parallel the conditions and starting premises of the new American political culture. In fact, one could find the beginnings of 'creedal nationalism' in the United States by simply going back to the age of the Declaration of Independence, whose text ignited a model of political system and society "in simple terms".<sup>9</sup> Moreover, according to Louis Hartz, the American Creed stood simultaneously at the foundations of 'compulsive nationalism' and 'dogmatic liberalism';<sup>10</sup> this statement suggests the meaningful plethora of the creed in its capacity of enabling the shared heritage of the American people together with their strong individualist mindset and private initiative. Other famous American intellectuals were sure in their belief that the American Creed was the cornerstone of ideological nationalism.<sup>11</sup>

Second, there was the search for a distinct identity and character that scholars identified as the driving force of American nationalism. Once again, depending on the desired future of the new union of former colonies, Americans took at least two different paths: on the one hand, supporters of a future agrarian and markedly individualist America embraced Jeffersonianism; on the other, there were those sharing the view of nationalization of resources and centralization of government that imagined a completely divergent destiny of the United States. In a nutshell, the Jeffersonian consensualist model of an affective and 'sentimental' nationalism strongly opposed the Hamiltonian authoritarian design of industrial nationalism.<sup>12</sup> But there was something deeper than this oversimplistic and mercantile way of framing early American nationalism.

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<sup>9</sup> Brian G. Smith, "Myths and the American Nation: Jefferson's Declaration and the Development of American Nationalism", in *Review of Nationalities*, no. 8, 2018, p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955, pp. 225-237.

<sup>11</sup> The chorus of voices decreeing the Creed as the most subtle ingredient of American nationalism include Hans Kohn, Gunnar Myrdal or Arthur Schlesinger (Carol M. Swain, Russ Nieli, "Forging a Common Identity: The Challenge of White Nationalism and the New White Racial Assertiveness", in Carol M. Swain, Russ Nieli (eds.), *Contemporary Voices of White Nationalism in America*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 16-20).

<sup>12</sup> Brian Balogh, *A Government Out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 49, 115.

Acknowledging that the achievement of political unionism represented only an intermediary move, the first Americans aimed at the overarching reconstruction of formerly elitist colonial morals through “literacy, social mobility, enhanced wealth and participatory politics”.<sup>13</sup> One peculiar and notable facet of the new American character was the fact that, between the foundation of the federal republic and the early 1830s, approximately 400 autobiographies were published.<sup>14</sup> This fact stands for the relentless efforts of many Americans to not only strive to succeed, but also to educate future generations in respect to what this land of opportunity could offer and how they could collectively share a certain pattern of experience.<sup>15</sup>

In my view, the most profound stimulus of early American nationalism was the spiritual idea of the ‘chosen nation’. In a sense, this dogmatic interpretation of the American people’s destiny and mission which fueled the consensus for a civil religion<sup>16</sup> completed the traits of secular civic nationalism. Moreover, religious tolerance, conceived as a fundamental freedom in the first amendment to the constitution, had a paramount contribution to strengthening secular nationalism in the United States,<sup>17</sup> prompting an almost mystical understanding of civic values and liberties. According to the most reputed researcher of American nationalism, Hans Kohn, Puritanism of the first pilgrims - inherited by the first generations of Americans - revived three salient ideals of Hebrew nationalism: “the chosen people, the covenant, and the Messianic expectancy”.<sup>18</sup> In a sense, the mythology of the chosen people adds the predestination dogma to the future-oriented nature of messianic mysticism.

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<sup>13</sup> Appleby, *op. cit.*, pp. 262-263.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 23. The emancipative nature of incipient nationalism in the United States gains further merits if one considers, for instance, the fact that proto-nationalist Noah Webster was the first American to undertake the difficult task of imposing standards for spelling and pronunciation in English (Balogh, *op. cit.*, p. 70).

<sup>15</sup> This particular fact speaks about the unique character of American experience; according to Caldwell, *op. cit.*, p. 19, the very definition of American national identity would single out “unique common destiny, unique common strengths, and unique common ideals”.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial*, New York: Seabury Press, 1975.

<sup>17</sup> *Idem*, “Civil Religion in America”, in *Daedalus*, no. 1, 1967, pp. 1-21.

<sup>18</sup> Kohn, *Nationalism: Its Meaning and History*, Malabar: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1965, p. 16.

Under the spell of the Second Great Awakening, the belief in the chosen American nation, “the Israel of our time”,<sup>19</sup> gained momentum and inflicted positive meanings beyond mere bigotry. As the idea of chosen nation was a fruitful ideological instrument in the service of the nineteenth century political goals, its sequel, messianism, became the key dogma underlying American foreign policy of the twentieth century; accordingly, it is worth a separate consideration in the last part of this study.

