

Dead Souls: The Denationalization of the American Elite

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Debates over national identity are a pervasive characteristic of our time. In part, they raise rhetorical questions, but they also have profound implications for American society and American policy at home and abroad. Different perceptions--especially between the citizenry and the more cosmopolitan elites--of what constitutes national identity generate different national interests and policy priorities.

The views of the general public on issues of national identity differ significantly from those of many elites. The public, overall, is concerned with physical security but also with societal security, which involves the sustainability--within acceptable conditions for evolution--of existing patterns of language, culture, association, religion and national identity. For many elites, these concerns are secondary to participating in the global economy, supporting international trade and migration, strengthening international institutions, promoting American values abroad, and encouraging minority identities and cultures at home. The central distinction between the public and elites is not isolationism versus internationalism, but nationalism versus cosmopolitanism.

Dead Souls

In August 1804, Walter Scott finished writing *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. Therein, he asked whether

"Breathes there the man with soul so dead
Who never to himself hath said:
'This is my own, my native Land?'
Whose heart hath ne'er within him burned
As home his footsteps he hath turned, . . .
From wandering on a foreign strand?"

A contemporary answer to Scott's question is: Yes, the number of dead souls is small but growing among America's business, professional, intellectual and academic elites. Possessing in Scott's words, "titles, power and pelf", they also have decreasing ties with the American nation. Coming back to America from a foreign strand, they are not likely to be overwhelmed with deep feelings of commitment to their "native land." Their attitudes and behavior contrast with the overwhelming patriotism and nationalistic identification of the rest of the American public. A major gap is growing in America between the dead or dying souls among its elites and its "Thank God for America" public. This gap was temporarily obscured by the patriotic rallying after September 11. In the absence of repeated comparable attacks, however, the pervasive and fundamental

forces of economic globalization make it likely that the denationalizing of elites will continue.

Globalization involves a huge expansion in the international interactions among individuals, corporations, governments, NGOs and other entities; growth in number and size of multinational corporations investing, producing and marketing globally; and the multiplication of international organizations, regimes and regulations. The impact of these developments differs among groups and among countries. The involvement of individuals in globalizing processes varies almost directly with their socio-economic status. Elites have more and deeper transnational interests, commitments and identities than non-elites. American elites, government agencies, businesses and other organizations have been far more important in the globalization process than those of other countries. Hence there is reason for their commitments to national identities and national interests to be relatively weaker.

These developments resemble on a global basis what happened in the United States after the Civil War. As industrialization moved ahead, businesses could no longer succeed if their operations were confined to a particular locality or state. They had to go national in order to get the capital, workers and markets they needed. Ambitious individuals had to become geographically, organizationally and, to some extent, occupationally mobile, and pursue their careers on a national rather than a local basis. The growth of national corporations and other national associations promoted national viewpoints, national interests and national power. National laws and standards took precedence over state ones. National consciousness and national identity became preeminent over state and regional identities. The rise of transnationalism, although in its early stages, is somewhat similar.

Transnational ideas and people fall into three categories: universalist, economic and moralist. The universalist approach is, in effect, American nationalism and exceptionalism taken to the extreme. In this view, America is exceptional not because it is a unique nation but because it has become the "universal nation." It has merged with the world through the coming to America of people from other societies and through the widespread acceptance of American popular culture and values by other societies. The distinction between America and the world is disappearing because of the triumph of American power and the appeal of American society and culture. The economic approach focuses on economic globalization as a transcendent force breaking down national boundaries, merging national economies into a single global whole, and rapidly eroding the authority and functions of national governments. This view is prevalent among executives of multinational corporations, large NGOs, and comparable organizations operating on a global basis and among individuals with skills, usually of a highly technical nature, for which there is a global demand and who are thus able to pursue careers moving from country to country. The moralistic approach decries patriotism and nationalism as evil forces and argues that international law, institutions, regimes and norms are morally superior to those of individual nations. Commitment to humanity must supersede commitment to nation. This view is found among intellectuals, academics and journalists. Economic transnationalism is rooted in the bourgeoisie, moralistic transnationalism in the intelligentsia.

