The American National Identity: The Source of Mounting Concern

Abstract
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The American national identity has been holding the attention of citizens, politicians, intellectuals, and writers. The concern about this identity has been increasing due to the spates of immigrants who have been streaming into the country and impacting the composition of the society as well as the mainstream culture.

The discussion demonstrates the failure of both the melting pot and the assimilation models, the necessity of emphasizing the American creed and constitutional rules to prevent identity erosion, and the importance of minimizing the differences and subordinating them to similarities that bind people together vis-à-vis diversity that won’t be a problem as long as peoples are loyal to the state, not to their ethnic groups.

In conclusion, the influx of immigrants is affecting the rapidly-changing society, and is posing challenges related to integrating them into the USA whose identity can be kept by maintaining its unifying ideals of liberty, equality, democracy, opportunity, individualism, and human rights which lure immigrants into coming to it.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, America is regarded to be the most powerful country all over the world. This country began as a number of colonies struggling for survival and independence which was achieved in less than two hundred years. By virtue of the efforts of great men and
women of the Founders’ Generation, the colonies formed, in the late 1700s, a nation whose birth was announced by The Declaration of Independence. The Constitution also created a federal government which was accepted by colonists who were united by a new national identity called American. This new feeling that binds people together, identity, should be defined before its developments is examined. In stanfordEncyclopedia, identity is defined as “the attributes that make you unique as an individual and different from others” or “the way you see or define yourself” (Olson, 2002). Brown also defines identity as “those parts of one’s self-definition which have to do with personality traits, physical attributes, interpersonal styles and the like” (789). Webster’s New World Dictionary defines identity as “the condition or fact of being the same; oneness; the condition or fact of being a specific person or thing; individuality” (696). Historian and Cornell University Professor Clinton Rossiter explains in The American Quest that an identity is a continuing process (39). The careful examination of these definitions shows that identity is an abstract, an intangible feeling, and that it refers, Smith argues in National Identity, to “an individual and can be determined by the gender and the culture, social, religious, ethnic, and national identity” (15).

Approaching the concept of national identity, it becomes clear that the definition won’t be of a single individual, but of the characteristics of a whole population of whom an extensive aggregate” that are “associated with each other by common descent, language, or history” from a nation that occupies a “definite territory.” (Oxford English Dictionary, 30). Reiterating the same idea, Krakau claims that national identity is based on a nation and describes people who feel that they are the same just because of their belonging to one nation (19). These two definitions reveal that national identity emphasizes certain characteristics and differs from national character which focuses, Bloom argues in Personal Identity, National Identity, and International Relations, on passing down cultural norms from one generation to another (18). This argument about nation and national identity is quite relevant to America whose nationhood has been generating dispute amongst historians. Some historians claim that American became a nation in the 1700s when colonists identified themselves with each other and started sharing similar feelings, which was something they never did before this time. These colonists identified themselves, before the 1750s, as British, confirming their loyalty to Great Britain. Historian Russel B. Nye states, in This Almost Chosen People, that by the 1750s, the term “American” was used separately and independently of the term “British” or “English” (52). By this time, the language spoken in the colonies grew to be a mix of English, French, Dutch, German, and Indian, which provides the indication that colonists were no longer loyal to the British empire. It is also at this time that colonists began to view Britain as their enemy and rejected the Sugar and Stamp Acts. By the time if the War of Independence, this shared identity became clearer.
Demonstrating this change, Patrick Henry holds, in *The American Nation-National Identity – Nationalism*, that the distinctions between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers, and New Englanders have disappeared, and that they were all unquestionably Americans (47). When *The Declaration of Independence* was signed, an American national identity had crystallized.