### **The Expansionist Nation: Manifest Destiny in nineteenth century America**

In a sense, the quest for meaningful expressions of identity and character in the United States and their encapsulation in what has been called the American Creed stand for Americans’ cultural, social, political and economic outcry in their confrontation with the realities of the New World; ultimately, their voluntary struggle and efforts to find a specific ‘American way’ of life and experience paved the way to the postulation of a unique character revealing the exceptional nature of their endeavors and accomplishments. By and large, the ideology of exceptionalism – that could hardly be represented in autonomous terms and pragmatic concepts, irrespective to a specific correlation with the nationalist doctrine – stands for the symbolical representation of certain traits which distinguish the ‘American soul’. However, one could not elude the fact that the American nation did not inherit a long-lasting historical tradition, distinct cultural customs, a common language and territory, but, on the contrary, had to invent itself based on purely civic credentials, out of diverse, disharmonious and peculiar individual habits of European immigrants. In retrospect, considering the present ideological characteristics of American nationalism and the fact that exceptionalism is, perhaps, its most illustrative epithet, one could significantly argue for the becoming of the American nation as an exceptional achievement as well.

Indeed, the story of territorial mapping of the United States through gradual acquisitions and expansion is an ideological saga. It started at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the more modest and wishful-thinking aspiration of George Washington and his fellow founding fathers for

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<sup>19</sup> Herman Melville, *White-Jacket*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967, p. 150.



edifying an exemplary American civilization which they intuitively called 'empire',<sup>20</sup> at the time, little they knew about the more than allegorical expression of a mere exceptional desiderate. Notoriously lionized under the name of Manifest Destiny, American expansionist nationalism has acquired both historical consistency and exceptional aura. Historically, expansionist nationalism had to abandon first the versatile policies of pragmatic and onerous alliances with France and Great Britain. On the one hand, the early fragile American nation at the start of the nineteenth century succeeded in overcoming several maneuvers of defensive and sea confrontations with France<sup>21</sup> and accomplished one of the most brilliant strategic moves in US history by purchasing the Louisiana territory in 1803 and doubling, as a result, its land ownership. On the other, the total war of 1812 against the British Empire paved the way for the American nation's future assertiveness in international politics. Roughly within the historical interval of one century – between the Louisiana Purchase and Theodore Roosevelt's Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, 1803-1904 – the US expansionist nationalism has been completed.<sup>22</sup> The ideological underpinning of Manifest Destiny, the frontier thesis, was instrumental for justifying both outer conquering westward and inner developments of the acquired territories; the first form of expansionism proved effective mainly through successful military campaigns, while the second had been secured through enfranchisement policies. In the first case, one should mention the military campaigns directed towards the relocation (in most cases) of Native Americans, while in the latter, outstanding policies had been issued in

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<sup>20</sup> Charles A. Cerami, *Jefferson's Great Gamble: The Remarkable Story of Jefferson, Napoleon and the Men Behind the Louisiana Purchase*, Naperville: Sourcebooks, 2003, p. 259.

<sup>21</sup> Jasper M. Trautsch, *The Genesis of America: US Foreign Policy and the Formation of National Identity, 1793-1815*, New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 107-108.

<sup>22</sup> Rodney P. Carlisle and Geoffrey J. Golson (eds.), *Manifest Destiny and the Expansion of America*, Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2007, pp. 26-54. The Manifest Destiny epic included, as its most important chronological pillars, the Louisiana Purchase (1803), the War of 1812, The Monroe Doctrine (1823), the Mexican War (1846-1848), the War against Spain of 1898 and the Roosevelt's Corollary (1804). The only significant breach of the American expansionist nationalism narrative was the Civil War (1861-1865) and the entire post-Jacksonian and pre-Civil War era which brought about ideological sectionalism and *de facto* secessionism (see the main thesis of Michael Morrison's book, *Slavery and the American West: the Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War*, Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

order to enforce federal authority over the new lands and ensure emancipating reforms for conational inhabitants.<sup>23</sup> Concisely, the expansionist facet of American nationalism epitomized by the Manifest Destiny ideology had been historically accomplished in two distinct episodes, of the 1840s and the 1890s, respectively.<sup>24</sup>

