Colby

Colby College
Digital Commons @ Colby

Honors Theses | Student Research

2011

We the Peoples of the United States of America: Constituting American Identities through Pluralism and Narrative

Michael .. Yohai
Colby College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/honorstheses

Part of the Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons

Colby College theses are protected by copyright. They may be viewed or downloaded from this site for the purposes of research and scholarship. Reproduction or distribution for commercial purposes is prohibited without written permission of the author.

Recommended Citation
Yohai, Michael .., "We the Peoples of the United States of America: Constituting American Identities through Pluralism and Narrative" (2011). *Honors Theses.* Paper 659.
https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/honorstheses/659

This Honors Thesis (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Colby.

We the Peoples of the United States of America:
Constituting American Identities through Pluralism and Narrative

By Michael Z. Yohai
Colby College Class of 2011
mzyohai@colby.edu

INTRODUCTION – FACT AND FICTION

W. E. B. DuBois writes in his 1897 essay, "The Conservation of Races," that every black person living in America must, sooner or later, ask herself the following question: "What , after all, am I? Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both? Or is it my duty to cease to be a Negro as soon as possible and be an American?"[1] DuBois' question, "Can I be both?" still lingers for blacks and other non-white groups in America. However, the racial demographic reality of the America is changing and with it, the connotations of the word "American," will change. What remains to be seen is if America will take hold of the moment and actively pursue a new national identity, or if it will continue to deny this reality, propagate the myth of America as a white, Christian nation, and mire itself in conversations about the propriety of commercials in Spanish.

America stands at demographic crossroads. Census trends from 2000 to 2010 indicate that the common tale of America as a white, Christian nation is quickly becoming an untenable fiction. Census analysis reveals that the Hispanic population in America may account for over 30% of the population by 2050.[2] Although the 39 years into the future may make 2050 seem distant to contemporary readers, remember that is was only 39 years ago that PONG was introduced and ignited an entertainment revolution. In 2050, America will no longer have a racial

---

[1] W. E. B. DuBois, "The Conservation of Races," in *The Idea of Race: Hackett Readings in Philosophy*, Bernasconi, Robert and Tommy Lott eds. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2000. 113. Print.
[2] Shrestha, Laura B. and Elayne J. Heisler. "The Changing Demographic Profile of the United States." *Congressional Research Service Report for Congress*. Congressional Research Service. 2011. (Accessed 5/11/11) Online.

majority, but a racial plurality. But the reality of racial plurality must be addressed today because the "doctors, lawyers, and other skilled professionals who will just be retiring in 2050 are in college *now*… the [UCLA Law] class of 2002 that will be in retirement in 2050 will *still* only have two African Americans and seventeen Latinos."[3] In other words, the social inequalities and economic gaps of today will echo far into our future. Because the make-up of our country is changing and because we are yet to live up our ideals, now is the time to evaluate our national identity.

Over time, American discourse has created a national identity that only admits personal identities, which contain a strict set of requisite elements. Personal identity needs an asylum from American national identity so that it can form independently of social pressures. Also, national identity ought to admit a greater range of group and personal identities. The current conception of American national identity perpetuates racial disparity despite continuing reform efforts since the Reconstruction Era. The same hegemonic national identity prevents America from dealing with the upcoming demographic shift gracefully. The current American national identity ignores the facts of today and undermines our future. America needs to re-conceptualize its national identity from a fixed notion into one which is more amenable to change, more accepting of the social diversity and the social dynamics of our country, and more in accordance with our espoused national ideals: justice, equality, and unity through diversity ("E Pluribus Unum").

[3] Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams. "Reclaiming Yesterday's Future." *UCLA Law Review* vol. 47. 2000. 1464. Online.

In this essay, I argue for a different conception of American national identity and, with it, a supporting theory of personal identity both of which are more open and malleable. A pluralist rendering of American identity and a narrative model of personal identity will achieve these goals. The paper is divided into three chapters: national identity, personal identity, and implementation.

In the first chapter, I give an account of the hegemonic national identity I wish to diagnose. I locate this current identity at the intersection of two theories: the governing and identity-formation theory of liberal nationalism and the nation-based racial paradigm. Combined, the two theories order that political and national units become congruous with the word "national" operating as a racially defined term. At this intersection, the role of race and diversity in national identity meets governing norms. In this way, American identity has produced both a discourse as well as political and legal practices which construct "the American" as an Anglo-Protestant, white, heterosexual male. I locate the above theories through discourse analysis of contemporary and historical public figures such as President Woodrow Wilson and writer Samuel P. Huntington. A brief historical survey of legislation and social programs demonstrates how our discourse has affected our policies and enabled this American identity to become dominant. In turn, discourse, legislation, and judicial practices undermine our national ideals, contribute to racial inequality, and make the current demographic horizon into a dilemma. After identifying the operative theories in American identity, I seek to alleviate the aforementioned problems by suggesting an alteration to our national identity. At this point, I propose a particular type of pluralism, which retains the liberal part of liberal

nationalism, the focus on identity that is central to nation-based racial paradigm, and the vast majority of Horace Kallen's cultural pluralism. I call this "Racial Liberal Pluralism."

The second chapter focuses on personal identity the relationship between the individual, sub-national groups, and the nation. The primary concern is to match a plausible theory of personal identity with the social model of pluralism. I reject traditional theories of personal identity such as Locke's consciousness theory and bodily accounts because they seek to answer the re-identification question, which itself is problematic for the project of pluralism because it presupposes a fixed notion of identity for every individual. Instead I promote the theory of narrative identity, which answers a different question: the characterization question. The characterization question does not presuppose a fixed personal identity and therefore fits within the pluralist social framework. Narrative identity theory, as delineated by Marya Schectman, argues that personal identity is created by crafting a story of one's life – past, present, and future. A great degree of autonomy is granted to each individual in creating their own identity. However, I agree with Alasdair MacIntyre's communitarian additions, which place individual narratives within a social and moral matrix thereby avoiding the possibility of blatantly false identities while also ensuring that these narratives are intelligible to others.

The final chapter includes two suggestions of how this pluralist social model and its supporting conception of personal identity as narrative can become a reality in our country. I argue that America's religious institutions and public schools should play a central role in promoting a pluralist national identity. I select these

two American institutions because American religions already engage in a great deal of pluralist practices and because American public schools are vital in the production of an educated, aware, and productive citizenry. Together, these institutions reach the vast majority of American citizens, resident aliens, and expatriates and hold the greatest potential in reorienting the public's understanding of the role of diversity within our nation and our national identity.

With this roadmap at hand and a sense of urgency, let us now delve into the work of addressing our national and personal identities. Through this interrogation of current notions of identity, I hope to show that the civic unity proffered from a pluralist conception of national identity allows the peoples of the United States of America to retain their distinctive cultural and national backgrounds while thinking of themselves as Americans nonetheless. In the end, we will see that it is possible to be a people composed of unique and diverse peoples.

CHAPTER ONE – RACE AND AMERICAN IDENTITY

Introduction

In 1944, Gunnar Myrdal released his highly influential study of race relations in America, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. Mrydal accurately noted, "The Negro problem has its existence in the American's mind. There the decisive struggle goes on. It is there that changes occur."[4] Mrydal's conclusion that the central battleground in the fight for social equality was in the mind of Americans refocused attention away from social trends to the deeply held prejudices and beliefs of 'mainstream' Americans. Today, Myrdal's assertion remains true in that quietly held prejudices and whitewashed racist discourse continue to present massive obstacles to social equality in America.

Through analysis of American discourse on who and what is American, it is clear that the dominant understanding of nationality is tethered to race. Such a connection justified horrendous practices such as slavery, segregation, and internment in America. When the scope of citizenship and belonging is racially limited, our society becomes an amalgamation of strangers rather than a united people seeking to promote the common good. It is impossible to "ensure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our posterity," if "our" remains an exclusive term.[5] The tendency to link race with nationality situates America's dominant understanding of race at the intersection of two theories: the first is not actually a theory but a paradigm of racial thinking which Michael Omi and Howard Winant

[4] Myrdal, Gunnar. *An American Dilemma: the Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. New York: Harper & Row, 1962. 998. Print.
[5] U.S. Constitution. "Preamble."

identify as the "nation-based" approach to racial theory, which recognizes the "continuity of *racial* oppression from its origins in *national* oppression;"[6] the second theory, liberal nationalism, states that every nation (equated with race, as informed by the nation-based paradigm) should have its own lands over which it is autonomous. This hybrid American understanding of race and governance, however, stands in tension with the nation's espoused ideals as expressed in its founding documents. Closely examining this racial theory through the lens of professed American virtues and ideals, reveals the unethical and "un-American" nature of racialized liberal nationalism.

In order to achieve a more just society vis-à-vis race in America, it is necessary to replace racialized liberal nationalism with a form of cultural pluralism that focuses on race: racial liberal pluralism. In this chapter, I first explore three theories that are central to understanding race and nationality in America: the nation-based racial paradigm, as explained by Omi and Winant in *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960's to the 1990's*, liberal nationalism as described by De Schutter in his essay, "Nations Beyond Nationalism," and Horace Kallen's cultural pluralism with additions from John Dewey and Milton Gordon. In all three of these theories I diagnose significant shortfalls in how they address race, nationality, and/or justice. I then locate America's public discourse within the theoretical position of racial liberal nationalism. Next, I analyze the position on a theoretical level in contrast with America's espoused principles, thus demonstrating their mutual exclusivity. Finally, I advance a position of racial liberal pluralism,

---

[6] Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: from the 1960s to the 1980s*. New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986. 39. Print.

which borrows and synthesizes aspects of the three aforementioned theories and fits within America's tenets. I contend that racial liberal pluralism provides an opportunity to reconsider America's racial injustice through a different conception of how race and nationality interact and overlap.

In this chapter, I draw from and react to three independent theories. These three theories are the nation-based racial paradigm, liberal nationalism, and cultural pluralism. Omi and Winant's nation-based racial paradigm is a descriptive category of theories concerning the nature of race and racism. All the specific theories and movements within this paradigm envision race as primarily a function of colonial dynamics. From this paradigm, I critique the use of colonialist dynamics as overly simplistic, but retain the racial aspect thus maintaining a focus on identity. What De Schutter identifies as "liberal nationalism," on the other hand, is a normative governing model and a theory of identity formation. From this theory, I reject nationalism but keep liberalism in order to emphasize the rights of the individual and a broad conception of the "good life." Horace Kallen supports cultural pluralism, a descriptive theory with the normative suggestion that we cease imposing artificial uniformity on natural pluralism, as a means of addressing discrimination. From Kallen's theory I want to emphasize pluralism and set aside the particularly cultural focus. I contend that Americans understand race in a variety of ways, most of which are categorized under the nation-based paradigm. The equation of race with nation informs the liberal nationalist principle of one-nation, one-state to justify the liberal nationalist practice of excluding of non-whites from fully living and participating in American social and political life. In other words, Americans conceptualize each race

as a nation. Simultaneously, Americans desire that the term “American” be synonymous with a single nation (i.e., race), as a matter of understanding and promoting a unified American identity. The nation chosen to be synonymous with the state is the racial nation of the dominant group: white Americans of Anglo-Saxon descent. What has followed has been the exclusion and oppression of many groups that seek to participate in American identity but are perceived to lack the racial-national credentials to join by those in power. Together, I use these three theories to both categorize American thinking on race (nationalist with a belief that each race is a nation) and to propose an alternative: racial liberal pluralism. By identifying this nationalist position as a core problem in the struggle to secure social justice, I hope to expose racial liberal nationalism as distinctly un-American because it violates our cherished ideals.