In 1953, the head of General Motors, nominated to be secretary of defense, proclaimed, "What's good for General Motors is good for America." He was widely criticized for not

saying that what's good for America is good for General Motors. Either way, both he and his critics presumed some coincidence of interest between corporation and country. Now, however, multinational corporations see their interests as separate from America's interests. As their global operations expand, corporations founded and headquartered in the United States gradually become less American. In the 1990s, corporations such as Ford, Aetna, Motorola, Price Costco and Kimberly-Clark forcefully rejected, in response to a Ralph Nader proposal, expressions of patriotism and explicitly defined themselves as multinational. America-based corporations operating globally recruit their workforce and their executives, including their top ones, without regard to nationality. The CIA, one of its officials said in 1999, can no longer count on the cooperation of American corporations as it once was able to do, because the corporations view themselves as multinational and may not think it in their interests to help the U.S. government.

Nationalism has proven wrong Karl Marx's concept of a unified international proletariat. Globalization is proving right Adam Smith's observation that while "the proprietor of land is necessarily a citizen of the particular country in which his estate lies . . . the proprietor of stock is properly a citizen of the world, and is not necessarily attached to any particular country." Smith's 1776 words describe the way contemporary transnational businessmen see themselves. Summarizing their interviews with executives of 23 American multinational corporations and nonprofit organizations, James Davison Hunter and Joshua Yates conclude:

Surely these elites are cosmopolitans: they travel the world and their field of responsibility is the world. Indeed, they see themselves as 'global citizens.' Again and again, we heard them say that they thought of themselves more as 'citizens of the world' who happen to carry an American passport than as U.S. citizens who happen to work in a global organization. They possess all that is implied in the notion of the cosmopolitan. They are sophisticated, urbane and universalistic in their perspective and ethical commitments.

Together with the "globalizing elites" of other countries, these American executives inhabit a "socio-cultural bubble" apart from the cultures of individual nations and communicate with each other in a social science-y version of English, which Hunter and Yates label "global speak."

The economic globalizers are fixated on the world as an economic unit. As Hunter and Yates report,

All these globalizing organizations, and not just the multinational corporations, operate in a world defined by 'expanding markets', the need for 'competitive advantage', 'efficiency', 'cost-effectiveness', 'maximizing benefits and minimizing costs', 'niche markets', 'profitability' and 'the bottom line.' They justify this focus on the grounds that they are meeting the need of consumers all over the world. That is their constituency.

"One thing globalization has done", a consultant to Archer Daniels Midland said, "is to transfer the power of governments to the global consumer." As the global market replaces the national community, the national citizen gives way to the global consumer.

Economic transnationals are the nucleus of an emerging global superclass. The Global Business Policy Council asserts:

The rewards of an increasingly integrated global economy have brought forth a new global elite. Labeled 'Davos Men', 'gold-collar workers' or . . . 'cosmocrats', this emerging class is empowered by new notions of global connectedness. It includes academics, international civil servants and executives in global companies, as well as successful high-technology entrepreneurs.

Estimated to number about 20 million in 2000, of whom 40 percent were American, this elite is expected to double in size by 2010. Comprising fewer than 4 percent of the American people, these transnationalists have little need for national loyalty, view national boundaries as obstacles that thankfully are vanishing, and see national governments as residues from the past whose only useful function is to facilitate the elite's global operations. In the coming years, one corporation executive confidently predicted, "the only people who will care about national boundaries are politicians."

Involvement in transnational institutions, networks and activities not only defines the global elite but also is critical to achieving elite status within nations. Someone whose loyalties, identities and involvements are purely national is less likely to rise to the top in business, academia, the media and the professions than someone who transcends these limits. Outside politics, those who stay home stay behind. Those who move ahead think and act internationally. As sociologist Manuel Castells has said, "Elites are cosmopolitan, people are local." The opportunity to join this transnational world, however, is limited to a small minority of people in industrialized countries and to only a miniscule handful of people in developing countries.