As far as identity formation is concerned, other historians maintain that American national identity was not formed before the 1800s. According to this group, when the colonies’ delegates met to sign *The Declaration of Independence*, they were, Adams maintains in *The American Story: The Revolutionaries*, disunited and John Dickinson of Pennsylvania demonstrated his desire to remain part of the British empire, holding independence to be treasonous (76). This view means that Pennsylvania attaches a high value to its relationship with Britain, and that its relationship with other colonies is not intimate. Equally displeased were also the other delegates who had problems with unity. To take an example, the regional differences between New England and Southern States threatened the Continental Congress in 1776 and remained unsettled in the Constitutional Convention of 1789. Commenting on this issue of lacking unity, Liah Greenfield claims, in *The American Nation – National Identity – Nationalism*, that the sense of being Americans “was not accompanied by sense that constituted a unity” in the colonies (32). This lack of identity means that settlers in the colonies failed center around one cause, and, consequently, had no common culture. This sort of culture, according to Anthony D. Smith and Clinton Rossiter, is a requirement for a nation. These arguments clarify that colonial America lacked the common culture that would unite citizens, territory, shared economy, and shared beliefs whose value lies in their being markers of national identity. Colonists shared a sentiment that united them together. This feeling that they were Americans led to the formation of the First Continental Congress in 1774. Similar to the first group of historians, historians in this group also hold that national identity has crystallized before signing *The Declaration of Independence*. This claim is supported by some people’s establishing an identity before independence is achieved. If America had a national identity by the end of the 1700s, then the question that poses itself in the words of Writer J. Hector St. John De Crevecoeur, would be: “What is an American, this new man?” (39). Unlike Britain and Ireland, American identity is based on, Nye, Gellert, and Mann argue, abstract ideas, such as liberty, individualism, and republicanism (47; 21; 47). In addition to these ideas, equality is a cornerstone of the American national identity. Equality means that, Nye adds. Americans have equal opportunities and rights (312 & 314).

Regarding the question raised as to who the American is, it can be said that the American is a cultural being who believes in democracy and rejects dictatorship. He also leaves behind, Crevecoer maintains in *Letters from an American farmer*, all his ancient “prejudices and manners” and “receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. He becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our great Alma Mater” (43). McClay adds, in “Is America an experiment?,” that an American is “active citizen and
willing to participate in the society. He is not bound by conventional dogmas; he seeks liberation from conventional history and the resurgence of innocence and youth.(4). Besides, an American does not look toward the past; he or she looks toward the future, and lives up to certain ideals that constitute the American Creed. These ideals have been the core of national identity since the eighteenth century, and occur in The Declaration of Independence whose draft was written by a five-man committee appointed by the Second Continental Congress. One of the members of this committee was Thomas Jefferson who was chosen on account of his training in law and political philosophy. Jefferson wrote in The Declaration:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed” (1776). These governments which derive their power from people are the democracies which shape the national American identity.

Although this national identity represents an intangible feeling, it is represented by artifacts, symbols, and folklore. The first artifact is The Declaration of Independence which I have already mentioned, and the second one is the Constitution. Whereas The Declaration of Independence separated the USA from Britain, the Constitution established, Kamen maintains in A Machine that Would Go of Itself: The Constitution in American Culture, a federal governments to protect individuals’ rights (86 & 94). In addition to these two artifacts, a national currency was created in 1792, and a flag with thirteen stars representing colonies became, Ross holds in The
American Revolution, “a powerful representation of American unity” (40). This New flag was called “Stars and Stripes.” National identity is also celebrated in American songs and the national anthem. In his article, “God Save the American National Songs and National Identities, 1760-1798,” Robert James Branham claims that songs offer “clear and concise statements of national identity, sung en masse in ceremonies of civil affiliation” (7). Branham adds, “As explicit vehicles of unification, subsuming the many into one, national songs obscure significant difference among citizens and their circumstances” (8).

In addition to songs, folklore, Arieli argues in Encyclopedia of American Political History, as well as monuments, celebration of holidays, and idolization of heroes express the American national identity (848). Heroes, for instance, propagate this identity. Not only do they, Gellert maintains in The Fate of America, embody the principles of the nation, but also inspire the country toward greatness and sense of purpose (xii). In his book, The Fate of America, the retired Humanities professor Michael Gellert identifies a type of hero developed during the 1700s: the revolutionary. Gellert claims that the revolutionary is the “…prototype of the American hero ideal” (29). It is believed that George Washington is the most known national hero of the Founding Fathers. Washington’s dedication and integrity gave him the hero status, and, therefore, his birthday has become a national holiday. He is worthy of being glorified; he represents ideals that are lacking in the world. He also warned against ethnicities and immigration.

