

The Progression of U.S. Identity in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

تطور الهوية الأمريكية في القرنين السابع عشر والثامن عشر

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Received: 29/09/2025

Accepted: 19/11/2025

Published:23/01/2026

Abstract:

The early seeds of American identity have begun to germinate with the advent of a religious-cultural group called the Puritans who determined this identity. This paper aims to explore the construction of this identity. We demonstrate the distinctiveness of American identity through a historical process that unfolds itself in several stages. We advance the thesis that American identity reveals several natures, and that American identity has an ethnic foundation. Each nature of this identity characterizes an era in American history. Through the examination of some historical facts, this paper attempts at answering the questions: What are the historical origins of American identity? What is or are the nature(s) of these origins? The approach advocated is a pragmatic qualitative-analytical approach of historical facts, which contributed to its construction. The conclusions of the study are as follows: first, the nature of American identity is multifaceted and each nature characterizes a definite era in American history; second, American identity is founded on ethnicity.

Keywords: American history; American identity; ethnicity; Protestants; Puritans.

ملخص

إن البذور الأولى للهوية الأمريكية بدأت تتورد مع مجيء جماعة دينية-ثقافية تسمى بالبوريتانيين-التطهيريين الذين حددوا هذه الهوية. يهدف هذا المقال إلى استكشاف بناء هذه الهوية. نوضح تميز الهوية الأمريكية من خلال مساق تاريخي يتجلى تدريجيا عبر عدد من المراحل. نقدم فرضية أن الهوية الأمريكية تكشف عن طبائع متعددة، وأن كل طبيعة لهذه الهوية تميز حقبة محددة من التاريخ الأمريكي. من خلال معاينة بعض الوقائع التاريخية، يحاول هذا المقال الإجابة على الأسئلة: ما هي الأصول التاريخية للهوية الأمريكية؟ ماهي طبيعة أو طبائع هذه الأصول؟ المنهج المتبنى في هذا المقال منهج نوعي-تحليلي عملي للوقائع التاريخية التي ساهمت في بنائها. نتائج الدراسة كما يلي: أولا، الهوية الأمريكية متعددة الجوانب وكل جانب منها يميز مرحلة معينة من التاريخ الأمريكي؛ ثانيا، الهوية الأمريكية مؤسسة على الإثنية.

كلمات مفتاحية: التاريخ الأمريكي؛ الهوية الأمريكية؛ الإثنية؛ البروتستانتيون؛ البوريتانيون-التطهيريون.

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1. Introduction

U.S. identity has aroused the special interest of scholars within the field of American studies. This interest is undoubtedly sparked by the very particular distinctiveness of American identity, since this identity is an identity of a nation of immigrants who come from various cultural backgrounds. However, among all the ethnic groups who have migrated to and have lived in the United States the Puritans remain truly exceptional in American history. The Puritans conclusively determined American identity since the seventeenth century. In this paper, we attempt to shed light on how the Puritans constructed the identity of a nation during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In order to carry this out, we advance the thesis that American identity had several natures, viz. ethno-religious, geographical-ecological and political. Each one of these natures characterized a definite era of American history during these two centuries. In addition, we suggest that the ethno-cultural aspect (of the migrant group called Puritans) is the decisive factor on which American identity depends, as ethnicity is thought to be remarkably productive of the identity of a nation.

U.S. identity has been carefully studied in the contemporary era because of its complex ethnic constitution. Samuel P. Huntington's *Who Are We? America's Great Debate* (2005) remains undeniably the definitive study of the issue of American identity in the twenty-first century. But as far as the historical perspective of the study of this identity is concerned, a number of studies have been carried out by scholars. Bruce C. Daniels (2012) explores how the first Puritans already shaped the earliest nature of American identity when they had established in New England in *New England Nation: The Country the Puritans Built*. In addition, Frederick Jackson Turner's work on the geography of the frontier and its dramatic impact on American character remains the major work on American identity in the nineteenth century (Turner, 1921). Despite its acknowledged importance as an issue, however, American identity needs further investigation from a historical perspective in order to understand the historical process of its formation, especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In this paper, a pragmatic qualitative-analytical approach is adopted in order to explore relevant historical facts which contributed greatly to the construction of this identity. First, we will attempt to define briefly what identity in general and ethnic identity in particular mean, as the latter will help understand the implications of ethnicity in the historical context of arguments concerning American identity. Second, the ethno-religious sources of American identity will be examined. Third, geographical-ecological factors that were involved in the historical development of American identity will be identified.