The Theories

Before positioning America’s racial understanding, it is necessary to explore the three theories individually. After considering the theories in their “purer” forms, I will apply them together as a lens through which to understand race in American society and identity.

Liberal Nationalism and its Limitations

Helder De Schutter claims, in describing liberal nationalism, that there is an “inherent affinity between the project of liberal democracy and nation-states.”[7] This affinity exists because the goods which liberal democratic states seek to extend to all

[7] De Schutter, Helder. "Nations Beyond Nationalism." *Inquiry* 50.4 (2007): 378-94. Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group, 2007. Web. July 2010.

of their citizens, liberal nationalists believe, can most effectively be provided in "self-governing national units."[8] De Schutter identifies four goods of the liberal democratic governing model which are better distributed through a nation-state system: national membership, social justice, social trust (and trust in government), and deliberative democracy.[9] Examining how liberal nationalism provides these four goods clarifies the liberal nationalist governing model.

Liberal nationalists hold the rights of the individual to be paramount. The right of the individual to live under the rule of whatever group one finds proper is what ultimately justifies a national group's "right" to self-govern. However, groups do not have any rights themselves under liberal nationalism. While liberal nationalism argues, "national and political units should become congruent," it does so out of concern for the *individual*.[10] According to liberal nationalists, "individual autonomy and embeddedness within a nation culture are compatible" insofar as "embeddedness [is] a precondition of autonomy" by contextualizing and limiting the array of options from which the autonomous individual may choose.[11] Therefore, group nationhood enables individual liberty.

Nationhood not only facilitates liberty but also social justice. According to liberal nationalists, citizens are reticent about paying taxes in order to help an anonymous individual in need of government assistance. A nearly homogenous nation-state can provide the connection between individuals that makes sacrifice for strangers more palatable. Thus, the distributive model of justice, in which social

---

[8] De Schutter, 383.
[9] De Schutter, 383-384.
[10] De Schutter, 382.
[11] De Schutter, 382.

benefits are allotted to a population and which is used to justify many modern governmental services such as welfare, social security, single-payer health insurance, etc. are easier to enact and sustain under the liberal nationalist system. These programs are thus understood as national or fraternal responsibilities instead of being viewed, as they are by many on the right, as government handouts or entitlements.

In the event of any minority group seeking the redress of grievances, liberal nationalists endorse the self-governance of these groups and would grant them autonomy in order for each group to promote the general welfare of their constituents. Thus, from the liberal nationalist perspective, there is no question that the solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a two-state solution, Chechnya should be given land and self-governance, and Québécois have a right to secede from Canada and form an independent nation. Simply put: one-nation, one-state.

Liberal nationalism is different from pure nationalism in at least one crucial area: its stance toward other nations. "Liberal nationalists… believe that nationalism should be liberal in the sense of 'moderate': liberal nationalistic politics are not aggressive against other national identities and typically expose a 'thin' or open conception of national identity."[12] In liberal nationalism, there is no suggestion that one ought to be part of a *particular* nation. Nations are not ranked. Thus, while the liberal nationalist state undergoes the process of "purification" by adhering to the one-nation, one-state rule, it does so without the vitriol toward other nations that is closely associated with historical nationalist movements such as Nazism.

---

[12] De Schutter, 383.

The Nation-Base Racial Paradigm and its Limitations

Whereas liberal nationalism normatively equates nation (i.e., a people that willingly associate as a nation) with political autonomy and statehood, the nation-based paradigm equates race with nation, giving prescriptive suggestions. Omi and Winant use the term "nation" in a different sense. Nation, in the nation-based racial paradigm, equates race with a — not-necessarily political — nationality. The nation-based paradigm itself does not imply nationalism, although nationalism was a common product of this view in American society.

The nation-based racial paradigm finds its roots in the "dynamics of *colonialism*."[13] This paradigm uses the colonialist power structure as a framework onto which contemporary racial dynamics and issues can be superimposed. Briefly, colonialist European powers exerted political and physical dominance over various non-European peoples and places. This practice established a colonial world order, which continues today in the form of a racial order. Thus, the dynamics of race relations today are the product of colonialism as well as the continuation of the colonialist hierarchy. At colonialism's height one could equate oppressor and oppressed with colonizer and colonized. Since the decline of the colonialist powers, nation-based theorists argue, at the national level a new "core" group of white nations maintains the racial order of the world by continuing the practice of oppression and exploitation of "periphery" non-white nations. At the subnational level, societies create a racial order that mimics the neo-colonialist hierarchy.

---

[13] Omi & Winant, 37. Emphasis added.

Gunnar Myrdal highlights the nation-based paradigm of race in his analysis of the hypocrisy present in America's simultaneous denunciation of Nazi racial doctrine on the one hand and legalized segregation at home. Myrdal quotes Wendell Wilkie's 1942 address to the NAACP annual conference in Los Angeles, CA saying, "It is becoming increasingly apparent to thoughtful Americans that we cannot fight the forces of imperialism abroad and maintain a form of imperialism at home."[14] Wilkie, a politically active lawyer, equates the white oppression of black Americans with the colonialist pattern of white *nations* oppressing and exploiting non-white *nations*. Wilkie, at the time, was an activist for civil rights. At the time, Willkie was one of the most prominent politicians to deliver an address at an NAACP conference. Wilkie's use of the nation-based racial paradigm in front of a predominantly black audience indicates the tacit agreement of both white and black Americans that the racial divide is national in nature.

The nation-based racial paradigm has operated as the central tenet of many black separatist movements in America that argued for the *national* unity of all blacks. Theories that fall under this paradigm often assert the national aspect of race to the exclusion of other characteristics such as ethnicity or class.

Cultural Pluralism and its Limitations

Cultural Pluralism, a position championed by Horace Kallen during the first half of the 20th century, draws prescriptive socio-political norms from natural relations among human and non-human groups. Kallen argues that humans mistakenly seek to impose unity upon instances of diversity. According to Kallen, we

[14] Myrdal, 1009.

translate "the actual pluralism of our experience into one or another of the many symbolic monisms of our discourse."[15] This is a process of 'assimilation,' whereby we strip away diversity and eliminate differences until an artificial, and untenable, unity is formed around a phenomenon, a group, a collection, etc. Kallen writes,

> The tendency is to 'assimilate' the culturally diverse, converting the difference into sameness with one's own culture, while what cannot be so converted because one is too weak or another is too strong, tends to be excreted, isolated, destroyed, as an offense, an unworthiness, a foe of the gods, the true and the beautiful.[16]

The effort to homogenize culture, and the world around us generally, is detrimental to individual flourishing and freedom.[17] Therefore, Kallen recommends that we embrace the natural pluralism of the world as a social model for the cultural landscape of America.

Kallen's cultural pluralism stands in stark contrast with liberal nationalism. Liberal nationalists argue that group identity ought to be synonymous with national identity. Thus, they envision the 'one-nation, one-state' equation as the vouchsafe of national unity, national pride, national success. The one-nation, one-state equation is also the site of individual freedom, flourishing, and safety. Cultural pluralism, on the other hand, holds that liberal goods do not exclude a rich diversity of culture, ethnicity, race, religion and other groups. Therefore, pluralism views a range of distinct group identities as constitutive of a national identity. Milton Gordon writes, "'Cultural pluralism' postulated the preservation of the communal life and

---

[15] Kallen, Horace Meyer. *Cultural Pluralism and the American Idea*. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1956. 47. Print.
[16] Kallen, 26.
[17] Kallen, 25.

significant portions of the culture of the later immigrant groups *within the context of American citizenship.*"[18] The communality of American citizenship binds together groups of otherwise disparate national, cultural, political and racial origins. "The context of American citizenship," implies a particular relationship and commitment between one American and another: a civic fellowship.

Without pluralism, cultures lose their vitality and vibrancy. Without pluralism, cultures are deprived of interaction with the Other, thereby stymieing change. Kallen writes, "A living culture is a changing culture."[19] Thus, within the civic fellowship, boundaries between one group and another are fluid so as to encourage communication and exchange among various groups. Although the liberal nationalist theorizes relations and communications between groups as damaging to group strength, pluralism "recognizes that the relations do really relate without identifying; that the communications do truly inform without coercing."[20] Kallen describes the interaction between members of different groups — meaning a range of interactions from experiencing a part of another group's traditions to joining and gaining multiple memberships — as a great benefit to the groups and individuals who come to together and dissolve their membership to "groups and societies wherewith they secure to one another their diverse safety and happiness."[21] Kallen's vision of pluralism is a relational (i.e., associatively relational)

---

[18] Gordon, Milton M. *Assimilation in American Life.* New York: Oxford UP, 1968. 85. Print. Emphasis added.
[19] Kallen, 53.
[20] Kallen, 51.
[21] Kallen, 51.

pluralism involving fluid group membership, which bolsters both the vivacity of the group and the strength of the individual's sense of identity.

Lastly, Kallen's vision of pluralism was a distinctly American vision. Although Kallen's theory was in no way provincial, he drew his understanding of group interactions from American history. He also relied heavily on American philosophers such as John Dewey and William James. His fullest explanation of cultural pluralism, entitled *Cultural Pluralism and the American Idea*, was written as a response to the unifying attempts and general anxiety of the early Cold War and McCarthyism. Kallen saw Senator Joseph McCarthy's campaign against supposed homegrown communist threats as an attempt to impose an artificial unity upon the diversity (both political and cultural) of America. McCarthyism regarded deviations from what McCarthy defined as the 'American mainstream' (cultural, religious, political, etc.) as indicators of a general threat to America and its unity. McCarthy's response was to expose these differences in an effort to expel them, thereby imposing an artificial homogeneity that undermined the vibrancy of America's culturally diverse society. Kallen would likely reject the very concept of an actual 'American mainstream.' Instead Kallen would suggest that 'mainstream America,' is merely the largest group, which in no way ought to dictate what is common to all Americans.

With an understanding of the three theories employed in this chapter, now let us look at the ways that the liberal nationalism and the nation-base racial paradigm have been employed within American discourse. Specifically, I will demonstrate that it is the nationalist and nation-based portion of these doctrines

that has been detrimental to constructing an open national identity. In turn, I will position racial liberal pluralism as the optimal model for maintaining a vibrant and diverse community of cultures constitutive of American identity.

Discourse Analysis and America's Racial Liberal Nationalism

American public discourse, both past and present, indicates a particular distillation of the two aforementioned theories: liberal nationalism and the nation-based racial paradigm. In this section, I explore trends in American discourse from a variety of periods. While American thought has certainly changed over time due to various historical events, the specter of nationalism and a notion of races as nations have persisted throughout American history in various ways. The appearances of these two theories in several epochs of American history suggest that despite social changes and legal advances toward equality, our discourse on race and nationality retains some problematic concepts from our founding. These concepts I wish to challenge and eliminate through the racial liberal pluralism I discuss at the end of this chapter.

For the vast majority of the America's history, the question of racial majority received has only sporadic, yet often intense, attention because there was no actual threat to the white race's majority status, only a perceived "fraying of the fixed, monolithic identity of whiteness" caused by the physical proximity of non-white immigrants and natives and the admittance of previously non-white groups (Irish,

Jews, etc.) into the white club.[22] The inclusion of previously non-white immigrants in the society of whites indicates that accessing the American mainstream required accessing whiteness. For an immigrant group or individual to become "American" it was necessary to become white. Thus, American nationality, historically, has contained a major racial criterion.