Within the manifold and transformative mythology of American exceptionalist nationalism, one could identify the idiosyncrasies of “national psyche, a far end of the wilderness dreamscape”,<sup>25</sup> and this characterization remained valid for the entire nineteenth century nationalist mindset. But, at the turn of the twentieth century, the Manifest Destiny nationalist adventure dramatically turned into a hyperbolic internationalist imperialism which I will examine later in this study. Until synthesizing the features of and rationale behind this radical conversion of US expansionism, i.e., from individualism and uniqueness, Monroe doctrine and Manifest Destiny to self-assured dogmas of superiority and moralism, arrogance and unilateralism, I would add a peculiar perspective on American nationalism which might be termed naturalistic nationalism. In the footsteps of romantic European thinking, Jefferson and the transcendentalist intellectual movement, James Fenimore Cooper and appraisers of the frontier mirage, and Theodore Roosevelt’s *Winning of the West* (1889) cunningly advanced an ideological shift from the early idealistic naturalization of the nation to achieving bold programs for the nationalization of nature. Their ideological followers, both in the form of cultural endeavors and public policies, were western movies, the regionalist writings of the 1930s, the Indian Reorganization Act, the Wilderness Act and the enumeration could include other achievements.<sup>26</sup> This perspective leaves room for further research regarding certain

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<sup>23</sup> Remarkable reform initiatives associated to successful expansionist nationalism would include, *inter alia*, the Railroad Act and the Homestead Act (both adopted in 1862) and the cutting-edge idea of conserving the natural resources of the new territories through the enforcement of national parks federal policies (see, for instance, Carlisle and Golson, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-79).

<sup>24</sup> Fousek, *op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> Cerami, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Eric Kaufmann, “Naturalizing the Nation: The Rise of Naturalistic Nationalism in the United States and Canada”, in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1998, pp. 668-690.

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insufficiently explored resources of expansionist nationalism such as the late twentieth century environmentalism.

### **The Divided Nation: on the Janus-faced dogmas of abolitionism, assimilationism and exclusivism.**

The most divisive and controversial syncope of nationalism in the United States took place in the period between the mid 1830s and the end of the reconstruction era in the 1870s; however, it is worth mentioning that the nationalist gospel succeeded to overcome all external challenges and bolster its momentous goals each time it had to face divisionism and rupture; moreover, the nationalist agenda continued to exploit to its benefit the sequel of these discords long after they had been extinct. By and large, the trauma of the divided nation had to absorb two major categories of antagonisms: the pre-Civil War controversies opposing unionism to sectionalist tendencies, and the post-Civil War disputes on the issue of immigration, opposing assimilationism to exclusivism, respectively. As such, the nationalist ideological traits had been entrapped at the core of these tensions and used as their resolution criteria and justifications.

The first dividing pair of oppositions – unionism versus sectionalism - is referential to the problem of preserving or eliminating the institution of slavery; this controversy covered the largest part of the nineteenth century's first half and generated various political, party-system, economic, social, cultural and racial sectionalisms. To start with what has been called the nationalization of politics on the issue of race in the past two centuries, one should notice the similitude between the divisive strategies of the Republican Party in the nineteenth century (the so-called Lincoln strategy) and the conservative and segregationist maneuvers of the Democratic Party in the twentieth century, extolling the Deep Democratic South.<sup>27</sup> In brief, identifying a regional, sectionalist enemy was the key strategic point which boosted national solidarity around the pressing issue of abolitionism. In close connection to economic sectional interests, the dismantling of the institution of slavery in the United States by the abolitionist program had to confront several timely compromises, of

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<sup>27</sup> See, for instance, Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002. Opposing the national agenda of the Democratic Party, southern democrats finally lost their influence and political dominance in the region.

which the Hartford Convention (1814), the Missouri Compromise (1820), the Compromise of 1850, or the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854) were cases in point, not to mention the three original compromises on slavery in the Constitution. In the realm of party politics, the national debate on slavery caused several splits especially on the side of republicans, with the Whigs as the dominating anti-slavery discourse in the 1830s and 1840s and the Know-Nothings in the 1850s.<sup>28</sup> Contrasting the prevalent sectional spirit, the movement of cultural nationalism in the pre-Civil War period was searching for a so-called national character, by advocating the ideas of Americanness and like-mindedness between the northern Yankee and the southern gentleman.<sup>29</sup>

Interestingly enough, both unionist and sectionalist politics have generated and further perpetuated a long-lasting dispute between white and black nationalisms in the United States. More interesting is that both factions aimed at preserving their racial specificities and, accordingly, defended separatism and segregation. Despite its nationally-framed discourse and agenda, pre-civil War abolitionism was only a contextual movement and rather failed to promote postbellum emancipative reforms consistent with its spirit; instead, despite safeguarding the Union at the end of the Reconstruction era, adverse effects have become dominant in divisive nationalist discourses appropriated by white and black nationalism, respectively. White nationalism was the first to shape an almost ethnic sense of belonging to the New World,<sup>30</sup> under the Puritan spell and the sole character of European immigration; up to date, it has conserved its racial, xenophobe and segregationist character in various manifestations, more or less radical, such as militancy for the rights of whites, white separatism, white Christian moralism and white suprematism.<sup>31</sup> Also originating in the pre-Civil War era of fierce debates on abolitionism and emancipation of slaves, black nationalism had

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<sup>28</sup> William A. Link, *Roots of Secession: Slavery and Politics in Antebellum Virginia*, Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003, pp. 121-122.