1. The Essence of Identity

If we look at the word "identity" in English, we will notice that it is fairly of a neoteric use in the language for it has been used since the sixteenth century. The present paper examines group identity and does not refer to personal or individual identity. Thus, the word identity in the former sense may convey several ideas such as self-understanding, character, nationality, ethnicity, self-definition, etc. Nonetheless, a few inclusive definitions of the concept of identity, which we are going to propose initially, do fulfil the purpose of

this study adequately.

Identity is the abstract idea that directly involves “people’s concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others” and it “is largely determined by the groups to which they feel they belong” (Hogg & Abrams, 1998, p.2). Identity can equally operate as a strong connection between environment and interests. The concept evokes the images of distinctiveness that are held and projected by an actor, formed and modified across time in virtue of relations with significant “others”. Identity “is also the relationship of the Other to oneself” (Hall, 1989, p.16). Therefore, an identity needs other identities in order to be defined, as it cannot be defined in isolation. Eventually, the concept of identity is primarily employed to designate how groups both define themselves and are defined by others grounded on race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture (Deng, 1995, p. 1).

Ethnicity, religion, language, and culture are the most concrete manifestations of ethnic identity. To clarify matters from the outset, identity was introduced in anthropological studies as ethnicity. This latter demonstrates directly a central aspect of the current study. Therefrom the fundamental importance of ethnic identity to the present study should be fully grasped prior to a solid understanding of the historical construction of American identity. Thus, ethnic identity is the collective identity of an ethnic group or ethnicity. In the main, what clearly renders an identity “ethnic”, and initially establishes a group as an ethnic one is the belief in a common origin and history. Indeed, in Weberian thought a human group is considered to be ethnic when its members subjectively believe in their common descent either on account of their physical similarities or traditions or both, or on account of colonization or migration. This putative belief in common ancestry is also associated with the existence of what Weber calls *Heimatsgefühl*, i.e. the feeling or sense of the homeland (Weber, 1978, pp. 388-389). So, culture becomes a channel through which we identify, recognize, deny identities, and wage fierce battles for. Furthermore, what is ethnic unites a group of people together and sharply distinguishes them from other groups because they claim the same ancestry, hence making them not only share a past but also face a common destiny. In order to capture the essence of identity and ethnic identity in particular, the subsequent section will examine the ethno-religious as well as the politico-historical sources of American identity.

2.The Ethno-Religious and Politico-Historical Sources of American Identity

The early origins of American identity go back to sixteenth-century Europe, especially in Germany starting from 1517, where the anti-Catholic movement was first led by the German theologian and religious reformer Martin Luther. In 1520, Luther wrote *On the Papacy at Rome* wherein he accused the pope of being an Antichrist openly. Luther became, thus, the catalyst for the historical division of Western Christendom between Catholicism and Protestantism. Luther and a number of his supporters originally intended to reform the Catholic Church and strongly protested against its policies, especially against the sale of indulgences; hence, he and his followers were named “Protestants”. Later, the Protestant movement spread far and wide throughout Europe and reached England.

King Henry VIII was the first king who supported the Protestants in England, by

reforming the Church of England. Henry VIII's son Edward VI and second daughter Elizabeth I adopted the same policies as their father as regards the Church of England. However, Henry VIII's first daughter Mary I (ruled 1553-1558), whose mother was the Spanish Catholic Catherine of Aragon, fiercely opposed Protestantism in England and re-established Catholicism. After Mary I's restoration of Catholicism in England, a great number of Protestants were arrested, executed, or burned at the stake. Instead of containing the Protestant movement in England, Mary's religious persecution of the Protestants had the opposite result: It rekindled Protestant feeling against Catholicism in the kingdom.