In the wake of the civil rights era, America witnessed almost every non-white racial group reject assimilation into white American culture in favor of promoting a black, yellow, brown, and red American identity.[23] Identity politics promoted group pride for being non-white in American society and asserted equality with white Americans, which, in turn, provoked a response from whites. White racial identity was often subtly evoked through a kind of populism. White racial identity "define[d] itself through cultural cues instead" of the political activism and community organization of the civil rights movement. It expressed itself through "a suspicion of intellectual elites and city dwellers, a preference for folksiness and plainness of speech (whether real or feigned), and the association of a working-class white minority with 'the real America.'"[24] Politicians, who certainly do not fall under the category of "working-class white," continue to promote this view on the national level. "Joe the Plumber" a.k.a., Samuel Joseph Wurzelbacher, of the 2008 McCain-Palin Republican presidential campaign is a vivid example of this phenomenon. After questioning some of then-presidential candidate Barak Obama's policies, the McCain-Palin campaign dubbed Mr. Wurzelbacher "Joe the Plumber" in an attempt

[22] Hsu, Hua. "The End of White America?" *The Atlantic* 303.1 (2009): 46-55. Web. 47. Sept. 2010.
[23] Hsu, 53.
[24] Hsu, 53.

to typecast him as a typical white middle-class working male who represented the voice of "real" Americans. Whereas McCain's opponent, Obama, described the problems of contemporary economic policy as a tension between the interests of "Wall Street and Main Street,"[25] the McCain campaign seized the opportunity to pick a representative of America's "real" voters and stakeholders: a white male.

Conservative public intellectuals such as Samuel P. Huntington have also positioned the "real America" within the working-class white demographic. Huntington writes in his book on American national identity, *Who Are We?*, that in the pre-9/11 era "among some educated and elite Americans, national identity seemed at times to have faded from sight. Globalization, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, immigration, subnationalism, and anti-nationalism had battered American consciousness."[26] Huntington implies that non-elites never forget their national identity and national pride — they retain American-ness better. Furthermore, he clearly insinuates that the cause of forgetting is interaction with and support for non-white culture in America. Huntington provides an example of how identifying the "real America" with working-class anti-intellectualist white society entails supporting a racial nationalism consistent with the tenets of liberal nationalism and the nation-based paradigm of race.

Samuel Huntington is particularly useful in an investigation of contemporary discourse surrounding American national identity for two reasons: first, Huntington

[25] President Barak Obama's use of this phrase did not promote a specific image of a "real" American. Although the case can be made that "Wall Street" references wealthy white-collar white males as abnormal Americans, it is more likely that the phrase was meant to convey his commitment to working to help and protect the underdog.
[26] Huntington, Samuel P. *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America's Identity*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004. 4. Print.

is immensely popular and well-known especially in connection with his "Clash of Civilizations" thesis, and second, Huntington has focused a good deal of his intellectual curiosity on the issue of American identity. His book, *Who Are We?* as well as his other writings promote a racially-charged liberal nationalist understanding of American identity. For example, Huntington writes, "The Founding Fathers assumed the survival of republican government required relatively high levels of racial, religious, and ethnic homogeneity."[27] Although Huntington readily admits the incorrectness of this view in light of the fact that the union of the country has remained strong despite a drastic spike in diversity since the time of Jefferson and Washington, Huntington's invocation of the framers of the Constitution has a clear objective: to tacitly support a homogeneous American society. Not only does Huntington make references to America's glorious past as a time of ethnic, racial, religious, and ideological homogeneity, but Huntington writes,

> The American people who achieved independence in the late eighteenth century were few and homogeneous: overwhelmingly white (thanks to the exclusion of blacks and Indians from citizenship), British, and Protestant, broadly sharing a common culture, and overwhelmingly committed to the political principles embodied in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and other founding documents.[28]

Again, Huntington's words are not neutral. The formulation of his sentence suggests that Huntington understands the success of America's rebellion against the British crown depended upon having a properly constituted populace — in this case, homogeneous. The sentence structure recasts the colloquialism, "thanks to," as less

[27] Huntington, 54.
[28] Huntington, 11.

sarcastic and mocking of America's more overt racial discrimination, and into more of an actual thankfulness that the populace was so constituted. Indeed, one must read Huntington as being in favor of racial exclusion in order to make any sense of the clause about ideological commitment and unity — the white, British, Protestant colonists of this nation were committed to common political ideals *only insofar as they applied to whites*. Thus, Huntington quietly supports the liberal nationalist belief that citizenship, and the benefits it brings, ought to be restricted to one nation while maintaining a belief that a nation is racially defined (partly or wholly)[29] — this view fits comfortably within the nation-based racial paradigm. Huntington makes a final push for his racially-charged liberal nationalism by quoting John Jay, the first Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, as a possible attempt to secure the Constitutionality of his liberal nationalism. John Jay said, "Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country to one united people — a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, [and] professing the same religion."[30]

Practicing Racial Liberal Nationalism in America

The association of race and nationality has firm roots not only in American political discourse but in American political practice as well. As noted above, citizenship or national membership is a key good in liberal nationalism and gaining that membership in America has long been a question and problem for non-white immigrants and natives alike. It is a question of assimilation. Practices such as

[29] Huntington, 30.
[30] Huntington, 44.

indentured servitude during the colonial period set precedence for probationary periods for immigrants. An indentured servant could become part of the 'new' world's land-owning citizenry after serving a current land-owning citizen for seven years. The problem of entering the American mainstream is a persistent problem for black Americans. Having been legally barred from becoming an American for centuries, legislative correctives such as the Reconstruction Amendments to the Constitution did not enable blacks to become American socially, economically, or any way other than legally.

Assimilation has been a large question for the American public as well. Stretching from the Naturalization Act of 1870 to the internment of Japanese-Americans during WWII and the treatment of Catholic immigrants, especially the Irish, there is a rich history of the diverse ways in which America has attempted to regulate the means of becoming 'American.' According to Milton Gordon, there are three theories of assimilation that were prevalent for much of America's history: anglo-conformity, melting pot, and cultural pluralism. By interrogating the theories of anglo-conformity and the melting pot, it is possible to unearth the embedded assumptions of these theories and their American supporters about who is American, who is not, and who can never become an American.

Anglo-conformity theory "demanded the complete renunciation of the immigrant's ancestral culture in favor of the behavior and values of the Anglo-Saxon core groups."[31] 'Anglo-Saxon' in the American mind, however, was a loosely constructed idea. Native-born American citizens used "anglo-saxon" in conjunction

[31] Gordon, 85.

with some pseudo-science to advance to the notion that “English, Germans, and others of the ‘old immigration’ constituted a superior race.”[32] Those of the old immigration and their children perceived the ‘new immigration’ (around 1900 CE) from the Southern and Eastern portions of Europe as a threat the “traditional American stock” and their cultural hegemony.[33] When complete exclusion of the new immigrants became impossible, Anglo-conformity became the next-best thing — although nothing could cure their lack of blond hair, blue eyes, and Aryan or Nordic blood, new immigrants could become less of a societal “problem” by instilling Anglo-Saxon virtues.

Anglo-conformity remained the dominant theory of assimilation in America through World War I. President Woodrow Wilson in his 1915 speech to a group of newly naturalized citizens in Philadelphia voiced the theory of Anglo-conformity, saying,

> “You cannot dedicate yourself to America unless you become in every respect and with every purpose of your will thorough Americans. You cannot become thorough Americans if you think of yourselves in groups. America does not consist of groups. A man who thinks of himself as belonging to a particular national group in America has not yet become American.”[34]

President Wilson suggests that to have any group identity is incompatible with becoming an American. To become American, under the Anglo-conformity program,

[32] Gordon, 98.
[33] Gordon, 98.
[34] Wilson, Thomas Woodrow. "Address to Naturalized Citizens at Convention Hall, Philadelphia." Address. Convention Hall, Philadelphia. 10 May 1915. *The American Presidency Project*. John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters. Web. 7 Nov. 2010. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=65388>.

requires subscribing to white virtues, white culture, and the white "way of life" — again, becoming 'American' means becoming white.

Wilson's words are exemplary of the tenets of liberal nationalism. Even with half the world embroiled in bitter war with Germany, Wilson suggests to the naturalized citizens that they ought to continue loving their countries of origin as something "very sacred," which "ought not be put out of our hearts."[35] Like liberal nationalists, Wilson neither casts other nationalities in a negative light nor does he take an aggressive stance against non-Americans who wish to remain non-American in their national identity and citizenship. While he certainly calls for the elimination of any *affinity* for another nationality, his rhetoric does not suggest the aggressive elimination of all non-American national identities.

Around the same time, a very different type of assimilation was occurring on the American frontier. In 1905, Israel Zangwill published *The Melting Pot*, in which he analyzed the dynamics of cultural intermixture in frontier towns. Zangwill discovered that in these heterogeneous towns a new American culture was being forged by mixing different cultural traditions together until national boundaries blurred. Certain foods were no longer purely German or Italian, but an American hybrid. Zangwill's theory became incredibly popular because it provided a utopian method of assimilation. Admitting "of no exceptions or qualifications with regard to ethnic stock," everybody was welcome to come and add their culture to the mix as part of building the new nation.[36]

[35] Wilson, "Address to Naturalized Citizens."
[36] Gordon, 121.

The melting pot concept spread from the frontier back East to the coastal states. Although immigrants on the East coast had nowhere near the level of cultural influence the frontiersmen had, the melting pot idealism was altered slightly and applied to describe the process of Anglo-conformity. The addition necessary to make Anglo-conformity appear compatible with the melting pot was proportionality. Instead of the balanced blending of cultures on the frontier, East coast natives insisted that ethnic groups should make proportional contributions based on the size and power of the group as well as how long they had already been in America. Yet, the melting pot, even in Zangwill's original application, required immigrants to exchange their distinct national culture in exchange for American culture. The melting pot and Anglo-conformity theories share this objective of cultural elimination and replacement in their assimilation projects.

This common feature of the two projects has contributed to embedding the liberal nationalist model into the minds of Americans. Both assimilation projects envisage the eradication of immigrant culture, thereby dissolving group identity and the group itself. Immigrant groups without a shared culture or language lose their *raison d'etre* and group membership quickly declines, because group affiliation no long provides something unavailable in other parts of American society. Thus, Americans came to believe that assimilation projects would result in the loss of all group identities, which would make America into a culturally and nationally monolithic country. Since statehood already existed, it was necessary to nationalize (i.e., racialize) it by imposing unity on a diversity of group identities.

When excluding non-whites from citizenship failed, those seeking to create a racial liberal nationalist society sought to annihilate all non-white culture and so implemented assimilation practices. Since assimilation cannot fully correct for the citizenship and potential political equality of non-whites with whites, lawmakers succeeded in limiting the national membership and political participation of non-whites while allowing non-white citizenship. In the context of a democratic republic such as the United States, the franchise is a crucial indicator of national membership. Throughout America's history and continuing today, the franchise has been restricted along racial lines — sometimes explicitly, other times secretively. The Constitution of the United States gives the first endorsement of a racially organized liberal nationalism in the infamous 3/5's clause, which deemed all "other persons" (i.e., non-free individuals) to count as less than one person in the Constitutionally-mandated census. The clause was placed into the Constitution in order to balance the relative legislative power of Southern states, which held the vast majority of slaves among the original thirteen states. But this clause also reveals the extent to which white free men desired to keep blacks out of the political workings of the federal government. The 3/5's clause ensured that any consideration of black issues would be sufficiently counter-balanced by the almost entirely white North, thereby creating a situation in which the stakeholders in America were white only and the presence of a racial-national Other could be tolerated and dealt with at the local level.