<sup>29</sup> William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

<sup>30</sup> Susan-Mary Grant, "In War Time: Dialectics of Descent, Consent, and Conflict in American Nationalism", in *Genealogy*, no. 2, 2018, pp. 1-23.

<sup>31</sup> Swain, Nieli, *op. cit.*

envisioned the possibility of a massive exodus for the liberated slaves either to Africa or, more plausible, to Central America;<sup>32</sup> in this way, they rejected any emancipation reform, reintegration and/or any concept of assimilation, strongly endorsing black cultural autonomy, separatism and resettlement. Radical black nationalism has constantly dissented from the mainstream narrative of inclusive American nationalism and championed anti-assimilation, relocation and self-determination. By and large, there have been two phases of the movement: classical black nationalism, roughly in the period 1850-1925, advanced a more radical and uncompromising ideological agenda by endorsing separate statehood through resettlement; after 1945, modern black nationalists have urged either for state self-determination or black administration in those communities inhabited by their fellows;<sup>33</sup> at best, they have admitted a kind of ethnic pluralism based on whites' noninterference in their autonomous public institutions.

The second major fracture which both energized and tested the ideology of nationalism pointed at two enduring social phenomena in the United States, namely racism and immigration. In both cases, pros and cons attitudes and justifications divided assimilationists and exclusivists who both claimed to defend their doctrines on behalf of robust nationalism.

Racism became rampant in the aftermath of the Civil War and had two main causes: on the one hand, there was the retaliation of southern white aristocracy in the confederate states, who lost their economic and status privileges; on the other, the liberation of blacks brought about serious pressures on labor, difficulties of integration, social conflicts. Black people and communities had to wait one century until racial discrimination and segregation were formally eliminated. Not only has racism survived through residual prejudices and resentment attitudes of whites, but also a shift happened within the mindset of black intelligentsia in their pleas for

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<sup>32</sup> Dean E. Robinson, *Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 17-18.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 2. It is worth mentioning that black nationalism supporters have been mostly educated people; their aspirations are at odds with poor blacks' fascination with the mythology of the American dream (Jennifer L. Hochschild, *Facing Up to the American Dream: Race, Class, and the Soul of the Nation*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 157).

racial identity and separation.<sup>34</sup> Until the 'negro problem' became a constitutive part of the national agenda, both white and black abolitionists tended to include black people, rather unquestionably, in the fictitious narrative of collective national identity; however, early classical nationalist Daniel Webster put forward a plan envisioning future colonization of both African-Americans and Native Americans.<sup>35</sup> Domination by enclosure could be deemed as the unpractical, albeit anticipating solution to the late nineteenth-century doctrine of segregation. There has always been a rift between the nationally-furnished American Creed and racism which impeded upon the realization of emancipate nationalism; the impetus of democratic nationalism in the 1930s and the civil rights movement leading to Lyndon Johnson's Great Society program were efforts directed at closing the gap between creedal values and racism.

Moderate exclusivism professed by both white and black nationalists, in the forms of geographical separation and/or social and cultural segregation, has been the defining attitude towards racism; radical exclusivism in the form of racial extermination was never considered an option. Assimilationists took a more aggressive posture than moderate exclusivists and approached racism in terms of exploitation and oppression of African-Americans;<sup>36</sup> the moderate version of acculturation was rarely imagined as a viable solution to overcoming racism.

On the issue of immigration, assimilationism also received a bad aura: the process would have implied the existence of a homogenous majority that could legitimately absorb all minorities of immigrants, in other words ethnic nationalism in disguise. Since that was not the case in the United States, the remaining alternative was multiculturalism and defense of group identities and rights. In its turn, starting with the second half of the nineteenth century,<sup>37</sup> exclusivism has been advocated by many

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<sup>34</sup> John D. Kerkerling, *The Poetics of National and Racial Identity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 4-5.

<sup>35</sup> Desmond King, *The Liberty of Strangers: Making the American Nation*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 55.

<sup>36</sup> Etienne Balibar, "Racism and Nationalism", in Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (eds.), *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, New York: Verso, 1991, p. 39.