This threat posed by immigrants is not new. Predating The Declaration of Independence, the threat immigration poses has been at the center of the attention of American writers. In 1751, for instance, Benjamin Franklin wrote an essay in which he described the threat posed by German and other immigration to the British character of Pennsylvania. Franklin wrote: …Why
should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our language or customs, any more than they can acquire our complexion (234). In this question, Franklin reaffirms the English identity of his society and denounces immigration, expressing his fear of a demographic change which may lead to Germanizing people. This view is different from Michel Guillaume Jean de Crevecoeur’s (pseudonym J. Hector St. John) view that clarifies the foundations of American national identity. In his letters from an American Farmer, published in 1782, Crevecoeur wrote: What, then, is the American, this new man? He is either an European or the descendant of an European; hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. I could point out to you a family whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations. He is an American who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new modes of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. He becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our great Alma Mater …… Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world (69-70). This quotation demonstrates the capacity of American identity to be molded out of the synthesis of people with diverse origins. It also shows that immigrants of diverse origins pose no threat as long as they leave their beliefs and customs behind and accept the new identity as Americans. Problems arise when immigrants refuse to shed their past cultural heritage. If this happens, it will be difficult to assimilate them into society as assimilation lies in the acceptance of the host society and compliance by its laws and principles. It will be equally difficult to integrate them into society because integration necessitates changing the country
legislation in order to do all of them justice. Immigrants’ preservation of their customs and traditions is likely to be the bringer of troubles for them, and legislation itself may not be enough to stop discrimination against them. This argument about legislation hints at the dire need for preparing the host society to accept the newcomers. This preparation can be done by creating the legal framework that treats all people equally, regardless of their color, creed, race, etc. As far as preparation is concerned, the culturalist model has failed in a few world countries because societies were unprepared. In Sweden, for instance, “multiculturalism policies,” Veronika Goncharova claims in “Multiculturalism policies in Sweden: the Preservation of Immigrants’ Cultures” “did not solve issue of cultural differences and the co-existence of cultures” (10). This model also failed in Australia. The failure of this model resulted from not incorporating non-white cultures in organizing living spheres and workplaces, disrespect of different languages and dialects, the inability to frame public education system in a way that suits the local models of learning and the mass media to represent cultural minority groups. Whatever the reasons underlying this failure are, many academics claim that Australia does not have its own national and cultural identity. Despite this failure, scholars and political activities in the US have embraced multiculturalism and diversity since the 1960s. The reason behind this choice made by scholars is connected with their realizing that the melting pot policy had failed. This shift in attitude is clear in the American Studies curriculum that used to employ the melting pot metaphor. Coined by, Diana Owen argues in American Identity, Citizenship, and Multiculturalism, the playwright Israel Zangwill in the early twentieth century, as an organizing principles (1). This choice of multiculturalism also means that individuals can be Americans and at the same time claim identities based on race, ethnicity, gender, etc. As far as choice is concerned, many Americans and institutions have embraced multiculturalism. This behavior is
shown by elementary and secondary schools’ adopting curricula, Owen claims in
American Identity, Citizenship, and Multiculturalism, to foster understanding of
cultural diversity (3). Following the same steps, the United States Post Office has,
Owen adds, “introduced stamps depicting Americans from diverse backgrounds (3).
In spite of these developments in this direction, some Americans believe, Simon
claims, “On Becoming American; Reasserting Citizenship in the Immigration
Debate,” that society has gone too far in fostering diversity (4). Similarly, a good
number of Americans object to promoting multiculturalism in areas such as
employment programs, holding immigrants to be a burden on the country in the
areas of housing, health, and employment (Pew Research Center, 1999).
According to a formerly-conducted survey, about fifty percent believe, Fonte
argues in On the Issues, that much effort and expense is directed at manipulating
separate racial and ethnic practices such as bilingual education (1996). A careful
scrutiny of these statistics reveals that Americans are not pleased with
multiculturalism, and that their arguments reflect their distrust of the mode and
concern about their national identity. Americans’ distrust of multiculturalism is
justified because Richard D. Lamm, the former Colorado Governor, claims, in
“Multiculturalism,” that multiculturalism in which immigrants maintain their
cultures destroys the country (1). Repeating Lamm’s argument verbatim, the
historical scholar Seymour Lipset maintains that the “histories of bilingual and bi-
cultural societies that do not assimilate are histories of turmoil, tension, and
tragedy. Canada, Belgium, Malaysia, Lebanon all face crises of national existence
in which minorities press for autonomy, if not independence”. These two
arguments constitute a roadmap for policy makers who should act in accordance
with the lessons drawn from the aforementioned countries ravaged by selfish
ethnicities that give priority to their own interests over the good of the country. To
evade troubles, Americans should stop immigrants from developing ethnic
identities whose dominance weakens the national identity. This action is becoming urgent, considering the dramatic change in the racial and ethnic composition of the country. This situation is aggravated by the fact that the number of illegal immigrants is unknown. For this reason, the extent to which immigrants contribute to the composition of population is unclear. Concerning the number of population, it has, Kent and Mather contend in “What Drives US Population Growth?,” remarkably increased since the 1990s(1-44). This increase is blamed on immigration. It is also caused for 60% of the population growth. The high fertility rates in the US parallel, Macunovich holds in Birth Quake: The Baby Boom and Its Aftershock, those of “minority groups that come from cultures in which families and multiple children are the norm”(2002). Reckoning with the increasing number of population and the cultural diversity, policy makers are advised to consider taking measures, for instance, is to make sure that immigrants relegate loyalty to their ethnic groups to their loyalty to America. In this way, diversity won’t do the country any harm. Disregarding this necessary precaution is certain to create evils, and render Americans concerned about their national identity.