The global involvements of the transnational economic elites erode their sense of belonging to a national community. An early 1980s poll showed:
The higher people's income and education . . . the more conditional the allegiance. . . .
They were more likely than the poor and uneducated to say they would leave the country if they could double their income.

In the early 1990s, future Secretary of Labor Robert Reich reached a similar conclusion, noting that "America's highest income earners . . . have been seceding from the rest of the nation." This seceding elite is, as John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge say,

increasingly cut off from the rest of society: Its members study in foreign universities, spend a period of time working abroad and work for organizations that have a global reach. They constitute a world within a world, linked to each other by myriad global networks but insulated from the more hidebound members of their own societies. . . . They are more likely to spend their time chatting with their peers around the world--via phone or e-mail--than talking with their neighbors in the projects around the corner.

Contemporary intellectuals have reinforced these trends. They abandon their commitment to their nation and their fellow citizens and argue the moral superiority of identifying with humanity at large. This proclivity flourished in the academic world in the 1990s. The University of Chicago's Martha Nussbaum denounced emphasis on "patriotic pride" as "morally dangerous", urged the ethical superiority of cosmopolitanism over patriotism, and argued that people should direct their "allegiance" to the "worldwide community of human beings." Amy Gutmann of Princeton argues that it was "repugnant" for American students to learn that they are, "above all, citizens of the United States." The "primary allegiance" of Americans, she wrote, "should not be

to the United States or to some other politically sovereign community", but to "democratic humanism." George Lipsitz of the University of California, San Diego, argued that "in recent years refuge in patriotism has been the first resort of scoundrels of all sorts." Richard Sennett of NYU denounced "the evil of a shared national identity" and judged the erosion of national sovereignty "basically a positive phenomenon." Peter Spiro of Hofstra University approvingly concluded that it is "increasingly difficult to use the word 'we' in the context of international affairs." In the past people used the word "we" with reference to the nation-state, but now affiliation with the nation-state "no longer necessarily defines the interests or even allegiances of the individual at the international level."

Moralist transnationals reject or are highly critical of the concept of national sovereignty. They agree with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan that national sovereignty ought to give way to "individual sovereignty" so that the international community can act to prevent or stop gross violations by governments of the rights of their citizens. This principle provides a basis for the United Nations to intervene militarily or otherwise in the domestic affairs of states, a practice explicitly prohibited by the UN Charter. More generally, the moralists advocate the supremacy of international law over national law, the greater legitimacy of decisions made through international rather than national processes, and the expansion of the powers of international institutions compared to those of national governments. Moralist international lawyers have developed the concept of "customary international law", which holds that norms and practices that have wide acceptance can be a basis for invalidating national laws.

A key step making this principle a reality in America was the 1980 decision by the Second Circuit Court of Appeals interpreting a 1789 statute designed to protect American ambassadors. In this case, *Filartiga v. Pena-Irala*, the court held that Paraguayan citizens residing in the United States could bring civil action in American courts against a Paraguayan government official whom they accused of murdering a Paraguayan in Paraguay. This ruling led to a number of similar cases being filed in U.S. courts. In these cases, courts in one country transcend the territorial jurisdiction of their country and assert the authority to act on alleged human rights abuses by foreigners against foreigners in foreign countries.

Moralist international lawyers argue that precedents in customary international law supersede previous federal and state laws. Since customary international law is not set forth in either statutes or treaties, it is, as the noted legal scholar Jeremy Rabkin says, whatever experts persuade a judge to think it may be. For that reason, it is likely to reach more and more deeply into domestic affairs. If a norm in customary international law exists against race discrimination, why not also against sex discrimination? And then why not also against discrimination on the basis of citizenship or language or sexual orientation?

Moralist international lawyers argue American law must meet international standards and approve of unelected foreign judges, as well as American ones, defining the civil rights of Americans in terms of international rather than American norms. In general, moralist transnationals believe that the United States should support the creation of tribunals such as the International Criminal Court and abide by its decisions as well as

those of the International Court of Justice, the UN General Assembly and comparable bodies.