<sup>37</sup> Until the issuing of Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965, the ratification of several exclusivist pieces of legislation (1882, 1921, 1924) revealed the nationalization of immigration management in the United States (see Margaret S. Orchowski, *The Law That*

purist nationalists in the United States through denial of the multiculturalist principle,<sup>38</sup> in this way, it became formally self-contradictory and illusory, substantially xenophobic and chauvinist. Both assimilationism and exclusivism of immigrants erroneously propagandized the idea of 'one nation' America; for that reason, the nationalist potboiler failed to discern between the concept of national minorities and the more complex US realities of polyethnic communities.<sup>39</sup>

### **The Enlightened Nation: the American System, progressivism and the administrative state.**

Enlightened nationalism is a metaphor used to convey various instantiations of 'rationalizing the nation'; accordingly, it speaks in terms of (pseudo)scientific theories, rational speculations and sophisticated programs and plans designed in order to improve the national character. Alternatively endorsed in terms of 'enfranchised nationalism', constructed nationalism and/or cultural nationalism, the struggle to elicit and purify the national basin had been characteristic for the most part of the nineteenth century and declined by mid-twentieth century. Enlightened nationalism was inaugurated by the clear-cut plans of Jacksonian nationalists of 1830s and 1840s known as the 'American System' agenda, deepened in the self-confident imaginary of the progressives starting with the 1870s and culminated with the overall bureaucratic and regulative programs of the administrative state in the 1930s. Both 'enfranchised nationalism' and 'constructed nationalism' are synonymous alternative designations for enlightened nationalism and purposely point at reflective and lucid "ideas or processes through which it is imagined";<sup>40</sup> additionally, cultural nationalism is a particular and different in kind species of enlightenment, for it speaks either about intellectuals' quest for national distinction and

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*Changed the Face of America: The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015, pp. 24-36).

<sup>38</sup> "The pot failed to melt", noted Desmond King in order to discredit both the exclusivist and assimilationist models of designing immigration policies (*op. cit.*, p. 5).

<sup>39</sup> Alain Gagnon and Raffaele Iacovino, "Interculturalism: Expanding the Boundaries of Citizenship", in Ramon Maiz and Ferran Requejo (eds.), *Democracy, Nationalism and Multiculturalism*, London and New York: Frank Cass Publishers, 2005, p. 34.

<sup>40</sup> These designations are consistent with Benedict Anderson's understanding of nationalism as a culturally-constructed concept (Fousek, *op. cit.*, p. 4).

originality (i.e., ‘Americanness’), or aims at discovering certain “patterns of thinking”<sup>41</sup> allegedly shared by most Americans.

But enlightened nationalism stands for more than its aforementioned varieties: it is precisely the embodiment of social engineering and, its inquirers, the progressives, have insidiously looked for the enforcement of ethnic nationalism and the ingenious invention of eugenic criteria for exclusion of the unfit. In defense of ethnic nationalism, the progressive mindset conceived an all-encompassing discriminatory system<sup>42</sup> as scientific justification for excluding: in order to instill their views on healthy nationalism, progressive historians, economists and anthropologists used hocus-pocus arguments, claimed to deploy the most recent scientific theories and resorted to purportedly objective experimental data in support of their theories. Most of them had been educated in Germany and imported the speculative thought which they effectively used in their visionary ruminations; moreover, the system of public schools in the United States was designed so that general culture and historical knowledge could be evacuated to make room for the imposition of (pseudo)scientific disciplines and promotion of “simplistic myths”<sup>43</sup> in the service of enlightened nationalism. In respect to eugenism, many progressive intellectuals and militants fashioned their theories with a view to ordain national engineering: they inflexibly postulated the desired national identity and accommodated their reasons for exclusions to fit their dogma; in a sense, this approach bears no substantial difference from the assimilationist perspective.<sup>44</sup> The recurrent and preferred vocabulary of eugenics, which also include management of breeding, heredity, racial inferiority and nativism, has often made use of cherished terms such as ‘the

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<sup>41</sup> Walter B. Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism and Pluralism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.

<sup>42</sup> King, *op. cit.*, p. 49. To exemplify, the US Bureau of Census delved into scientific racial classifications (p. 44) as the very rationale for exclusions and the eulogizing of the desired ethnics – whites, Anglo-Saxons and Protestants.

<sup>43</sup> Anatol Lieven, *America Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 61-62.

<sup>44</sup> Wayne Norman, “From Nation-Building to National Engineering: The Ethics of Shaping Identities”, in Maiz and Requejo (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 79-84.



national gene pool', 'the American phenotype' and 'the national stock'.<sup>45</sup> While the science of eugenics gave a rational justification to American enlightened nationalism, the latter rewarded eugenists through academic recognition and backup legislation.