This concern is not the fruit of the moment. It has been a staple in American literature. To take an example, Washington Irving was so interested in the American character and identity that he wrote several books about the American West. Like Irving, John Barth deals with the question of identity in The End of the Road. James Cooper, similarly, treats of the theme of identity, demonstrating his concern about the cultural diversity and American identity. In Homeward Bound, for instance, he is worried about the many “knaves who migrate to America”(530); he also frets that New York City is now comprised of two-thirds immigrants from the interior or from “some foreign country” (530). In a novel titled Afloat and Ashore, Cooper establishes the connection between the problems of social instability and immigration. He, for instance,
compares contemporary New York to former days, preferring the old days. He pines for “the true, native portion of the population, and not the throng from Ireland and Germany, who now crowd the street, and who, certainly as a body, are not the least remarkable for personal charms” (358). In *The Chainbearer*, he also gives a piece of advice to those newly arriving in New York:

“Our immigrant friends should remember one thing … he who migrates is bound to respect the habits and opinions of those whom he joins” (124). In a third novel, *The Ways of Hour*, he describes New York as a “mottled city, populated with “European representatives amounting to scores of thousands” (10). Cooper’s concern about immigrants and cultural diversity is not limited only to his novels. This concern is also manifest in his letters. To take an example, in a letter to his friend William Shubrick (Letters III), he warns of foreign domination of American letters, claiming that “immigration weighs us down” (300). In an earlier letter (Letters III) to James Mead, he complains that “the state of things is, I fancy, but little understood in the interior. Here we all lie at the mercy of foreign hirelings, and I see no remedy for it” (247).

In 1893, he wrote to his wife about his visit to a church in Philadelphia (Letters III), arguing that the chapel was “filled with Irish of a class better than usual” (455). A careful examination of Cooper’s comments on immigrants reveals the development that has occurred. Whereas these comments upon foreigners were veiled at first, they turned into clear denunciations later on. These remarks urged other writers and scholars to tackle the same theme. One of these writers is Kay Seymour House who wrote a book titled *Cooper’s Americans*, in which she claimed that Cooper constructs an image of America as a melting pot which is a metaphor for diversity. Like Cooper, Gish Jen concentrates on the theme of identity and the immigrant experience in America. In *Typical American*, *Mona in the Promised Land*, and *Who’s Irish?*, Jen
shows that identity in America is multifaceted and shifting, and that immigrants are not for assimilation and becoming Americans. Echoing Cooper and Jen, Bernard Malamud also deals with the immigrant experience. In his *Selected Stories*, he dwells on Jewish American immigrants who struggle to construct new identities. In a sense, Malamud concentrates on post-immigrant identity, illustrating the mechanism by which, Siebert argues, the American society has shaped the Jewish-Americans identities between 1950s and 1980s. Commenting on the American society and its woes, Samuel Huntington poses the fundamental question, “Who Are We?, clarifying his concern about national identity which has been threatened by the multicultural immigrants streaming into the country and impacting its mainstream culture and value system.