The prevalence of anti-patriotic attitudes among liberal intellectuals led some of them to warn their fellow liberals of the consequences of such attitudes for the future not of America but of American liberalism. Most Americans, as the American public philosopher Richard Rorty has written, take pride in their country, but "many of the exceptions to this rule are found in colleges and universities, in the academic departments that have become sanctuaries for left-wing political views." These leftists have done "a great deal of good for . . . women, African-Americans, gay men and lesbians. . . . But there is a problem with this Left: it is unpatriotic." It "repudiates the idea of a national identity and the emotion of national pride." If the Left is to retain influence, it must recognize that a "sense of shared national identity . . . is an absolutely essential component of citizenship." Without patriotism, the Left will be unable to achieve its goals for America. Liberals, in short, must use patriotism as a means to achieve liberal goals.

The Patriotic Public

While elements of America's business and intellectual elites are identifying more with the world as a whole and defining themselves as "global citizens", Americans as a whole are becoming more committed to their nation. Huge majorities of Americans claim to be patriotic and express great pride in their country. Asked in 1991, "How proud are you to be an American?", 96 percent of Americans said "very proud" or "quite proud." The terrorist attacks of 9/11 could not and did not have much effect on these high levels of patriotic assertion; in September 2002, 91 percent of Americans were "extremely" or "very" proud to be American.

These affirmations of patriotism and pride in country might be less meaningful if people in other countries responded similarly. By and large, they do not. Americans have consistently and overwhelmingly been foremost among peoples in their patriotism and their identification with their country. This country ranked first in national pride among the 41 to 65 countries covered in each of the World Values Surveys of 1981-82, 1990-91, and 1995-96, with 96 to 98 percent of Americans saying they were "very proud" or "quite proud" of their country.

The extent of their identification varies, however, with their socio-economic status, race and place of birth. In the 1990-91 World Values Survey, over 98 percent of native-born Americans, immigrants, non-Hispanic whites, blacks and 95 percent of Hispanics said they were very proud or quite proud of their country. When asked about the priority of their national identity, however, differences appeared. Thirty-one percent of the native-born and of non-Hispanic whites said they identified primarily with America, but these proportions dropped to 25 percent for blacks, 19 percent for Hispanics and 17 percent for immigrants. Asked whether they would be willing to fight for America, 81 percent of non-Hispanic whites and 79 percent of native-born Americans said yes, compared to 75 percent of immigrants, 67 percent of blacks and 52 percent of Hispanics.

As these figures suggest, recent immigrants and the descendants of people coerced into becoming part of American society are likely to have more ambivalent attitudes toward that society than the descendants of settlers and earlier immigrants. Blacks and other

minorities have fought valiantly in America's wars. Yet significantly fewer blacks than whites think of themselves as patriotic. In a 1989 poll 95 percent of whites and 72 percent of blacks said that they considered themselves "very" or "somewhat" patriotic. In a 1998 survey of the parents of school children, 91 percent of white, 92 percent of Hispanic and 91 percent of immigrant parents strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement, "The U.S. is a better country than most other countries in the world." Among African-American parents, the proportion dropped to 84 percent. In other surveys, black-white differences have been somewhat less, yet in a September 2002 Gallup poll for ABC News-Washington Post, 74 percent of whites and 53 percent of non-whites said they were "extremely" proud to be an American, a larger difference than between other major social-economic categories.

Overall, however, with only minor variations, Americans overwhelmingly and intensely identify with their country, particularly compared to other peoples. While American elites may be denationalizing, Americans, the conductors of one comparative survey fittingly concluded, remain "the world's most patriotic people."

Unrepresentative Democracy

Growing differences between the leaders of major institutions and the public on domestic and foreign policy issues affecting national identity form a major cultural fault line cutting across class, denominational, racial, regional and ethnic distinctions. In a variety of ways, the American establishment, governmental and private, has become increasingly divorced from the American people. Politically, America remains a democracy because key public officials are selected through free and fair elections. In many respects, however, it has become an unrepresentative democracy because on crucial issues--especially those involving national identity--its leaders pass laws and implement policies contrary to the views of the American people. Concomitantly, the American people have become increasingly alienated from politics and government.