Liberal nationalist voting policies have persisted well beyond emancipation. The implementation of these policies has served the purpose of racially limiting who

is considered part of the “people” in the Greek *dēmokratía* or, “rule of the people.” The first of these efforts simply denied the right to vote for all blacks by instituting poll taxes and literacy tests. This continued with grandfather clauses in the voting laws of Southern states that permitted poor illiterate whites to forego the test and tax in order to vote if their father or grandfather had been able to vote prior to 1865 (the last year of the Civil War), which no Southern black could prove. At the same time that states were taking measures to racially discriminate against the black franchise, the federal government was increasing the number of congressmen in the House of Representatives in accordance with population growth. Between the first meeting of the House in 1789 and the last time the House approved an increase in the number of seats in 1910, the House had grown from sixty-five members to four hundred thirty-three.[37] Since 1910, the population in America has increased dramatically, but the size of the House has only grown by two seats not because of population growth but because of New Mexico and Arizona’s entrance into the Union. Representatives voted not to increase the number of seats in the House after the next census in 1920 because figures from that census indicated that large numbers of Americans were concentrating in cities, which, if given more representatives, would entail the political empowerment of immigrants and non-whites, who were disproportionately concentrated in cities.

Even today the non-white vote is limited through felon voting restrictions, which exist in all but two of the fifty states and the District of Columbia , creating a

[37] Conley, Dalton, and Jacqueline Stevens. "Build a Bigger House." *The New York Times* 24 Jan. 2011: A27. *The New York Times*. Web. 25 Jan. 2011.

de facto racial liberal nationalist republic in the United States.[38] In ten of those states, convicted felons can be disenfranchised for life.[39] Since roughly 60% of all people in prison are non-white, state felon disenfranchisement laws disproportionately affect the rights of non-whites to participate in the political process.[40] In a democracy, one's right to vote and find representation in government is what includes an individual as a member of the nation-state. In America, legislation throughout the country's history has limited membership almost exclusively to whites by disenfranchising and alienating non-white immigrants and natives. The effect of this practice has been to make what Jean De Crevecoeur said about England true about America. He wrote,

> A wretch who works and starves – can that man call England or any other kingdom his country? A country that has no bread for him, whose fields procured him no harvest, who met nothing but the frowns of the rice, the severity of the laws, with jails and punishments; who own not a single foot of the extensive surface of this planet?[41]

In democracy, denying a citizen the right to vote while subjecting him to laws and punishments is tantamount to denying him food.

---

[38] ProCon.org. "State Felon Voting Laws" *Felonvoting.ProCon.org*. ProCon.org, 8 April 2010. Web. 14 March 2011.
[39] "Ex-Offenders." *American Civil Liberties Union*. Web. 14 Mar. 2011. <http://www.aclu.org/voting-rights/ex-offenders>.
[40] "The Sentencing Project News - Racial Disparity." *The Sentencing Project Home*. Web. 14 Mar. 2011. <http://www.sentencingproject.org/template/page.cfm?id=122>.
[41] De Crevecoeur, Jean, "Letters from an American Farmer," in Kallen, 67.

American Ideals

In 1917, William Tyler Page, a life-long public servant, coined the term "American Creed" in his contest-winning essay "The American Creed," which summarized American political faith in only 100 words. Since coining the term, "American Creed" has come to signify the ideals and virtues America has historically espoused and strives to realize both at home and globally. These ideals demarcate the boundaries of what is acceptable to the American conscience as well as a rough sketch of Constitutional limits. In other words, American ideals designate what is and what is not "American." These ideals include, but are not limited to: equality, a liberal conception of the "The Good," the primacy of the individual, freedom of association, and an open door to entering America's mainstream.

I contend that racial liberal nationalism, and its various practices, is un-American because it stands in contrast to American ideals, gathered from a variety of sources. The first declaration of American ideals I want to examine comes from Emma Lazarus' 1883 sonnet, "The New Colossus," which was inscribed at the base of the Statue of Liberty in 1903.[42] Lazarus' words are important because they are the message symbolized by one of America's most iconic statues, one which millions of immigrants beheld when they first arrived at Ellis Island. The first image of the poem establishes a dichotomy between the new and old Colossus, it reads, "Not like

[42] Although Lazarus wrote this poem over a century after America's founding and independence, the words of this poem are meant to convey the message of Lady Liberty. Since "liberty" is listed in the Declaration as among the three chief inalienable rights of man, this poem extrapolates on the American ideal of liberty.

the brazen giant of Greek fame,"[43] which implies a second dichotomy, this time between that which the Greeks would praise and that which Americans would praise. Although not explicit, Lazarus alludes to the Ancient Greek model of city-states as a system geared for conquest. The new Colossus, praised by Americans, presides over a very large and diverse nation— she is the "Mother of Exiles."[44] Lazarus continues, "From her beacon-hand / Glows world-wide welcome,"[45] declaring American liberty to be nondiscriminatory, which liberal nationalism would not contest. But Lazarus' words contradict liberal nationalism in terms of *how* that ideal will reach the greatest number of individuals. As the keeper of the "golden door" to freedom, Lady Liberty keeps out those who do not deserve liberty, yet Lazarus' words suggest that Lady Liberty's flame acts as a "lamp beside the golden door"[46] illuminating the path to freedom for all, regardless of background. In other words, the prospect of a highly diverse society does not threaten the distribution and protection of liberty for its citizens. Further, in the poem Lady Liberty silently cries, "Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp,"[47] which directly contradicts one manifestation of American liberal nationalism: the Anglo-conformity movement. Instead of promoting liberty or any other American ideal as a distinctly Anglo-Saxon concept, Lady Liberty suggests that all immigrant cultures are equal. At the very most, one could argue that Lady Liberty would support the American-conformity movement because the word "keep" might implore immigrants to leave their culture

---

[43] Young, Bette Roth. "The New Colossus." *Emma Lazarus in Her World: Life and Letters*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995. 3. Print.
[44] Young, 3.
[45] Young, 3.
[46] Young, 3.
[47] Young, 3.

at the gate in favor of American culture as distinct from its Europeans connections. But since the Anglo-conformity movement has led to cultural Anglo-dominance in America, it is difficult to separate Anglo-American culture from the "storied pomp" of "ancient lands" such as England. Lastly, Lazarus' description of exactly which people liberty seeks to bring ashore is distinctly heterogeneous. Instead of Lady Liberty asking for only people of one nationality or race to come to her shores so that she may light their path to liberty, she solicits the "poor," "tired," "wretched refuse," and "temptest-tost" of other countries thereby depicting American liberty as something that does not require the homogeneity of liberal nationalism. America's ideal of liberty can be provided to the person who knows nothing of American (Anglo-) culture.

Lazarus' words reflect the intention of the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration relies on civic virtues and the principles of liberal democracy to justify secession and independence. Ignoring racial, cultural, and religious grounds for independence, which are prevalent in almost all independence movements of the 20th century, Thomas Jefferson focused on the political ideals that distinguished the new from the old political world. In particular, those ideals "affirmed the parity of the different and the unalienability of the equal rights of the different freely to live and to struggle for the life and happiness which its singularity envisions and projects."[48] Indeed, one of the written charges against the King of England reads, "HE has endeavoured to prevent the Population of these States; for that Purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to

[48] Kallen, 63.

encourage their Migrations hither, and raising the Conditions of new Appropriations of Lands."[49] The members of the Continental Congress understood obstacles to the naturalization of foreign arrivals as counter to the ideals of liberal government. The Declaration also blames the King of England for inciting unrest among settlers and with the American Indians, "HE has excited domestic Insurrections among us, and has endeavoured to bring on the Inhabitants of our Frontiers."[50, 51]

Racial Liberal Pluralism

Racial liberal pluralism borrows from the three theories I described above in order to create a new social model that shifts certain pre-existent American social thought so as to provide a new lens through which to confront social inequality. This type of pluralism is 'racial' because it takes seriously the variety of identities in American society, many of which are instilled in individuals by virtue of ancestry and lineage. Thus, racial liberal pluralism takes extant race-consciousness and shifts the focus to identity generally. This pluralism is also 'liberal' in the sense that individual freedom is paramount and the political system in which racial liberal pluralism is optimal is a liberal governing structure. Thus, the liberal aspect of this model does not shift anything in our current discourse and thinking. Lastly, racial

[49] Engrossed copy of the Declaration of Independence, August 2, 1776; Miscellaneous Papers of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789; Records of the Continental and Confederation Congresses and the Constitutional Convention, 1774-1789, Record Group 360; National Archives.
[50] U.S. Declaration of Independence, 1776.
[51] This line of the Declaration continues, "… the merciless Indian Savages, whose known Rule of Warfare, is an undistinguished Destruction, of all Ages, Sexes and Conditions" which belies the prejudices of the American settlers. However, it is crucial to note that this line suggests that if it were not for the King, the two populations might live side by side peacefully, avoiding the brutal war described.

liberal pluralism is pluralistic in its organization of relationships from group to group, person to person, and between the groups and the nation as a whole. Pluralism embraces horizontal diversification while rejecting vertical differentiation. Furthermore, pluralism maintains that groups do and ought to interact with one another in order to better define the identity of the group and its members as well as a means to understanding the meaning of our national motto, "e pluribus unum," (*From many, one* [unity]) and how diversity unites our nation. Pluralism shifts notions of American identity construction away from concepts such as the "melting pot" toward an understanding that establishes group equality without sacrificing group identity and uniqueness.

Racial liberal pluralism is superior to liberal nationalism, cultural pluralism, and nation-based racial thinking in that it offers a better lens through which to explain and treat America's racial inequalities. Racial liberal pluralism is an amended version of cultural pluralism, a position popularized by Horace Kallen. Whereas cultural pluralism worked within an ethnicity-based paradigm of race, which reduces racial tensions and differences to matters of culture, values, and environment, a racial pluralism avoids the temptation of reductionism.[52] Racial liberal pluralism views group rights as the "inevitable consequence" of providing the ultimate liberal priority: individual freedom.[53] Through a crucial realignment of how groups relate to the concept "American," the freedom to associate with a particular national or ethnic group (i.e., the right to subscribe, or unsubscribe, to a group identity) becomes the freedom to associate with a distinct aspect of "American

---

[52] Omi and Winant, 48.
[53] Gordon, 142.

civilization."[54] In other words, pluralism re-imagines the applicability of the term "American" to sub-national groups and thereby changes the way in which these groups relate to each other and the umbrella connective: American citizenship. Under pluralism, the word "American" no longer refers directly to any individual or group, but instead signifies an inclusive term referring to a confederacy of groups that collectively produce a comprehensive "American." As John Dewey stated in his address to the National Education Association in 1916,

> The genuine American, the typical American is himself a hyphenated character… he is international and interracial in his make-up. He is not American plus Pole or German. But the American is himself Pole—German—English—French—Spanish—Italian—Greek—Irish—Scandanavian—Bohemian—Jew— and so on… the hyphen connects rather than separates.[55]

Dewey's speech clearly leaves out Africans, Asians, Native Americans, and many other groups from non-European countries, but this is likely due to the fact that he was addressing a mostly, if not entirely, white audience. However, Dewey's point — namely, the structure of the sub-national group to nation relation and the "hyphenated" character of the term "American" — should not be lost on account of his omissions.

The structure may become clearer by analogy. In Jewish pluralism the various sects of Judaism — orthodox, conservative, reform, reconstructionist, and secular — are unable to claim Jewishness individually. Instead of each group claiming to represent the "true message" or "true practice" of Judaism, which each

[54] Gordon, 143.
[55] Dewey, John. "Nationalizing Education." Address. National Education Association Annual Conference. New York. 1916. *Assimilation in American Life*. New York: Oxford UP, 1968. 139. Print.

group has tried at one time or another, under Jewish pluralism each sect operates autonomously as a vital artery of Jewishness. But autonomy does not involve complete separation. These groups can dine together, for example, by adhering to a strict code of respect for each other's differences — non-kosher foods are kept off the dining table, but the choice to make a blessing over the food is up to the individual. In this way, differing groups (and these groups have strong differences of opinion) cooperate to invigorate the concept of Judaism generally and the sense of Jewishness shared amongst the sects. Most importantly, by coming into direct contact and communication with different groups, individuals and groups come to know themselves, their positions, and practices better without resorting to animosity as a mechanism for group solidarity and uniqueness.