When Henry VIII's second daughter Elizabeth I ascended the throne of England (after the death of her sister Mary I in 1558), she re-instituted Protestantism in the country. Likewise, Elizabeth's nephew James I (who had inherited her after her death in 1603) promoted Protestantism. Nevertheless, a group of English Protestants did not appear completely satisfied with Elizabethan and Jacobean reforms relating to the Church of England. They considered that the reforms that had been adopted by both Elizabeth I and James I were not radical enough to counteract the significant influence of Catholicism in England. Therefore, this group of Protestants searched to purify the Church of England from its remaining Catholic clout actively. Thenceforward these Protestants began to be sarcastically referred to as "Puritans" by their adverse party.

Later, the Puritans even revolted against King Charles I (ruled 1625-1649) when he reinforced his political absolutism in the kingdom and actively sought to diminish the power of the English Parliament. The then Parliament's majority consisted of Puritans, who felt themselves exposed to considerable danger politically and religiously. All the more so, Charles I's Catholic wife Henrietta Maria (sister of the French king Louis XIII) as well as Charles' Catholic advisers wielded enormous influence over him; thus, they strengthened the Catholic party in England once again. Therefore, the subsequent escalating conflict between the king and the Puritan parliamentarians dramatically climaxed in the English Civil War (1642-1651). Charles I was executed in the immediate aftermath of the English Civil War in 1649. As a consequence, the Puritans entertained fervent hopes for their future in England after Charles I's execution. As a matter of fact, the Puritans rose to absolute power in England, Scotland, and Ireland under Oliver Cromwell's and then his son Henry's leadership until 1659. As soon as Charles II (ruled 1660-1685) had been restored to the throne in 1660, the Puritans began to lose political power and their liberties were seriously restricted. All of their hopes in Britain rapidly faded.

Accordingly, the Puritans began to flee Britain during the Carolean era (1660-1685) because they "found themselves the objects of persecution, and nothing remained but to seek a new land where the heavy hand of repression could not reach them" (Commons, 1907, p. 28). Notwithstanding, some of them had escaped England during the reigns of Mary I and James I towards North America earlier. Pre-eminently, the Clarendon Code (a series of laws of the English Parliament between 1661 and 1665) severely restricted the Puritans: They were enjoined from holding office, debarred from church offices, and their meetings were banned. It was then that the ultimate and inevitable demise of Puritanism in England began. However, during times of their unprecedented prosperity and political

absolute power under Cromwell, and their dramatic decline under James I and Charles II, the Puritans had become intensely aware of their distinct identity compared with the other English within English society. Moreover, they attempted to express their identity and assert it by clearly underscoring its profound difference from Catholic identity. But why did the Protestants in general and the Puritans in particular managed to identify themselves against the Catholics explicitly and why did they become sharply critical of Catholicism?

The crucial difference between Catholicism and Protestantism (and the latter's political and religious offshoot: Puritanism) arises from the critical issue of authority. While the Catholics endorse the absolute authority of the Church fully, the Protestants sanction the supreme authority of the Bible. The Catholics forcefully argue that Jesus Christ had established a community and had not written a book. However, the Protestants including the Puritans reason that Jesus is the "word" that is known by virtue of reading, preaching, and hearing the Scriptures. Protestant reformers strongly urged Christian believers to read and interpret the Bible for themselves, and did not impel them to accept the authority of the church meekly as Catholicism did. It is this profound difference between these two Christian thinking principles (the Catholic and the Protestant) that created two fundamentally distinct and clearly separate Christian identities. It is in this specific context that being a Protestant emerged as a new Christian identity. Indeed, for a new identity to develop, another contrasting one must exist. If Catholicism and Catholics had not existed, Protestants and Protestantism would not have existed either; and Protestant identity would not have seen the light of day. This is why, the concept of the "other" is closely connected with that of identity. A fortiori, identity underlies difference. Identity "involves both self-awareness of the group and awareness of others from which the [group] seeks to differentiate itself. This means that identity has no meaning per se. It becomes meaningful in contrast to other [groups]" (Triandafyllidou, 1998, p. 599).