Apart from business and the military, contemporary American elites in categories such as the media, labor, religion, law and bureaucracy were almost twice to more than three times as liberal as the public as a whole, according to a 1980s survey. Another survey similarly found that on moral issues elites are "consistently more liberal" than rank-and-file Americans. Governmental, nonprofit and communications elites in particular are overwhelmingly liberal in their outlooks. So also are academics. The radical students of the 1960s have become tenured professors, particularly in elite institutions. As Stanley Rothman observes, "Social science faculties at elite universities are overwhelmingly liberal and cosmopolitan or on the Left. Almost any form of civic loyalty or patriotism is considered reactionary." Liberalism tends to go with irreligiosity as well. In a 1969 study by Lipset and Ladd, at least 71 percent of Jewish, Catholic and Protestant academics who identified themselves as liberal also identified themselves as being "basically opposed to religion."

These differences in ideology, nationalism and religion generate differences on domestic and foreign policy issues related to national identity. The public is overwhelmingly concerned with the protection of military security, societal security, the domestic economy and sovereignty. Foreign policy elites are less concerned with these issues and more concerned with U.S. promotion of international security, peace, globalization and the economic development of foreign nations than is the public. There

is, as Jack Citrin concludes, a "gulf between elite advocacy of multiculturalism and stubborn mass support of assimilation to a common national identity." The parallel gap between the nationalist public and cosmopolitan elites has its most dramatic impact on the relation between American identity and foreign policy. A 1994 study by Citrin and others concluded that

the dwindling of consensus about America's international role follows from the waning of agreement on what it means to be an American, on the very character of American nationalism. The domestic underpinnings for the long post-World War II hegemony of cosmopolitan liberalism and internationalism have frayed, quite apart from the fact that the United States no longer confronts a powerful military adversary.

The public and elites agree on many foreign policy issues. Yet overall the differences between them far exceed the similarities. The public is nationalist, elites transnationalist. In 1998, for instance, differences from 22 to 42 percent existed between the views of the public and those of a representative group of foreign policy leaders on 34 major foreign policy issues. In six polls from 1978 to 1998, the proportion of foreign policy elites favoring an active U.S. role in the world never dropped below 96 percent; the proportion of the public favoring such a role never rose above 65 percent. With a few exceptions, the public consistently has been much more reluctant than the leaders to use U.S. military force to defend other countries against invasion. On the other hand, the public is more concerned with upheavals closer to home, willing to support an indigenous uprising against Fidel Castro's regime and to use force in Mexico if it were threatened by revolution. A substantial majority of citizens also believe, however, that the United States should not act alone in international crises without support from its allies, as compared to less than half of elites saying it should not do so. Fifty-seven percent of the public have also approved of America taking part "in UN international peacekeeping forces in troubled parts of the world."

The gap between public and elite is especially great on America's economic relations with the rest of the world. In 1998, 87 percent of leaders and 54 percent of the public thought economic globalization was mostly good for America, with 12 percent of the leaders and 35 percent of the public thinking otherwise. Four-fifths of the public but less than half of foreign policy leaders think protecting American jobs should be a "very important goal" of the U.S. government. Fifty percent or more of the public but never more than a third of leaders have supported reducing economic aid to other countries. In various polls, 60 percent or more of the public have backed tariffs; comparable proportions of leaders have favored reducing or eliminating them. Similar differences exist with respect to immigration. In two 1990s polls, 74 percent and 57 percent of the public and 31 percent and 18 percent of foreign policy elites thought large numbers of immigrants were a "critical threat" to the United States.

These and other differences between elites and the public have produced a growing gap between the preferences of the public and policies embodied in federal legislation and regulation. One study of whether changes in public opinion on a wide range of issues were followed by comparable changes in public policy showed a steady decline from the 1970s when there was a 75 percent congruence between public opinion and government policy to 67 percent in 1984-87, 40 percent in 1989-92, and 37 percent in 1993-94. "The evidence, overall", the authors of this study concluded, "points to a persistent pattern since 1980: a generally low and at times declining level of

responsiveness to public opinion especially during the first two years of the Clinton presidency." Hence, they said, there is no basis for thinking that Clinton or other political leaders were "pandering to the public." "A disturbing gap is growing", one analyst concluded, "between what ordinary Americans believe is the proper role of the United States in world affairs and the views of leaders responsible for making foreign policy." Governmental policy at the end of the 20th century was deviating more and more from the preferences of the American public.