Pluralism does not require that each group live in a vacuum and ignore the aspects of different groups that cause us discomfort — indeed, the outcome would be complete separation and autonomy of groups under a single political scheme, not very different than the provisions of liberal nationalism. Pluralism requires sociability and mingling of groups for the purpose of continuing to reshape and define the umbrella term, American, the groups, and the individual. However, this presents a serious set of obstacles to the implementation of a pluralist system. For example, language could bar the full social inclusion of Spanish-speakers. This could be an especially large obstacle in legislating or judicial proceedings. There appears to be an inherent tension between the goals of group autonomy and national unity.

So how can pluralism provide for group autonomy and national unity simultaneously? Actually, this particular problem has already been addressed in our

nation's history. Laura Gómez's analysis of race relations in territorial New Mexico in the late 19th century provides a rich description of how the aspiring state, whose male population was 80% Mexican and 20% white, established and maintained a multiracial governing system. That system included a fully bilingual court.[56] Mexican-Americans were afforded complete access to government and the judicial system. Through the bilingual court system, Mexican-Americans not only gained a significant stake in the system, but also a means to group self-determination. Simultaneously, white interests in New Mexico, namely statehood, were satisfied because a functioning court system was an "implicit requirement for statehood."[57] Access to the jury box provided a necessary check on the racial bias of European American prosecutors and judges. Similar to the voting example above, jury service is a second voting of sorts. Through jury nullification or by simply showing mercy through acquittals, Mexican-Americans asserted their opinions and protected their group interests. Importantly, this exercise in creating a pluralist state occurred around the 1870's in the aftermath of the Mexican-American war. Therefore, despite violence and resentment between the two racial groups, New Mexico was able to create and maintain a pluralist model. Under this model, New Mexico simultaneously maintained American principles of governance, by consent rather than coercion (as was the case in Texas at the time), and supported group identity for Mexican-Americans, who "increasingly viewed [themselves] in racial terms." The blend of American government and group self-determination forged a new identity

---

[56] Gómez, Laura E. "Race Mattered: Racial Formation and the Politics of Crime in Territorial New Mexico." *UCLA Law Review* 49 (2002): 1395-1416. 1408. Print.
[57] Gómez, 1409.

within the New Mexico territory in which both whites and Mexicans both had a stake in the emerging American state without having to shed distinctive cultural differences.[58]

The pluralism I advocate differs from Kallen's cultural pluralism. Racial liberal pluralism expands the theory from a pluralism of culture to a pluralism of identities. Whereas Kallen originally worked with race as a type of culture, racial liberal pluralism sees culture, races, religions, etc. as identities. In this sense, the fluidity of pluralism increases thereby acknowledging the slippery nature of identity (especially racial identity). Racial liberal pluralism has the term "liberal" in the name because a pluralistic focus on person identity (see chapter 2) involves a liberal mindset — that is, one which values the individual most highly and sees the individual in an essential partnership with the group. Kallen writes, "A group-life prolongs and redirects the lives of the individuals whose association generates, sustains and impels the formation of the groups. Individuals not only live and move and nourish their being amid traditions, they are themselves traditions."[59] Finally, I retain pluralism as the best method of alleviating social inequality in America. Although Kallen mirrors natural pluralism in molding his social theory, I believe there are numerous examples of social pluralism — I have in mind the Millet system of the Ottoman Empire as an example — that support the implementation of pluralism.

Under pluralism, race and nationality become disentangled. There is no racial, religious, gender, or political criterion for who counts as an "American."

[58] Gómez, 1408, 1412.
[59] Kallen, 23.

Pluralism provides the groundwork for fully addressing social inequality among groups in America. What remains is to place the individual within this structure. If group identity can be divorced from national identity, then it should be possible to separate personal identity from the former two. It is necessary to carve out a space for personal identity, which is free from national and group pressures to conform to a dominant narrative. This goal can be accomplished through a non-traditional conception of personal identity, one which privies the individual to create and maintain that identity as she sees fit, but also responds to and thrives within a social context. To this conception of personal identity we now shift our focus.

CHAPTER TWO – PERSONAL IDENTITY

Introduction

Identity, writ large, is an amalgamation of family narratives, group affiliations, national pride, and a self-directed life-plan. Personal identity, for good reason, is therefore highly individualized. But, in a hegemonic framework like the one demonstrated in the preceding chapter, human flourishing is restricted to those who fit or adhere to the dominant narrative. Therefore, if we accept racial liberal pluralism as the proper corrective, it is necessary to determine which formulation of personal identity best supports the social model. This formulation must pay heed to the social environs of the individual while maintaining a space for personal identity that is free of excessive social restrictions and pressures. A narrative conception of identity is most fruitful here. Narrative allows the greatest degree of autonomy for the individual belonging to the identity as well as granting a good deal of variability in how those narratives are constructed. Simultaneously the narrative model also casts a broad net that connects individual narratives to the overarching narratives of a nation and race.

In this chapter, I critique prominent theories of identity as problematically essentialist, propose narrative communitarian identity as a useful model for protecting personal identity, and demonstrate how narrative identity supports the social model of racial liberal pluralism. More specifically, I hold that consciousness and bodily theories of personal identity do not work conceptually and are too easily dominated by the hegemonic influences of national or racial identity due to their essentialism. Narrative identity, however, is a plausible theory of identity that both

satisfies theoretical requisites and provides a malleable model of identity-creation that interacts but does not succumb to outside influences. Drawing from Marya Schectman's pure narrative identity theory in conjunction with Alasdair MacIntyre's communitarianism, I establish a safe haven for personal identity which allows the simultaneous consideration of the individual purely as an individual and within the context of society. Narrative identity supports the objectives of racial liberal pluralism, which I delineated earlier. This social model is necessary in order to realize our American ideals, most notably, equality.

Doxa

During the Enlightenment, the conversation surrounding identity focused on the continuity of identity: what ensures that person A at time T_1 is still the same person as time T_2? The re-identification question, as it has come to be known, spawned two primary schools of thought: mind and body. Locke asserts, "As far as consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person."[60] Drawing from Aristotle, Joseph Butler and, more recently, Sydney Shoemaker defend a bodily account of identity. Both of these constructions of identity are essentialist accounts. As such, they fail to support a pluralistic social environment, which is essential to realizing the American ideal: equality. In this section, I use Locke and Shoemaker as examples of the consciousness and bodily accounts of identity. While my explanation of these

[60] Locke, John. *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*. New York: Dover Publications, 1959. II.27.§9. Print.

theories is by no means exhaustive, I use Locke and Shoemaker's respective expressions of the two accounts in order to demonstrate the need for a different conception of identity.

Consciousness, as Locke used the term, includes memory but does not connote merely memory. Locke reasoned that a person is a "thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself, as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking, and… essential to it."[61] The extension of consciousness into the past involves the ability to enter in the first person mindset of one's memories — Locke argues, "As far as any intelligent being can repeat the idea of any past action with the same consciousness it had of it at first, and with the same consciousness it has of any present action; so far it is the same personal self."[62] In other words, I may recall the first time I went on a rollercoaster, the name of the ride, and the people who forced me on, but if I cannot recall the feelings and thoughts that ran through my mind as the safety bar locked down and the coaster began crawling up the first big drop, then I am no longer the same person that I was on that day. Locke, therefore, believes that consciousness stands central to every action taken. (One might go so far as saying that Locke's conception of identity presupposes that there are actions. Indeed, it is uncommon that one could re-enter the consciousness of doing nothing)

Locke's consciousness theory famously ran into some theoretical problems, which, to his credit, he did not shy away from, but embraced as logical conclusions.

[61] Locke, II.27.§9.
[62] Locke, II.27.§10.

For example, Locke theorized that it is possible for a human to switch between consciousnesses. Locke suggested that Socrates sleeping could inhabit a different consciousness than Socrates waking; Locke writes, "If the same Socrates, waking and sleeping, do not partake of the same consciousness, Socrates waking and sleeping is not the same person."[63] The one physical body of Socrates is dis-unified by having multiple consciousnesses. This would be an interesting defense in court, "Your honor, I did not commit that crime, it was my other consciousness, you'll have to wait until my body re-inhabits that consciousness and charge that-other-me later." But herein lies a problem — "that-other-me" is not physically distinct from the wrongly charged "me" in the courtroom. These consciousnesses both inhabit the same body, so it would be wrong to convict that body to a prison sentence if the felonious consciousness only presides for half the time. And Locke embraces this position, remarking, "To punish Socrates waking for what sleeping Socrates thought, and waking Socrates was never conscious of, would be no more of right, than to punish one twin for what his brother-twin did."[64] For this reason, and some others, neo-Lockeans have asked: how strict is Locke's definition of identity, does identity actually consist in consciousness *alone*?

For Locke, consciousness constitutes identity in its entirety. Therefore, when we cease to reason in a certain way, we actually change identity. In other words, singular consciousness is essential to having a singular identity. But how would this explain a wife who remains with her husband after he suffers irreparable brain damage? Why does the wife stay with her husband if he can't even remember her? It

[63] Locke, II.27.§19.
[64] Locke, II.27.§19.

is likely because there is something more to identity than consciousness. Should I look upon my young self with bewilderment because I cannot remember why I did not like eating broccoli? Locke's account yields a fractured self.

Locke's consciousness account fails to support a pluralist social model on several counts. First, the re-identification question is inherently essentialist and casts changes in identity as a loss of identity. As noted above, pluralism contends that a changing culture is a living culture, and that cultures are constituted of dynamic individuals. Therefore, in order to achieve a functioning pluralist order, the re-identification question must fail — person A at T_2 must be different from who s/he was at T_1. Second, Locke presupposes a body for one's consciousness to inhabit. Although never stated explicitly, this imagined body is a British white male. Locke gives no attention to skin color because his observations of the "human condition" are actually observations of the *white* human condition. The difference between "Socrates waking" and "Socrates sleeping" is minimal compared the lived differences of a white and black male; or a white male and black female. This critique also applies for a variety of other forms of diversity: sexual orientation, socio-economic class, religion, nationality, etc. Third, consciousness does not entail self-awareness of continuity of identity. Indeed, if I were to wake up tomorrow without memory, I would still say, "I am me" even though I may have no sense of who I was. Instead, consciousness and memories appear to serve the needs of others who want to assert my identity — "You are Mike, because we both remember being in middle school together." A pluralistic American identity gives equal regard to

identity for the purpose of identification by others as well as the purpose of self-knowledge.

As seen above, even when we speak of switching consciousness, it is difficult, using our language, to say that another consciousness is entirely other — it involved the same physical being after all. The other formulation of identity has traditionally focused on the body. The bodily account of identity has roots in Aristotle and has been modified by philosophers such as Joseph Butler and Sydney Shoemaker. The bodily account asserts that memory and consciousness are properties of the body: "Far from personal identity being definable in terms of memory, memory must be defined in terms of personal identity" because when one remembers doing an action or having an experience, that person actually remembers *her physical self* doing or experiencing.[65] In this account, the body occupies an essential position. Without a physical presence, a person has no identity.