But what I would call enlightened nationalism in the United States was not restricted to this peculiar style of defending nationalism; in fact, the epithet 'enlightened' hints at the American constant political yearning to use power in order to boost the idea of nationhood by means of lofty programs. In my interpretation, the first experiment in this respect comprised comprehensive and developmental political agendas known as the 'American System'. Originating in the classical age of Jacksonian nationalism, the American System inaugurated a paradigm of political thinking with the purpose of emancipating and consolidating the domestic infrastructure of the nation; specifically, the American System national concept summed up three distinct, albeit complementary, plans. Henry Clay's economic nationalism encompassed the strategic network of roads and canals for the improvement of commerce capacities, the benefits of prospective territorial expansion, the idea of enforcing a protective tariff for American goods, and the bid for a strong national bank for the management of currency. John Quincy Adams' elitist view on nationalism particularly urged for the creation of a national university and the installation of a planetary observatory. Last but not least, John C. Calhoun's national security program focused on a more assertive US foreign policy, despite the vice president's markedly agrarian views on economy.<sup>46</sup>

The second important attempt to enhance the national creed in the United States was basically made by the intellectual movement of progressivism in the aftermath of the Reconstruction period. The vast progressive program of nationalization epitomized reformism, welfarism, administration, expertise, pragmatism, moralism, positivism, and collectivism. It was one of the most intense efforts to shape American nationalism according to allegedly scientific criteria. The central endeavor of progressive economists, historians, political scientists and ideologues

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<sup>45</sup> Nancy Ordovery, *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

<sup>46</sup> Richard A. Sauers, *Key Concepts in American History: Nationalism*, New York: Chelsea House, 2010.

was to enforce an alternative strategy to the 'invisible hand' economic doctrine of self-regulating markets and laissez-faire liberalism by designing the 'visible hand' dogma of the scientific administrative state.<sup>47</sup> One might easily explain the outburst of labor unions and riots of the period (appraised by the progressive scheme) as spontaneous responses to monopolistic tendencies and savage capitalism of big businesses and bosses (defended by the Gilded Age liberal schemata). For any progressive, the chief concern was that of replacing liberalization with nationalization: to exemplify, two hardcore supporters of progressivism, Edward Bellamy and Henry George, advocated a comprehensive strategy for the nationalization of industries.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, not only that progressives provided disinterested and objective calculations and expertise militating for the general public interest and welfare of Americans, but they also became actively involved in the machinery of the administrative state. Roughly in the period 1880-1920, a lot of national associations cooperated directly with the federal government, as 'independent' agencies, to dismantle laissez-faire liberal practices and enterprises.

The emergence of welfare state in the 1930s, especially during the first two terms of President F. D. Roosevelt, was the ultimate consequence of progressive nationalism centered on the dogmas of administrative state and scientific management. In fact, the efficient and scientific administrative state was the champion and the general welfare was its glory. Nationalizing all sectors of public life became the adamant goal of the 'new liberals', welfare state nationalists and social-democrats.<sup>49</sup> Through the methods of surveillance, investigation and regulation, the expert-conducted, interventionist and paternalist bureaucratic agencies of the administrative state could operate overarching social and economic control and engineering. The progressive ideologues and reformers

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<sup>47</sup> "Progressivism reconstructed American liberalism by dismantling the free market of classical liberalism and erecting in its place the welfare state of modern liberalism" (Thomas C. Leonard, *Illiberal Reformers: Race, Eugenics & American Economics in the Progressive Era*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016, p. 191).

<sup>48</sup> Balogh, *op. cit.*, p. 321.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 360-361.

equated science with efficiency;<sup>50</sup> they acknowledged scientific and political action as the very spirit of the age and efficiency as its prime ethos. The doctrine of administrative state was very influential among the new school of social-liberals, who added to the vocabulary of enlightened nationalism terms such as the 'American way of life' and the 'American Dream'.<sup>51</sup>

### **The Messianic Nation: Americanism, anti-communism, and the paradigm of self-aggrandizing nationalism.**

At the end of the nationalist spectrum of grandeur and self-aggrandizement, there is an unshakeable belief in the noble and redeeming mission of one nation. Partly religious and partly resulting from the overall exaggeration of that nation's role in the world, messianic nationalism intersects the basic tenets of ethno-religious nationalism: prompted by ignorant conformism to a misunderstood form of civil religion based on unquestioned innate innocence, messianism rests fundamentally on a "theological faith in the universal validity of a dogmatic... default mode of humanity".<sup>52</sup> This general picture has perfectly represented the geopolitical portrait of the United States, especially from the beginning of the Cold War onward. At the core of this mystical self-confidence, there is a strong sentiment of national superiority doubled by the future projection of a special worldly mission. Seymour Martin Lipset, in his *American Exceptionalism*, derived this shared sentiment from the historical circumstances that have favored the United States' uniqueness in the world.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, the future dimension of messianic nationalism stands for a permanently renewed promise regarding the realization of 'more perfect' human conditions; contrary to the exhortations praising a past immovable national identity stemming from common origins, religion, language and history, American messianic nationalism descends "from an

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<sup>50</sup> The principle of national efficiency was glorified by Frederick Winslow Taylor in his 1911 speech "The Principles of Scientific Management", in Bruce P. Frohnen (ed.), *The American Nation: Primary Sources*, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2008, pp. 306-313.