The failure of political leaders to "pander" to the public had predictable consequences. When government policies on many important issues deviate sharply from the views of the public, one would expect the public to lose trust in government, to reduce its interest and participation in politics, and to turn to alternative means of policymaking not controlled by political elites. All three happened in the late 20th century. All three undoubtedly had many causes, which social scientists have explored at length, and one trend--decline in trust--occurred in most industrialized democracies. Yet at least for the United States, it can be assumed that the growing gap between public preferences and government policies contributed to all three trends.

First, public confidence in and trust in government and the major private institutions of American society declined dramatically from the 1960s to the 1990s. As three distinguished scholars have pointed out, on every question asked concerning confidence in their government, roughly two thirds of the public expressed confidence in the 1960s and only about one third in the 1990s. In April 1966, for instance,

with the Vietnam War raging and race riots in Cleveland, Chicago and Atlanta, 66 percent of Americans rejected the view that 'the people running the country don't really care what happens to you.' In December 1997, in the midst of the longest period of peace and prosperity in more than two generations, 57 percent of Americans endorsed the same view.

Similar declines occurred during these decades in the degree which the public had confidence in major public and private institutions. Only two non-elected institutions of government, the Supreme Court and the military, saw an increase in the public's confidence.

Second, as many studies have shown, public participation in and interest in the major governmental and private institutions of American society declined fairly consistently from the 1960s to the 1990s. Sixty-three percent of the adult population voted in 1960, but only 49 percent in 1996 and 51 percent in 2000. In addition, as Thomas Patterson observes,

Since 1960, participation has declined in virtually every area of election activity, from the volunteers who work on campaigns to the viewers who watch televised debates. The United States had 100 million fewer people in 1960 than it did in 2000 but, even so, more viewers tuned in to the October presidential debates in 1960 than did so in 2000.

In the 1970s, one in three taxpayers allocated a dollar from their tax payments to the fund created by Congress to support political campaigns. In 2000, one in eight did so.

The third consequence of the gap between leaders and the public was the dramatic proliferation of initiatives on major policy issues, including those relating to national identity. Initiatives had been an instrument of progressive reform before World War I. Their use then declined steadily from fifty per two-year election cycle to twenty in the early 1970s. As legislatures neglected the concerns of their constituents, initiatives dramatically became popular again, beginning in June 1978, when 65 percent of California voters approved Proposition 13, drastically limiting taxes, despite the opposition of virtually all the state's political, business and media establishment. This started a tripling of initiatives to an average of 61 per two-year election cycle from the late 1970s to 1998. Fifty-five initiatives were voted on in 1998, 69 in 2000 and 49 in 2002. Between 1980 and 2002, there were 14 initiative votes in six states on issues concerning American national identity: six opposing bilingualism, six endorsing the use of English or declaring English the state's official language, and two opposing racial preferences. In all of these hotly debated contests, the state political, governmental, academic, media, religious, professional and business elites overwhelmingly opposed the initiative. In all these contests but one, the public approved the initiatives by margins avering 63 percent and going up to 85 percent. David S. Broder concluded in *Democracy Derailed* that "the trust between governors and governed on which representative government depends has been badly depleted."

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In today's America, a major gap exists between the nation's elites and the general public over the salience of national identity compared to other identities and over the appropriate role for America in the world. Substantial elite elements are increasingly divorced from their country, and the American public, in turn, is increasingly disillusioned with its government.

America in the World

HOW BOTH America's elites and the rank-and-file define their country determines its role in the world, but how the world views that role also shapes American identity. Three broad concepts exist of America in relation to the rest of the world. Americans can embrace the world--that is, open their country to other peoples and cultures. They can try to reshape other societies in terms of American values and culture. They can strive to maintain their society and culture distinct from those of other peoples.