But what if "her physical self," has been altered in some way between the moment of action/experience and the moment of recollection? Since the re-identification question essentially asks how the individual retains identity through change, the obvious question of the bodily account is: at what point has the body — through amputation, replacement, etc. — been reconstituted into a different identity? Is the threshold 50% of matter? Or are there certain parts of the body that are more important to retain, such as the brain, wherein consciousness resides? Richard Swinburne argues, "for living things… total replacement of matter — so long as it is gradual, and so long as physiology and anatomy only change gradually if

[65] Shoemaker, Sydney, and Richard Swinburne. *Personal Identity*. Oxford, England: B. Blackwell, 1984. 81-82. Print.

at all — will not destroy identity."[66] Swinburne attempts to avoid essentialism, but if identity resides in the body and a total replacement of matter is possible, then clearly identity resides elsewhere.

Anthony Appiah offers a critique of the bodily account of identity and the idea of gradual change in "'But Would That Still Be Me?' Notes on Gender, 'Race,' Ethnicity, as Sources of 'Identity,'" in which he compares being born a boy with a botched circumcision who is then raised as a female and being born male but later undergoing a sex-reassignment operation. Both cases have a gradual process of change involving the actual surgery, recovery, hormone treatment, and physical therapy. But, these cases will garner different answers to the question "would that still be me?" The answer might depend, according to Appiah, on "how central my being-a-man… is, as we would ordinarily say, to my identity."[67] In other words, the body has varying degrees of importance vis-à-vis identity.[68] The difference in answer might depend on one's perception of whether the change is a change in gender or sex — a social or biological change — even though it is still a *bodily* change nonetheless. Since there is no surgery yet available to alter the chromosomal make-up of a human, there is no way to fully switch from being genetically male to genetically female. No XY chromosomal human can become XX. If we can say that an individual can change his identity through other criteria besides bodily composition exclusively, we must seek out a different conception of identity.

---

[66] Shoemaker and Swinburne, 6.
[67] Appiah, K. Anthony. "'But Would That Still Be Me?' Notes on Gender, 'Race,' Ethnicity, as Sources of 'Identity'" *The Journal of Philosophy* 87.10 (1990): 493-99. 495. Print.
[68] Although Appiah is not a phenomenologist, his work borders on some phenomenological theories of identity and social determination. See note 80.

Again, there are a number of problems with the bodily account, which make it incompatible with a pluralist society. The continuity question remains problematic for the aforementioned reasons. The bodily account also downplays psychological and intellectual changes as insignificant in terms of identity. In a pluralist framework, the interaction between groups and individuals is meant to foster examination one's beliefs, mental states, and prejudices. Pluralism, especially liberal pluralism, holds changes in these immaterial aspects of our identity to be important, because such changes are significant to the individual whom they affect. Lastly, the idea that bodily attributes constitute an individual's identity is a slippery slope. Just as we generally no longer claim that one's skin color and physique are not indicative of a person's intelligence, so too must we reject the notion that identity inheres in the body. An over emphasis on the connection between the body and identity leads to over-determination, a concept from Jean-Paul Sartre, who argued that Jews are over-determined and therefore there is a "necessity imposed upon the Jew of subjecting himself to endless self-examination and finally of assuming a phantom personality, at once strange and familiar, that haunts him and which is nothing but himself — himself as others see him."[69] While this is problematic in and of itself, the bodily account, like Locke's, allows identity to focus on the ability of another to identify somebody as the same person as before without giving much thought to the individual's self-knowledge of his identity. For these reasons, we must seek out a different conception of identity that provides a healthy interaction between self-awareness of our own identity and the social space in which that

[69] Jean-Paul Sartre. *Anti-Semite and Jew*, New York: Schocken Books, 1948. 78. Print.

identity lives. The identity model needed to support a pluralist social structure is narrative identity.

Narrative Identity

Because the traditional positions on identity are problematic within a pluralist social framework, it is necessary to look beyond these two options to a more recent theory: narrative identity.[70] Self-constituting narrative as a theory of personal identity presents a unique opportunity to individuals: creating an identity. The narrative identity model claims that individuals create their own story as their identity — and as an account of that individual's identity. An individual is free to omit or include (factual) events as a part of his or her biography in order to convey a particular message: a personalized account. Instead of addressing The re-identification question, an understanding of identity based in self-narrative asks us to consider a characterization question: "Most simply put, [the characterization] question asks which actions, experiences, beliefs, values, desires, character traits, and so on are to be attributed to a given person."[71] But individuals are not free to completely fabricate a false identity. As Alasdair MacIntyre notes, the concepts of personal identity, narrative, intelligibility and accountability mutually presuppose one another. And therefore, self-creation and social ascription of identity depend on one another for verification and legitimization.

[70] I am not making a normative claim here. There are many ways to conceive of identity, but within the context of promoting and sustaining pluralism in America, narrative identity is optimal. I agree with David Shoemaker's position in his *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry titled, "Personal Identity and Ethics," in which he posits a plurality of identity theories as plausible and useful in specific ways, especially in how we understand our ethical obligations.
[71] Schechtman, Marya. *The Constitution of Selves*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1996. 73. Print.

Through a narrative account of identity, the range of those who "fit" in American identity expands. By stepping away from the re-identification question, which presupposes a fixed identity, and using the more fluid characterization question, the fixed conception of the "typical American," becomes absurd. Because the characterization question acknowledges the human need for change and growth, it is ridiculous to think that anybody could maintain a fixed "typical American" identity. This is similar to the problem of a parent who refuses to recognize their child's growth and change in identity. To do so undermines the actual identity of the child, or in the more general case, of the individual American. Thus, without the possibility of a "typical American," the range of American identities grows from one to many. Furthermore, by involving values, desires, beliefs, and experiences in the process of molding an identity, there are different ways in which American-ness can play a role in one's narrative – a belief in democratic government, seeing the value of liberty, desiring the "American Dream," and experiencing the emotional ups and downs of the nation as one's own.

When considering issues of race and national membership, the characterization question is optimal in discussing identity. Unlike the re-identification question, the characterization question focuses on the construction of identity, not its durability over time. It answers the central questions required for one to say "I know him/her." And not only does it answer our curiosities, but a narrative answer can also defend against the accusation of lesser fidelity to a given group. Marya Schectman delineates four general areas of identity: a) moral responsibility, b) self-interested concern, c) compensation, and d) degrees of

survival. Schectman uses these categories in order to support narrative as a normative model of identity generally. I have adapted these categories in a limited manner, though still normative, to demonstrate the narrative model's usefulness in supporting racial liberal pluralism and addressing group and national identity concerns in the United States. Because racial and national membership deal with the interaction between the individual and the group, I have termed these categories as "questions" that individuals and groups use in order to get to know somebody. These questions deserve some explanation.

Question 1: Moral Responsibility

Moral responsibility is our assumption that actions are indicative of our moral identity (i.e., our moral "fibers"). Schectman writes, "the degree to which an action expresses someone's identity is a central consideration in making moral judgments."[72] To place moral responsibility on an individual requires knowledge of a history of the individual's actions, experiences, beliefs, and relationships. Narrative identity and morality are "bound up"[73] to one another. Social matrices (i.e., communities, social groups) provide a moral space within which the self is situated. The moral space of a community "provides the evaluative framework" necessary for "articulat[ing] what is good and valuable."[74] The communitarian view of narrative identity suggests that actions are manifestations of the moral space individuals inhabit. Consequently, MacIntyre claims that elements of a narrative are

---

[72] Schectman, 81.
[73] Shoemaker, David. "Personal Identity and Ethics." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. The Metaphysics Research Lab, Center for the Study of Language and Information, 5 Mar. 2008. Web. 14 Mar. 2011. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-ethics/>.
[74] Shoemaker, D., "Personal Identity and Ethics."

intelligible because the "agent is *accountable*" for the action. Thus, narrative identity, satisfies the first question by locating the individual in a moral space, connecting action with moral background, and thereby making those actions intelligible to an audience.

Question 2: Self-Interest

Most people would agree that the ideas and values, which occupy central importance for an individual, often define who that person truly is. But, following from the above, there are values that are congruous with their social setting and others that are particular to the individual. When we see one act in pursuit of the former set of values, we are less likely to question the motive, but the latter set causes us to investigate the actor's project more closely. The second question, therefore, is self-interest, which asks how the narrative we tell informs us of one's true self-interests. These desires derive from a part of one's narrative history. Self-interest distinguishes the individual from the social matrix in which they are situated. This question is operative when we support a cause — a political movement or disaster relief drive — we look to the leader's history, though perhaps not in its entirety, in order to understand what the goals truly are. For example, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. vacillated between hatred and compassion for white Americans in his youth. He even rejected non-violence as a method for achieving social justice for several years. However, by the time he began his doctoral program for a PhD in divinity at Boston University, King had come to synthesize his own philosophy of political action through peaceful resistance with a reading of Jesus' pacifistic teachings that understood the doctrine of loving "thy enemy" actually

implied the Greek type of love, *agape*, not *eros* or *philo*. By understanding King's narrative — his beliefs, teachers, and the poignant moments in his life (such as when he was no longer allowed to play with a childhood friend at the age of five because of racial differences) — one can fully understand the power and righteousness of King's movement.

Question 3: Compensation

Following from our understanding of one's self-interested concerns, we want to know the import of those interests. The third question, compensation, asks what is worth sacrificing, in the eyes of the individual, in the process of satisfying his self-interests. Narratives can reveal how deeply seated and immutable our beliefs are merely by locating them on a timeline. Compensation is, therefore, a question of degree. By identifying the deepest values, the deepest desires, and the deepest beliefs of an individual, we gain an understanding of what the individual deems to be essential to his own being. This is different from the essentialism exemplified by the earlier theories, because it is a self-generated understanding of essential elements of the self. The recent film *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*[75] offers a visual characterization of this curiosity. In the film, Wilbur Wonka, Willy's father, is a dentist who forces his son to wear torturous orthodontic headgear, forbids candy, and burns all of Willy's Halloween stash. Because of his traumatic childhood experiences with candy and dental health, Willy works his entire life to build a candy empire and a micro-candy-cosm within his factory. Willy's early childhood gives us a deeper understanding of what he is willing to sacrifice in the name of this

---

[75] *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Dir. Tim Burton. Perf. Johnny Depp. Warner Bros. Studios, 2005. Film.

goal (Willy is not married, feels no affinity for or real connection to other humans, and has not been outdoors for several decades). It is not a specific moment in Willy's history that makes him into a candy tycoon, but his complete narrative: past trauma, present efforts to make up for his past, and future plans to pass along the factory to Charlie so that children can enjoy candy for generations to come.

Question 4: Degrees of Survival

The last question, degrees of survival, asks how alive an individual is. While life and death are often seen as an exhaustive dichotomy, there are many cases, especially seen among wounded soldiers of the Iraq War, where life and survival admits of degrees: brain function can be diminished, the ability to work, walk, eat, and speak unassisted can all ebb. And, through a narrative identity we can say that the "degree to which a person is alive, and hence survives, seems linked to the degree to which her actions, experiences, and characteristics are her own."[76] Although there is no one-to-one correlation, the autonomy one has over his actions is often connected to the degree of his survival. This question acknowledges the role the body plays in informing our sense of identity.

With the characterization question in mind, now let us explore the answer: self-constituting narratives. What is involved in creating a narrative, and when is the work of self-creation complete, if ever? One creates a narrative by pulling together the most important occurrences in his life and fitting these actions, experiences, and beliefs into a story. The story format transforms these occurrences from a mere list into a comprehensible saga. Just as our understanding of characters in books and in

[76] Schectman, 89.

film comes from the stories told of them, a self-constituting narrative enables understanding of the self for the person creating the narrative and others who will "read" it. What to include and what to omit from the narrative is ultimately determined by the message of the autobiography, that is, the crafter's identity. This message also informs the future choices of an individual, because, as explored above, one part of identity is the concern expressed for beliefs and things that we hold dear. Therefore, one builds a narrative not only from the occurrences of the past but the intended actions of the future.