<sup>51</sup> Charles C. Alexander, *Nationalism in American Thought, 1930-1945*, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969.

<sup>52</sup> Lieven, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-66.

<sup>53</sup> Caldwell, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

imagined future whose promise lay in transcending the past".<sup>54</sup> As such, the portrayal of American messianic nationalism cannot avoid lucid criticism and skeptical disbelief. Accordingly, the *forma mentis* of messianic nationalism would have to confront at least three basic objections: first, the ignition of self-righteous national extremism; second, the promotion of misplaced geopolitical strategies, and third, the preservation of strenuous international relations with other states, including allies.<sup>55</sup>

No messianic nationalism could possibly be effective without its outer export; in other words, it becomes fruitful within an internationalist setting in which the messianic nation fulfills expansionist and imperialist duties. The story of a bright world future under the patronage of the United States has been prompted by the annexationist and protectionist missions assumed by the United States in Central America and the Caribbean Islands in the aftermath of the 1898 war against Spain. At the turn of the century, the British journalist William T. Stead was the first to coin the dictum 'the Americanization of the world', in 1902; until the glorious proclamation of the 'American Century' in 1940,<sup>56</sup> there has been a constant and widespread optimistic sentiment dominating the American elites regarding their nation's civilizing and purposeful mission in the world which might work as a solid justification for expansionism and imperialism.<sup>57</sup> By and large, the expansionist military campaigns under the nobler guise of Americanization started in 1890, when a large community of Sioux Native Americans was exterminated; the same type of approach, against 'savage peoples', was carried out in countries such as Puerto Rico and Philippines after the Spanish war.<sup>58</sup> When endorsing European ethnic nationalism at the end of World War I, in his famous *Fourteen Points Address*, President Woodrow Wilson made one step further in the affirmation of propagandistic messianic nationalism: to make the 'world safe for democracy' meant the exportation of American values according to

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<sup>54</sup> Don H. Doyle, *Nations Divided: America, Italy, and the Southern Question*, Athens & London: The University of Georgia Press, 2002, p. 21.

<sup>55</sup> Lieven, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-82.

<sup>56</sup> Henry R. Luce, "The American Century", in *Life*, February 17, 1941.

<sup>57</sup> See, for instance, Senator Alfred J. Beveridge's 1900 political discourse "The Star of Empire", in Frohnen (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 496-504.

<sup>58</sup> King, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-36.

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the self-assured idealist mission and transformative zeal of a model concocted in a privileged and exceptional nation.

At the end of the Second World War, the doctrine of Americanism enriched its plethora of meanings. Two separate and markedly nationalist orientations appraised Americanism and pretended to fight for certain goals in order to defend it. On the one hand, a bunch of statesmen and political activists, such as Dean Acheson, James Forrestal or Averell Harriman, turned into architects of nationalist globalism and exceptionalism;<sup>59</sup> on the other, a congressional committee whose brain was Senator Joseph McCarthy followed a path of intense domestic nationalism and pursued a non-compromising anti-communist campaign under the shield of Cold War ideological confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. While the first Americanist wing called for committed patriotism in support of shaping a new foreign policy direction, anti-communist nationalists launched an almost hysterical witch-hunting and demanded integral loyalty to the American nation. Their brutal anti-communist propaganda bears striking resemblance to the inter-war European nationalist elites in their combativeness to discredit socialism. In addition, what particularly banded the two groups together was the subordination of their political actions to national security propaganda; in effect, the ratification of the National Security Act in 1947 provided protection for these nationalist impetuses and paved the way for the nationalization of federal bureaucracy and creation of specialized institutions, such as the Department of Defense and the National Security Council. All these endeavors were called the 'Pearl Harbor effect' and illustrated the coordinated effort of domestic institutions and groups to design the American national grand strategy. If Roosevelt's administrative state subordinated national security to the economic national interest, the post-war nationalists precisely identified the security agenda with the supreme national interest.<sup>60</sup>

From the mid 1950s on, a steady conflict between the post-New Deal social-liberal nationalists and the first generations of right-wing nationalist neoconservatives has been dominant within the ideology of

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<sup>59</sup> Fousek, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>60</sup> Douglas T. Stuart, *Creating the National Security State: A History of the Law that Transformed America*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008, pp. 8-24.