The first, or cosmopolitan, alternative involves a renewal of the trends dominating pre-September 11 America. America welcomes the world, its ideas, its goods and, most importantly, its people. The ideal would be an open society with open borders, encouraging subnational ethnic, racial and cultural identities, dual citizenship, diasporas, and would be led by elites who increasingly identified with global institutions, norms and rules rather than national ones. America should be multiethnic, multiracial, multicultural. Diversity is a prime value, if not the prime value. The more people who bring to America different languages, religions and customs, the more American America becomes. Middle-class Americans would identify increasingly with the global corporations for which they work rather than with the local communities in which they live. The activities of Americans would more and more be governed not by the federal and state governments, but by rules set by international authorities, such as the UN, the WTO, customary international law, and global treaties. National identity loses salience compared to other identities. In this cosmopolitan alternative, the world reshapes America.

In the imperial alternative, America reshapes the world. The end of the Cold War eliminated communism as the overriding factor shaping America's role in the world. It thus enabled liberals to pursue their foreign policy goals without having to confront the charge that those goals compromised national security and hence to promote "nation building", "humanitarian intervention" and "foreign policy as social work." The emergence of the United States as the world's only superpower had a parallel impact on American conservatives. During the Cold War America's enemies denounced it as an imperial power. At the start of the new millennium conservatives accepted and endorsed the idea of an American empire--whether they embraced the term or not--and the use of American power to reshape the world according to American values.

The imperial impulse was thus fueled by beliefs in the supremacy of American power and the universality of American values. Because America's power far exceeds that of other nations, America has the responsibility to create order and confront evil throughout the world. According to the universalist belief, the people of other societies have basically the same values as Americans, or if they do not have them, they want to have them, or if they do not want to have them, they misjudge what is good for their society, and Americans have the responsibility to persuade them or to induce them to

embrace the universal values that America espouses. In such a world America loses its identity as a nation and becomes the dominant component of a supranational empire.

Neither the supremacy assumption nor the universalist assumption, however, accurately reflects the state of the early 21st-century world. America is the only superpower, but there are other major powers: Britain, Germany, France, Russia, China, India and Japan at a global level, and Brazil, Nigeria, Iran, South Africa and Indonesia within their regions. America cannot achieve any significant goal in the world without the cooperation of at least some of these countries. The culture, values, traditions and institutions of the other societies are often not compatible with reconfiguring those societies in terms of American values. Their peoples generally also feel deeply committed to their indigenous ways of life and beliefs and hence fiercely resist efforts to change them by outsiders from alien cultures. In addition, whatever the goals of their elites, the American public has consistently ranked the promotion of democracy abroad as a low-priority goal. The introduction of democracy in other societies also often stimulates anti-American forces, such as populist movements in Latin American states and violent, extremist movements in Muslim countries.

Cosmopolitanism and imperialism attempt to reduce or to eliminate the social, political and cultural differences between America and other societies. A national approach would recognize and accept what distinguishes America from those societies. America cannot become the world and still be America. Other peoples cannot become American and still be themselves. America is different, and that difference is defined in large part by its religious commitment and Anglo-Protestant culture. The alternative to cosmopolitanism and imperialism is nationalism devoted to the preservation and enhancement of those qualities that have defined America from its inception.

FOR ALMOST four centuries, the Anglo-Protestant culture of the founding settlers has been the central and the lasting component of American identity. One has only to ask: Would America be the America it is today if in the 17th and 18th centuries it had been settled not by British Protestants but by French, Spanish, or Portuguese Catholics? The answer is no. It would not be America; it would be Quebec, Mexico, or Brazil.

America's Anglo-Protestant culture has combined political and social institutions and practices inherited from England, including most notably the English language, together with the concepts and values of dissenting Protestantism, which faded in England but which the settlers brought with them and which took on new life on the new continent. At the beginning, as Alden T. Vaughan has said,

almost everything was fundamentally English: the forms of land ownership and cultivation, the system of government and the basic format of laws and legal procedures, the choices of entertainment and leisure-time pursuits, and innumerable other aspects of colonial life.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., concurs: "the language of the new nation, its laws, its institutions, its political ideas, its literature, its customs, its precepts, its prayers, primarily derived from Britain."