Yet narratives are likely to change, and potentially change often during youth. Many young children say that they want to be a doctor, a fireman, or an astronaut. Of course, many childhood dreams go unfulfilled, usually because individuals don't hold the same dreams and aspirations throughout their entire life. Indeed, a more believable narrative would be one of evolution and gradual change rather than one that is teleologically unified and driven from birth to death. ("I was born on August 8th because Leo's make good doctors," is a ludicrous statement) Therefore, it may be necessary to revisit a narrative, re-evaluate and redact it until it again becomes an appropriate account of one's identity. Such a phenomenon can be witnessed among new parents. Often, new mothers and fathers will claim that since starting a family their priorities have changed. In other words, they have altered the list of things and beliefs most important to them and the things they are willing to sacrifice in the name of those concerns. Often this will not constitute a total revamping of identity, because it is extremely difficult to unravel the unity of one's narrative without trespassing into false narratives. Simply, the self-narrative will

stand in such contrast to others' perception of the individual's identity that the narrative will not be trustworthy or useful. MacIntyre writes, "In what does the unity of an individual life consist? The answer is that its unity if the unity of a narrative embodied in a single life… The unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest."[77] Therefore, the editing done to a narrative must also make sense in terms of the narrative. The character of Rob in Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity* perfectly captures this point about editing and changing identity:

> I… felt a fraud. I was like all those people who suddenly shaved their heads and said they'd *always* been punks, they'd been punks before punk was even thought of: I felt as though I was going to be found out at any moment, that somebody was going to burst into the college bar brandishing one of the anorak photos and yelling, "Rob used to be a *boy*! A little *lad*!," and Charlie would see it and pack me in.[78]

There is a limit to the amount of change we can expect others to understand and accept. While it is possible that we may truly desire a massive overhaul of our identity for one reason or another such a change must be in response to one's past, not a complete denial of the past.

It is difficult to claim that a moment will come in every individual's life at which point self-creation no long occurs. It is unlikely that a dearth of new possibilities would be the cause of cessation of self-creation — although many experience moments of inescapable situations. Even if one believes that her identity has been pigeon-holed and cannot expand or change in any way, the fact that we are rational social creatures implies that changes in society will produce alterations and

---

[77] MacIntyre, Alasdair C. *After Virtue: a Study in Moral Theory*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1984. 219. Print.
[78] Hornby, Nick. *High Fidelity*. New York: Riverhead, 1995. 22. Print.

amendments to one's narrative. Even if an isolated elderly man does little but visit doctors and watch CNN all day, his understanding of the world around him causes him to reconfigure his narrative and emphasize different elements until his position in society and toward society becomes fully comprehensible to himself and others, even if they'll never meet him.

Self-narratives constitute identity in three respects. First, if we accept that the characterization question is the most accurate question to ask in order to discover one's identity, then narrative as an answer to this question must be a method of creating identity. Second, the narrative position presupposes that we do not necessarily know who we are until we recognize or discover who we are as persons. Indeed, several theorists have gone so far as to suggest that an identity "is not… something that an individual has whether she knows it or not, but something that she has *because* she acknowledges her personhood and appropriates certain actions and experiences as her own."[79] In other words, identity requires subjectivity — self-reflecting subjectivity. When we assume this subjectivity, and think of ourselves as subjects persisting through time, with experiences and actions in our past and events yet to come in our future, we gain identity by taking on certain occurrences as our own. In the third respect, interpersonal interaction, which presupposes the existence of a person, requires at least a snapshot of a narrative. This is why conversations with strangers about the weather or how long you've waited for a table at a restaurant are universally boring. Speed-dating is premised on the use of a list of questions that delve into one's narrative quickly. "What is your

[79] Schectman, 95.

favorite Disney film?" instantly allows two individuals to understand that their childhoods shared an experience: not only of watching the film, but of singing the songs, laughing at the jokes, and possibly dressing up as a character for Halloween or playing with an action figure. Thus, by using a narrative, one not only acknowledges the portions of his life that create a self, we create our identity in the minds of others. That is, we begin to exist as persons rather than mere bodies — to others and ourselves.

What is most useful to our problem is that narrative identity is almost radically anti-essentialist. Re-identification theorists depend on an assumption that the identity of an individual can be grasped from a singular moment in a person's history. In other words, how can one re-identify a 40-year-old husband and father of three with his childhood self without taking into account at least the four momentous changes in his life: marriage and three births? Therefore, everything in a narrative, from the perspective of the narrator, is an essential element of identity.

However, if narrative identity involves a moment of creation, then how ought we account for the moments, events, and beliefs from before the moment of identity genesis? Is there any reason for an individual to draw upon events from his supposed history if that history belongs only to a pre-identity version of the self? In other words, does the narrator have good reason to re-identify with the occurrences before? To answer this, we must first explore what it would mean to have actions, beliefs, and relationships without an identifiable agent. Alasdair MacIntyre distinguishes actions from occurrences, arguing that "to identify an occurrence as an action is… to identify it under a type of description which enables us to see that

occurrence [i.e., a formerly unassigned action] as flowing intelligibly from a human agent's intentions, motives, passions, and purposes."[80] According to MacIntyre, we have no way of understanding those actions as connected with a specific self; instead we ought to consider them as occurrences: actions bereft of a *responsible* actor. It is because an individual begins to take responsibility (enters a higher state of awareness/consciousness) for his actions that he creates a definitive identity. This perspective would fit generally with our conceptions of maturation from a minor to a full adult as played out in most criminal justice systems. But it is not necessary to require strict narrative unity from birth to death. Instead, it is quite possible that one unity will exist for a segment of one's life, which is then followed by another unity. These parts are then fitted together, as the narrator deems appropriate. In other words, the entire narrative need not maintain the same level of unity as the subdivisions of the narrative. A narrative unified in such a way would not undermine the moral criterion for intelligible action. In fact, this lenient conception of narrative unity allows the subject the ability to locate epochs and instances, which are unintelligible within a strictly unified comprehensive narrative, in a part of the narrative that differs in certain beliefs or psychological states from the subject at another point in the narrative.

An example of this process will further clarify this distinction of responsibility in past actions. When I was younger, I had a tendency to dress up at random intervals in a cape, with gloves, wielding twin *sai* (a three-pronged weapon famously used by the character Raphael in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*). After my

[80] MacIntyre, 209.

mother would cease laughing and taking pictures of me, she would ask why I dressed up. My answer would often have something to do with Batman, yet all I knew at the time of Batman was that he was an action figure and I wanted the newest one. Today, although I no longer dress the part, I keep a painting of Batman on my wall, read the graphic novels, and feed my addiction by watching all the films. Whereas I can point to the early expressions of my childhood Batman obsession and say, "I was just a kid," I have no such option with my adulthood Batman obsession. I have taken responsibility for my love of the character by reading the comics, exploring the idea of vigilantism more generally, and openly marking my walls with his image.

Narrative Identity and Pluralistic Liberalism

The narrative model of identity pushes the individual closer to the preconditions of J. S. Mill's ideal of liberty, that is, an autonomous individual who has complete agency and responsibility for most, if not all, aspects of his life, including his identity. Mill argues that liberty is not very valuable unless we take necessary steps to become individuals. Individuality, Mill insists, depends on the individual creating and taking ownership of his own life plan.[81] Instead of "finding oneself," or having an identity projected onto a body, a person must *create* oneself. Self-creation, or self-narration, occurs within a context and therefore has limitations. As MacIntyre writes, "Only in a fantasy do we live what story we please. In life… we are always under certain constraints. We enter upon a stage which we did not design

[81] Appiah, Anthony. *The Ethics of Identity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2007. 4. Print.

and we find ourselves part of an action that was not our making."[82] While I support MacIntyre's insight, instead of viewing the societal context as a constraint on personal identity, I want to suggest that outside forces, which attempt to define an individual based on group identity, are in tension with narrative identity. Not all societal constraints are oppositional to narrative, only those which both constrain narrative and liberty. Appiah writes, "Mill says that it is important that one choose one's own plan of life, and liberty consists, at least in part, in providing the conditions under which a choice among acceptable options is possible."[83] Social matrices present *acceptable* options to the individual from which a narrative is constructed, in this way society and the individual are in tension because one constrains while the other seeks unbounded liberty.[84] But when those options are unacceptable, society oppresses the identity of individuals and liberty becomes useless. Appiah appears to agree with this tensional set-up when he writes, "We are exactly as capable of making our own character, if we will, as others are of making it for us."[85] This does not privilege one narrative over the other; both stories "aspire to truth."[86] The creation of a narrative self combats the pressure to melt into group identity. We need a self-narrative so as not to become a stereotype.

---

[82] MacIntyre, 213.
[83] Appiah, *Ethics*, 5.
[84] Phenomenological accounts of identity often remark on the effect of determination on our identity – the idea that the perceptions of others strongly influence the way we see ourselves. I have not delved into the phenomenological theories in this paper, because I am addressing the specific issues of identity within the framework of liberalism. However, it is important to note that the phenomenologists have made significant contributions to the topic of identity formation and racialization.

[85] Appiah, *Ethics*, 18.
[86] MacIntyre, 216.

The tension between group identities and personal identity is necessary and exists today in American life. On the one hand, a self-narrative would not function if it drastically departed from the contextual narrative of a people (group). Yet, groups would fail as well if they rejected every deviant identity, as Kallen writes, "Cultures live and grow in and through the individual,"[87] and "Individuals not only live and move and nourish their being amid traditions [i.e., within a group context], they are themselves traditions."[88] Kallen asserts a power-sharing arrangement between groups and members, and describes personal identity as a history in progress, which is to say, a united narrative. Kallen writes, "The individual… is his personal history in the making. *His* personal history and no other… His present is a flowing of a singular past into a singular future that in joining, alters the past whose future it becomes." [89] Kallen's theory of cultural pluralism presupposes that the nature of personal identity takes the form of a narrative and that the relationship of individual and group be structured similarly to MacIntyre's communitarian view. African American slave narratives from the Antebellum and Reconstruction Eras provide an example of the process of locating one's self within a group while also asserting an individual identity. Frederick Douglass undertook great pains to account for his different experience as a slave. He was self-conscious of the fact that his ability to read and write as well as the considerable time he spent as a city-dwelling slave marked him as outside the group narrative of contemporary African Americans, which found narrative expression through the use of spirituals. Thus, Douglass

---

[87] Kallen, 55.
[88] Kallen, 23.
[89] Kallen, 24.

declares a personal identity that works against stereotypes of an African American male, especially during his time. Nevertheless, other aspects of his narrative place him well within the story of enslaved and oppressed Africans under racial slavery in America. Thus, he can be united with others and adopt parts of their stories as his own by adding to his narrative, "I was an African American slave."

Conclusion

Communitarian narrative identity theory provides an excellent framework for separating the various parts of identity. Just as MacIntyre subjects personal autonomy in creation of a narrative to the scrutiny of society, so too must we re-establish the relationship between American national, group, and personal identity. By placing American national and group identity in tense conversation with personal identity, it is possible to retain the powerful individualism of liberalism while creating a role for national and sub-national group/racial identities. This structure of identity fits within the context of racial liberal pluralism.

With a full exploration of the various parts of identity and how they fit together, at least in the American scenario, complete, it is now possible to propose some ways in which we might be able to support a shift in our conception of identity through various institutions.

CONCLUDING CHAPTER - IMPLEMENTATION

What remains is to move this theory from paper to practice. Since racial liberal pluralism is already a type of liberalism, it does not require an overhaul of government institutions or systems. Furthermore, since we are already liberal subjectivities, creating a subjective self through narrative that fits within the liberal conception of the individual does not require any serious overhaul either. Racial liberal pluralism is more social than political, therefore it is possible to implement this orientation of sub-national groups toward national identity through individuals. This ground-up approach involves a crucial role for many of our social institutions. In this concluding chapter, I will argue the religious institutions and schools are central to implementing racial liberal pluralism in America and thereby moving toward equality.