With relation to religious identity, for example, most scholars think that it is a category of group identity. As a category of group identity, religion entails emotional and evaluative associations (Callero, 2007, p. 4425). An individual's driving need to identify with a religious group is created by the threat to the individual's own self-esteem and well-being. Because of this threat, then, most scholars of religious studies believe that the individual identifies with a religious group as this identification provides a pre-eminent position and renders great assistance to this individual. In consequence, the extremely serious threat perceived by the Puritans as being posed by both the Catholics and later the English as a whole after the Restoration facilitated the Puritans' positive identification with one another, first within English society and then in America. Theoretically, religion can be the *primum mobile* of the process of the construction of a stable and fixed identity (Hood et al. 2009, p.135). This early identification of these Puritans with Puritanism and against Catholicism is then the earliest stage in the construction of American identity. The next stage of the development of this identity was to occur in America.

3. The Puritans, First Devisers of American Identity

The year 1630 remains a memorable year in American history because it marks the foundation of the first Puritan colony in Massachusetts. This historic event also marks

somehow the genesis of American identity. What sharply distinguishes the first English Puritan migrants to North America from their English countrymen who were left behind in England is the former's spirit and mindset. "[Puritan] identity was what singled them out for victimization and discrimination in Jacobean and Caroline England" and "Their sense of identity, already strong, was reinforced by their experience and suffering" (McGrath, 2007, p.169). As a matter of fact, the very inception of America thereupon is Puritan in origin and so is American identity. Thus, we argue that it is Puritanism which made America and American identity, as "The Puritan is the heart of America" (Flynn, 1920, p.97). How can we then characterize the true nature of this embryonic American identity?

We postulate that American identity at this stage is three-dimensional, namely Protestant-Puritan-English. Put in simple words, the nature of this identity is religious-sectarian-ethnic. The religious nature of American identity, in its inception, is heavily emphasized by the stringent socio-political restrictions imposed on the Puritans in England and their systematic religious persecutions during the Jacobean and Carolean eras. Furthermore, when the Puritans reached America, their identity had been already and fully articulated in fierce opposition to Catholics both in Europe and England. Similarly, after their arrival to North America, the Puritans' religious identity was strongly expressed counter to Catholics in bordering Canada and Native "heathens" who surrounded them. What sharpens this sense of identity still more is the Great Migration of around 30,000 (O'Neill, 2010, p. 222) Puritans from Britain to North America between 1630 and 1640. To a certainty, this high number of Puritans came from Britain not only to increase the population of the Puritan colonies in North America substantially, but to revive the Puritan spirit and thus preserve the religious Puritan nature of this incipient American identity as well. Moreover, during the middle of the seventeenth century, a major political event occurred in the North American Puritan colonies. That event exerted tremendous influence on the nature of incipient American identity.

Since the number of Puritan colonists increased considerably in New England in the seventeenth century, the number of colonies extended further north, south, and west of Massachusetts. The most notable of these new colonies were Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Haven, and New Hampshire. This major colonial extension resulted in another political event that is the transference of political authority in the colonies from the trade companies that had first governed the colonies to the British crown. This transference of political authority involved North American Puritan colonists in the nascent British Empire in a direct manner. This major political change conferred considerable benefits on the economy of the North American colonies because their trade boomed as they widely exported both to Britain and its colonies in the expansive British Empire. This close politico-economic association of American colonists with the British Empire made them assume British identity automatically. Of course, British identity is integrally related to politics since Great Britain as a state began to exist in 1707 long after the kingdoms of Scotland, England and Ireland had first united under the kingship of James I in 1603. It follows that the identity of the American colonists revealed a political nature then. Thereupon, a second stage in the historical process of the construction of American identity

was reached.