American nationalism; on one side, there were liberal interventionists defending isolationism, affirmative civil rights and economic interests as pervasively chief goals of US nationalism; on the other, adepts of laissez-faire and free markets liberalism amplified the issue of security interests and, consequently, advocated a more assertive role of the United States in international politics. It was precisely the foreign policy agenda that have ignited the nationalist controversies during the Cold War era: for instance, American universities dominated by left-wing and moderate liberals denounced the 'national weakness' and the 'Vietnam guilt' as some of the most negative consequences of aggressive foreign policy and neo-imperialism; their rivals, the neoconservatives, accused the liberal intelligentsia of decadence, shallowness and lack of patriotism and loyalty to the country.<sup>61</sup> This ideological state of belligerence has remained in place even after the end of the Soviet-American Cold War frictions; in fact, in the 1990s, one could notice a resurgence of the above-mentioned conflict, with the neoconservatives playing the upper hand. In the context of globalization, the neocons insisted, the United States should not diminish its strong assertive tone in foreign affairs; the chorus of global voices in a multi-polar world should be conducted by the United States' messianic timbre – expression of overconfident and self-aggrandizing nationalism. Opting for US assertive nationalism to the detriment of petty isolationism, the former Secretary of State in the 1990s, Madeleine Albright, convincingly decreed the international posture of America under the formula of 'indispensable nation'.<sup>62</sup> This was the prevailing atmosphere surrounding the US foreign policy agenda when the tragic events of 9/11 happened at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The aggressive and inflexible response of the US through the national security strategy of President George W. Bush urged for renewed reflection on the privileged destiny of the American nation. One perspective discerned between two basic types of national identification in those troubled times of confusion and utter emotionalism: thus, Americans themselves were entrapped between positive patriotism based on solidarity, active participation, pride and loyalty, and hyper-

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<sup>61</sup> Lieven, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 32.

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nationalism inspired by the Bush doctrine, centered upon intolerance, imperialism, militarism and muscular politics.<sup>63</sup>

### **Coda: the 'post' avatars of an ideology**

Liah Greenfield's germane book on nationalism dismissed its ideological character and adopted an alternative approach by assimilating nationalism to a 'style of thought', even though the author provided one of the most comprehensive definitions for whatever it might mean: nationalism "locates the source of individual identity within a people, which is seen as the bearer of sovereignty, the central object of loyalty, and the basis of collective solidarity".<sup>64</sup> As I will attempt to show, each of Greenfield's four pillars of nationalism rather subverts the ideology and converts it in current 'post' reevaluations.

First, the *post-ethnic* perspective on nationalism unties the confined meanings of individual ethnic identity in order to mirror the realities of a global and cosmopolitan<sup>65</sup> world. Paradoxically enough, in the case of the United States, the foreign policy strategy has attempted to provide more conspicuous identity contours of American 'national individualism' in the forms of self-aggrandizement and assertiveness, especially in the aftermath of 9/11 events. Second, the sovereignty of the people concept has been recently reversed in order to become one of the central tenets of *populist* rhetoric; recently hallowed as 'neo-sovereignty',<sup>66</sup> the post-national appropriation of the concept in the United States could be easily identified with Donald Trump's glorification of 'American nation first'. Third, as the most radical repudiations of nationalism have instantiated, a lot of sub-national conflicts and separatist tendencies have legitimated outright *post-nationalism*: in the United States, the 21<sup>st</sup> century 'neo-nationalist' upheavals of Bush and Trump have prevented the nation from facing sweeping

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<sup>63</sup> Qiong Li and Marilyn B. Brewer, "What Does It Mean to Be an American? Patriotism, Nationalism, and American Identity after 9/11", in *Political Psychology*, vol. 25, no. 5, 2004, pp. 727-728.

<sup>64</sup> Greenfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>65</sup> David A. Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism*, New York: Basic Books, 1995.

<sup>66</sup> Peter J. Spiro, "The New Sovereignists: American Exceptionalism and Its False Prophets", in *Foreign Affairs*, November/December, 2000.

manifestations of nationalist denials and striking regional loyalties. Fourth, the *post-multiculturalist* perspective on nationalism, according to which group distinctions are paramount and hierarchies and differentiations between groups should be erased through affirmative policies,<sup>67</sup> dissolves the nationalist concept of collective solidarity in the United States into racial, social, class, community, and local crumbled solidarities. Would it be the case that these 'post' assessments are just present-time occurrences of American nationalism's promising and future-oriented character?

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<sup>67</sup> King, *op. cit.*, p. 167.



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