In America, religion has practiced a type of pluralism for a long time. Much of the impetus for leaving Europe for America was religious freedom, which was achieved through religious pluralism. American religious institutions practice two types of pluralism — pluralism from group to group and pluralism of congregants. By making these two practices of pluralism more explicit to patrons, it is possible to instill the virtues of pluralism as it relates to national identity and sub-national groups.

First, let us explore group to group pluralism. In America, religious organizations and sects of religious movements often work together in order to achieve similar religious or social goals. Because these goals are religiously informed, their cooperation implies a respect for the other group's place in the

pantheon of religious movements. Therefore, religious groups generally do not fear interaction with other denominations or sects, but instead welcome it as a joint effort in fulfilling a shared religious project. Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. appeals to the religious pluralism established in the colonial period in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," in which King calls upon his "fellow clergymen," comprised of "my Christian and Jewish brothers," to support (or merely cease condemning) King's methods for achieving civil rights. [90] King envisioned his religiously supported campaign for civil rights as not merely a Southern Baptist movement, but as a pan-religious obligation to fight injustice. Thus, American religions can and do adopt a pluralistic approach to achieving a shared ideal. This practice can and ought to be taught regarding American identity.

The American ideal, social equality, is, in fact, also a religious goal.[91] Therefore, religions have a unique ability to preach a pluralistic conception of group relations and lead by example. Since a relatively high level of mutual respect among religious movements and sects already exists in American compared to Europe and the Middle East, it is not difficult to expand such an understanding to nationalities and other identities. For many identities there is already an associated religion. The vast majority of Mexican-Americans (close to 90% of the first generation and declining in subsequent generations) are Catholic, therefore by welcoming the

[90] King, Martin Luther, Jr. "Letter from Birmingham Jail." The Norton Anthology of African American Literature. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay. New York: Norton, 1997.1854 – 66.

[91] "(8) Open your mouth for the mute, for all the rights of the unfortunate. (9) Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy." Proverbs 31:8-9. *Biblia: Online Bible Study.* http://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Proverbs%2031.8-9 (Accessed 5/11/11) Online.

Catholic Church into the shared American-religious mission of equality there is good reason to also preach a vision of American identity inclusive of Mexican-Americans.

The other pluralism, that of the individual vis-à-vis the group is also a practice that has roots going back beyond the founding of the United States of America and contains a useful model for the relationship between individuals and national identity. Every religion maintains an open door for all patrons, adherents of the religion or not. And the affiliation of the new patron does not factor into the admissions policy for attending religious services. This long-lived practice has produced a highly diversified congregation for religions. Such a welcoming view toward newcomers should be preached regarding the American citizenry. While I do not contend that the practice of conversion ought to be our model for naturalization, because the renunciation of former ties is a type of Anglo-conformity, which I argued against in chapter 1, adopting the attitude of religions regarding new patrons appears to be essential to establishing pluralism in America.

Many religions practice this type of pluralism of congregants because they already have a pluralist mindset regarding their constitution. Religions in America have generally dropped the concept of what the typical Christian, Jew, Muslim, Sikh or Buddhist looks like. The other identities of an individual adherent are irrelevant to the religious identity of the individual. Simply put: skin color, nationality, language, economic status, political alignment, and gender do not matter in terms of who is and who is not a Christian, for example.[92] The criterion is adherence to a set

[92] Sexual orientation has remained a contentious issue for many religions, but LGBTQ community members are still welcome in many congregations despite living a 'sinful'

of principles and beliefs. This same criterion ought to be used in our understanding of who is admitted to the fellowship of American citizenship: a liberal conception of "the good life," belief in the democratic process, staunch defense of civil freedom and rights, and a sense that personal success is tied to national success.

Religions are generally utopian in nature and method, which renders religions in an optimal position to effectuate a pluralist society. In Christianity, the "Lord's Prayer," as it appears in The Gospel of Matthew reads, "Your kingdom come / Your will be done / On Earth as it is in Heaven."[93] These words are precisely what John Dewey wrote about in *A Common Faith*, in which he argued that God is "the unity of all ideal ends arousing us to desire and actions."[94] In other words, God functions to conduct us from our reality and our ideal. Thus, if religion seeks to replicate the world of ideals (i.e., Heaven) on Earth, then it ought to preach the pre-existing pluralism of American religions as an ideal that must be promulgated to the rest of American society.

John Dewey also provides a good deal of suggestions for how to implement pluralism through public schooling and his address to the National Education Association in 1916 frames much of the following. Dewey begins his speech by suggesting that in the "remote future," the crucial question asked about our public school system will be, "What has the American public school done toward subordinating a local, provincial, sectarian, and partisan spirit of mind to aims and

---

lifestyle. I have omitted it from the list because of the ongoing heated debate within religious communities.

[93] Coogan, Michael D., Marc Z. Brettler, Pheme Perkins, and Carol A. Newsom. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010. 1755. Print.

[94] Dewey, John. *A Common Faith*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1934. 42. Print.

interests which are common to all men and women of the country – to what extent has it taught me to think and feel in ideas broad enough to be inclusive of the purposes and happiness of all sections and classes?"[95] In other words, Dewey is asking how the American public school experience brings children of diverse backgrounds and unifies them as citizens. Because the public school system came into being as a prerequisite for a fully functioning democracy, we can say that the American public school creates citizens. Therefore, the social experience of a born-American citizen or young immigrant depends upon the foundational lessons that student receives regarding America. When our teachers instruct their students on the American nation, we must fixate on the national motto, "One out of Many." But, as Dewey writes,

> Our unity cannot be a homogeneous thing like that of the separate states of Europe… it must be a unity created by drawing out and composing into a harmonious whole the best, the most characteristic, which each contributing race and people has to offer.[96]

Thus the America envisioned has each race and people contributing "its special good," thereby eliminating isolation, while also remaining unique and distinct, thereby avoiding dissolution. Such a vision allows, indeed requires, that each group in America take pride in its past while not living (culturally) off of it. In such an America, group identity is a living identity. In the classroom, this will require a great deal of give and take with students. Teaching the American immigrant experience will involve assigning students to research their own family's history and immigration story as well as teaching the stories of other groups, which may be

---

[95] Dewey, 184.
[96] Dewey, 185.

unrepresented in a given classroom. But the story of immigration will not be one that stops at Ellis Island. The story of immigration will involve the cultural, intellectual, and economic contributions of each group and family. By focusing on the contributions of immigrant groups and individual families, immigration becomes less of an obstacle to overcome. Immigration becomes a celebrated process, because it constantly adds and breathes life into the patchwork cultural identity of America.

In spirit, the newly oriented education will a focus on the

> fact that our nation and democracy are equivalent terms; that our democracy means amity and good will to all humanity (including those beyond our border), and equal opportunity for all within… [Our objective is] to make [the public schools] an instrument in the active and constant suppression of the war spirit and in the positive cultivation of sentiments of respect and friendship for all men and women, wherever they live.

Thereby we will make the public schools the primary instrument of the democratic idea of America. It will help make America resemble the American Idea by striving to establish a pluralist American identity as well as a society of opportunity, giving each individual a reason to call America his country.

At one and the same time, America faces both a test of identity that it has not encountered in this era and an opportunity to reaffirm and carry through on the promises of its founding. The proper response to these tests is not the anxiety about immigration and the Spanish language promoted by writers like Samuel P. Huntington, for "when an age is signalized as an age of anxiety it is thereby

signalized as an age without courage."[97] The proper response is to allow our nation's values to mold our identity. Kallen writes, "To all the Declaration affirmed the parity of the different and the unalienability [*sic*]of the equal rights of the different freely to live and to struggle for the life and happiness which its singularity envisions and projects."[98] Whereas the Declaration of Independence stated our political identity, today American must assert its social identity as a "union of the diverse," and define "The American" as "any person convinced of the American Idea, working and fighting in and through this union to bring it from faith to fact."[99]

---

[97] Kallen, 57.
[98] Kallen, 63.
[99] Kallen, 97.

Bibliography

Appiah, K. Anthony. *The Ethics of Identity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2007. Print.

Appiah, K. Anthony. "'But Would That Still Be Me?' Notes on Gender, 'Race,' Ethnicity, as Sources of 'Identity'" *The Journal of Philosophy* 87.10 (1990): 493-99. Print.

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. Dir. Tim Burton. Perf. Johnny Depp. Warner Bros. Studios, 2005. Film.

Coogan, Michael D., Marc Z. Brettler, Pheme Perkins, and Carol A. Newsom, eds. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010. Print.

Conley, Dalton, and Jacqueline Stevens. "Build a Bigger House." *The New York Times* 24 Jan. 2011: A27. *The New York Times*. Web. 25 Jan. 2011.

De Schutter, Helder. "Nations Beyond Nationalism." *Inquiry* 50.4 (2007): 378-94. Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group, 2007. Web. July 2010.

Dewey, John. *A Common Faith*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1934. 42. Print.

Dewey, John. "Nationalizing Education." Address. National Education Association Annual Conference. New York. 1916. *Assimilation in American Life*. New York: Oxford UP, 1968. 139. Print.

DuBois, W. E. B., "The Conservation of Races," in *The Idea of Race: Hackett Readings in Philosophy*, Bernasconi, Robert and Tommy Lott eds. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2000. 113. Print.

"Ex-Offenders." *American Civil Liberties Union*. Web. 14 Mar. 2011. <http://www.aclu.org/voting-rights/ex-offenders>.

Gómez, Laura E. "Race Mattered: Racial Formation and the Politics of Crime in Territorial New Mexico." *UCLA Law Review* 49 (2002): 1395-416. Print.

Gordon, Milton M. *Assimilation in American Life.* New York: Oxford UP, 1968. Print.

Hornby, Nick. *High Fidelity*. New York: Riverhead, 1995. Print.

Hsu, Hua. "The End of White America?" *The Atlantic* 303.1 (2009): 46-55. Web. Sept. 2010.

Huntington, Samuel P. *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America's Identity*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004. Print.

Kallen, Horace Meyer. *Cultural Pluralism and the American Idea*. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1956. Print.

Locke, John. *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*. New York: Dover Publications, 1959. Print.

MacIntyre, Alasdair C. *After Virtue: a Study in Moral Theory*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1984. Print.

Myrdal, Gunnar. *An American Dilemma: the Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. New York: Harper & Row, 1962. 998. Print.

Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: from the 1960s to the 1980s*. New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986. Print.

Perry, John. *Personal Identity*. Berkeley: University of California, 1975. Print.

Schechtman, Marya. *The Constitution of Selves*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1996. Print.

Shoemaker, David. "Personal Identity and Ethics." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. The Metaphysics Research Lab, Center for

the Study of Language and Information, 5 Mar. 22008. Web. 14 Mar. 2011. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-ethics/>.

Shoemaker, Sydney, and Richard Swinburne. *Personal Identity*. Oxford, England: B. Blackwell, 1984. Print.

"The Sentencing Project News - Racial Disparity." *The Sentencing Project Home*. Web. 14 Mar. 2011. <http://www.sentencingproject.org/template/page.cfm?id=122>.

Wilson, Thomas Woodrow. "Address to Naturalized Citizens at Convention Hall, Philadelphia." Address. Convention Hall, Philadelphia. 10 May 1915. *The American Presidency Project*. John T. Woolley and Gerhard Peters. Web. 7 Nov. 2010. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=65388>.

Young, Bette Roth. "The New Colossus." *Emma Lazarus in Her World: Life and Letters*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995. 3. Print.