Echoing Cooper, Jen, and Malamud, Edgar Allan Poe also treats of the theme of national identity. In *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, Poe’s narrator, Pym, leaves Edgartown in Massachusetts, turning away from ordinary society, and pursuing the dream of America as a virgin land. In his adventures at sea, he develops a deep friendship with Indians, just as Melville’s Ishmael in *Moby Dick* does. It is clear that Poe’s novel is based on the journey motif that also occurs in Cooper’s *The Prairie*, Melville’s *Moby Dick*, Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Fin*, Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, and Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*. Commenting on this journey motif, J. Meyers holds in *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Legacy*, that the journey undertaken by Pym is concerned with establishing a national American identity as well as discovering a personal identity (297-298). Like Meyers, Ian Ousby, maintains in *An Introduction to Fifty American Novels*, that Pym’s quest is a “metaphor for an exploration of the underside of the human mind – an interior voyage
“(45). I take Ousby’s point that the journey is an inward one, but I’d like to say that it is also an outward one. Regardless of the values that can be attached to the journey, it is important to point out that the idea of the journey is central to American culture. In An Introduction to Fifty American Novels, Ian Ousby holds that the USA was originally “colonized as a result of the Pilgrim Fathers’ voyage across the Atlantic, and its frontiers were expanded by those great moves westward in the nineteenth century” (313).

American culture as well as American character is the target of Henry David Thoreau, R.W. Emerson, and Walt Whitman. While Thoreau and Emerson both concentrate on the American character regarding it to be individualistic and deeply connected with nature, Walt Whitman’s poetry highlights an American voice dealing with people’s relationship and the American ideals. Following the steps of other American writers, J.D. Salinger treats of the theme of identity in The Catcher in the Rye, in which he depicts Holden Caulfield who is a teenager unready for adulthood. Holden realizes that he is no longer a child, and desperately searches for his identity. Holden’s quest for identity has been capturing the imagination of adolescent readers. Like Salinger, Ralph Ellison does a parallel job in Invisible Man, which focuses on the theme of identity. This quest for identity is also a staple in Kate Chopin’s The Story of an Hour, Neg Creo, Beyond the Bayou, and The Awakening, John Updike’s A & P and Separating, Toni Cade Bambara’s The Lesson, and Anne Beattie’s Weekend. Moreover, it is the struggle for identity that keeps giving Ann Tyler’s characters a tough time in her novels. These characters scramble against odds to assert their identities and maintain a balance between their self-identity and family identity. In Tyler’s first novel, If Morning Ever Comes, Ben Joe Hawkes goes back home from school because he has trouble with concentrating. Worried about his home while he was away, he decided to play the role of substitute father. In another novel, The Clock Winder, Elizabeth Abbot flees the roles of gardener and handyman in her family, but She ends up playing the same roles for the Embers, another family. Like Tyler, Toni Morrison handles this theme in a novel published in 1987, Beloved, which centers on freed slaves’ attempts to reclaim their identities. Treating the same theme, Lorrie Moore depicts characters at odds with their roles. These characters appear in Birds of America, Self-Help, and Anagrams, which all focus on the quest for identity. In these words, characters are displeased with their names which are markers of their identities. In Birds of America, for instance, the protagonist, Olena, rejects her parents’ efforts to Americanize her name to "Nell". Moore’s works are similar in that they are of, Karen Weekes holds in "Identity in the Short Story Cycles of Lorrie Moore", "Cyclical structure" and focus on "multiple identities and roles for women" (109-122).

A quick look at these writers’ works shows how much they are concerned about the theme of identity. It can be argued that these writers are the nation’s spokespersons. By focusing on the theme of identity, they obviously demonstrate their being bedeviled by the same problem that has been disturbing the whole nation for a long time. Some of them have been sounding alarm
bells, beginning with Cooper and ending with Huntington, which is a positive sign, a piece of evidence showing that they care about their country, and an indication of their being keen on setting this problem of immigration that is certain to beget other problems unless it is completely resolved. These caring and responsible writers are deserving of praise on account of their concern about the national identity and mainstream culture. Such a good deed is worthy of being appreciated simply because it reflects their belonging to their country which defines them and empowers them to enjoy their rights. Regarding the national identity, the source of their fears, it is protected, I think, by the American ideals of liberty, equality, rights, opportunity, and democracy which have been constituting its core. It is because of these ideas that are lacking in other countries that we see the influx of immigrants on a daily basis. It is taken for granted that immigrants are attracted to this country because of its unique opportunities as well as its ideals that have not been even tried in other countries. Were America a dictatorship, immigrants would never think of leaving for it. To immigrants, the afore-mentioned ideals are worth the efforts exerted and the sacrifices made. The value of these ideals lies in their being like a bond that holds a country as heterogeneous as the US is together. By virtue of these ideals, the US has survived the Civil War, political turmoil, and the mounting cultural differences that have been responsible for ripping other countries in which the multicultural model failed to integrate immigrants into the host society. Arguing in support of this claim, Huntington claims, in Who Are We?, that the principles of liberty, equality, democracy, etc. have been regarded as an important reason "why the United States is still a coherent nation despite its varied multiethnic social complexion"(2004).