With adaptations and modifications, this original culture persisted for three hundred years. Two hundred years after John Jay in 1789 identified six central elements

Americans had in common, one of these, common ancestry, no longer existed. Several of the five others--language, religion, principles of government, manners and customs, war experience--had been modified or diluted. Yet in their fundamentals Jay's components of American identity, although challenged, still defined American culture in the 20th century. Protestantism has been of primary and continuing importance. With respect to language, the efforts of 18-century German settlers in Pennsylvania to make German the equal of English infuriated Benjamin Franklin, among others, and did not succeed. At least until the appearance of bilingualism and large concentrations of Spanish-speaking immigrants in Miami and the Southwest, America was unique as a huge country of more than 200 million people virtually all speaking the same language.

During the 19th century and until the late 20th century, immigrants were in various ways compelled, induced, and persuaded to adhere to the central elements of the Anglo-Protestant culture. Contemporary cultural pluralists, multi-culturalists, and spokesmen for ethnic and racial minorities testify to the success of these efforts. Southern and Eastern European immigrants, Michael Novak poignantly commented in 1977, were pressured to become "American" by adapting to Anglo-American culture: Americanization "was a process of vast psychic repression." In similar language, Will Kymlicka in 1995 argued that prior to the 1960s, immigrants "were expected to shed their distinctive heritage and assimilate entirely to existing cultural norms", which he labeled the "Anglo-conformity model."

These critics are right. Throughout American history, people who were not white Anglo-Saxon Protestants have become Americans by adopting its Anglo-Protestant culture and political values. This benefited them and the country.

Millions of immigrants and their children achieved wealth, power and status in American society precisely because they assimilated themselves into the prevailing American culture. Hence there is no validity to the claim that Americans have to choose between a white, racist, WASPish ethnic identity, on the one hand, and an abstract, shallow civic identity dependent on commitment to certain political principles, on the other. The core of their identity is the culture that the settlers created, which generations of immigrants have absorbed, and which gave birth to the American Creed. At the heart of that culture has been Protestantism.

Religiosity distinguishes America from most other Western societies. Americans are also overwhelmingly Christian, which distinguishes them from many non-Western peoples. Their religiosity leads Americans to see the world in terms of good and evil to a much greater extent than most other peoples. The leaders of other societies often find this religiosity not only extraordinary but also exasperating for the deep moralism it engenders in the consideration of political, economic and social issues.

Religion and nationalism have gone hand in hand in the history of the West. As the historian Adrian Hastings has shown, the former often defined the content of the latter: "Every ethnicity is shaped significantly by religion just as it is by language.... [In Europe,] Christianity has shaped national formation." The connection between religion and nationalism was alive and well at the end of the 20th century. Those countries that are more religious tend to be more nationalist. A survey of 41 countries found that those societies in which more people gave a "high" rating to the importance of God in their life were also those in which more people were "very proud" of their country.

Within countries, individuals who are more religious also tend to be more nationalist. A 1983 survey of 15, mostly European, countries found that "in every country surveyed, those who said they were not religious are less likely to be proud of their country." On average, the difference is 11 percent. Most European peoples rank low in their belief in God and their pride in country. America ranks with Ireland and Poland, close to the top on both dimensions. Catholicism is essential to Irish and Polish national identity. The dissenting Protestant heritage is central to America's. Americans are overwhelmingly committed to both God and country and see them as inseparable. In a world in which religion shapes the allegiances, the alliances and the antagonisms of people on every continent, it should not be surprising if Americans again turn to religion to find their national identity and their national purpose.

Significant elements of American elites are favorably disposed to America becoming a cosmopolitan society. Other elites wish it to assume an imperial role. The overwhelming bulk of the American people are committed to a national alternative and to preserving and strengthening the American identity of centuries.

Samuel P. Huntington is chairman of the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies and an editorial board member of The National Interest. Copyright 2004 by Samuel P. Huntington. From the forthcoming book, Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity, to be published by Simon & Schuster, Inc., NY. Printed by permission.