As far as cultural differences are concerned, the host society should do something about them. It doesn't do the society any good to emphasize them; it wouldn't do the society any good either to force immigrants to drop their cultural differences and prior identities. It doesn't work to ask immigrants to drop their beliefs and habits and pick up new ones In American Identity Crisis? What's an American Identity?" Paul Wallis maintains that it is not realistic to assume that people will come to America, "drop their cultural identity," and pick up new characters with new roles to play(1). In my own judgment, the best thing to be done about these cultural differences is to de-emphasize and subordinate them to a universal human nature. Such cultural differences should convince Americans that people are fundamentally different, and, therefore, have different opinions and needs. This consciousness of the difference of people yields further consciousness of other people's needs. In other words, this consciousness paves the way for channeling the efforts exerted into the ways of accommodating the needs of different

As regards this consciousness of others, it is a prerequisite for protecting the American national identity. It is good to understand that others are different. It is also a mark of wisdom to recognize that other people are different in terms of their needs, tastes, habits, beliefs, aspirations, views, etc. This recognition should lead to treating others on this basis. It should also lead to accepting and tolerating these differences when it comes to protecting the country's
Practicing intolerance and stressing differences creates conflict and untold troubles. It keeps people divided and threatens to tear the country apart. Instead of doing that, Americans should emphasize similarities. The nameless writer of "Multiculturalism within America?" Quotes Joseph Campbell's contention that "when we celebrate our similarities, we prosper. When we celebrate our differences, we self-destruct" (2). Campbell's argument provides us with the guidance needed, with the recipe for keeping the national identity. He proposes a vision based on the similarities shared by the multicultural people in the US. These similarities are embodied in the ideals that all peoples value, that have been in fact invigorating the country turning it into a source of attraction for others. The ideal of opportunity, for instance, still draws immigrants. These newcomers keep dreaming of opportunities and seizing them the same way others have done. They hope to work at decent wages, get the education they are aspiring for, receive the medical treatment unthought of in their countries, get the citizenship and work permanently in the US, Live luxuriously and peacefully, change their social classes, etc. To help these newcomers live happily, the American government and non-governmental organizations are invited to give an equal chance to all citizens in the US, regardless of their color, m culture, creed, race, etc. The reason underlying this invitation is that in so doing the American government and organizations do people justice and practice this principle. It is this practice that impresses people, holds their attention, and attracts them to the country. Just as this ideal draws immigrants, so also do other ideals. Not only do these ideals shape the American national identity, but also keep it protected. Ideals also do job; they keep the country united. They are unifying principles. Arguing in support of this argument, Myrdal claims, in An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy, that "the principles of liberty, equality, democracy, individualism, human rights, the rule of law, and private property have unified the diverse ethnicities in the United States" (3)! Like Myrdal, Samuel Huntington holds, in Who Are We? The Challenge to National Identity, that the principles of liberty, equality, democracy, individualism, human rights, etc. are the key elements of American ideals, it does the US and its citizens good to live up to these ideals although it is not a simple thing to live by ideals. The difficulty of doing so lies in the fact that ideals represent the highest standards which humans cannot attain because of their imperfections.

I have demonstrated the mounting concern about the American national identity, the American writers' being the nation's spokespersons and addressing the problem of identity which is the talk of the whole nation, the policy makers' duty to take the precautions necessary for protecting the national identity, the importance of emphasizing similarities, the necessity of living by the American ideals, the value of making sure that immigrants prioritize loyalty to America over their loyalty to ethnic groups, the significance of practicing tolerance and understanding, the challenges posted by immigrants, and the attraction of the US as the land of unique opportunities and ideals that are unheard of in other countries.
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