Additionally, Puritan spirit kept pace with the massive demographic increase and territorial expansion of the Puritans in the north-eastern part of modern-day United States. This expansion eventually reached the borders of French Canada in the north and Native peoples in the western Frontier. This perilous geographical closeness engendered frequent and violent armed clashes between the Puritans and French colonists on one side, and between the Puritans and Native Indians on the other side. Unquestionably, these ethnic clashes were factors that affected the nature of the development of American identity dramatically.

4.The Development of English-British Identity in North American Colonies

Two of the first major armed conflicts between New England colonists and the Natives in North American colonial history are the Pequot War and King Philip's War that broke out respectively in 1637 and 1675. These wars were clearly caused by the Puritans' ever-increasing demand for land. It is claimed that conflicts "centre around explicit interest and identities" and that they "involve cultural and psychic processes" (Ross, 2001, p.73). Although these wars were mainly caused by the need for land, they were also provoked by antithetical identities and world views. Moreover, the other reason for war on the Natives is the Puritans' distorted perception of these peoples.

For the Puritans, the Natives truly represented the "other". The Puritans were simply astonished by the identity of the Natives. In the present paper, it is argued that the identity of the Puritans is forcefully expressed through religion and ethnicity, respectively before and after the Pequot War. The Puritans' religious identity (which is mainly monotheist and Christian) grew extremely strong when it was favourably contrasted with the identity of the Pequot (who were polytheist and pagan). Furthermore, the Puritan settlers regarded themselves as a civilized people who constructed an excellent model for the uncivilized Pequot. As a result, these settlers revealed an identity of a civilized people, antagonistic towards the identity of the "savage" Pequot.

Further, the idea of savagery convinced the Puritan settlers in North America that their religious-ethnic identity (Christian-English-British-civilized) was exposed to extreme danger by the existence of Natives' identity, whose major constituent aspects were "anti-Christian" and "uncivilized". On account of the cardinal importance of the element of savagery in the eyes of the Puritan settlers, their positive identification with Christianity, civilization, and Englishness-Britishness brought their religious-cultural-ethnic identity to the fore. Also, this deep-seated fear of the savage and its outgrowth, that is the urgent desire to fight the Natives, were directly experienced by the Puritans' contiguity to the Natives as well as their geographical remoteness from the civilized world of England and Europe. In other words, both the Puritan settlers' geographical contiguity with the Natives (notwithstanding the two were worlds apart on a cultural level) as well as the Puritans' vast distance away from the civilized world of England and Europe were the two most important historical and geographical circumstances that instilled in the first settlers a genuine fear of being culturally perverted by the autochthones. These decisive historical, cultural, geographical, and psychological factors predisposed American identity to emerge.

The historical process of the construction of American identity maintained its course into the late seventeenth and during the eighteenth centuries. During that period, American identity reflected another intrinsic nature in its development, peculiarly within the immediate context of European colonial wars.

5. The Prominence of Anglo-American Identity within the Context of European Colonial Wars

In addition to the New England colonies established by the Puritans in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire, other colonies were founded by non-Puritan settlers such as New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia. With the concomitant increasing number of the population in these colonies, Anglo-American settlers assumed that their territories were very limited geographically in unfavourable comparison with the French and Spanish colonies in North America. Anglo-American colonists were entirely confined within a limited area stretching from the Atlantic seaboard in the east to the Appalachians in the west. However, the French colonial territories in North America stretched from the mouth of the Saint Lawrence River to the Great Lakes (from east to west); and from the Great Lakes and along the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico (from north to south). As for the Spanish colonies, they included Florida, Texas, and the area north of the Rio Grande River.

This heated rivalry for more land among the British, French, and Spanish empires induced the three empires to violently clash with one another over the frontiers of their respective colonies. The North American colonial settlers of each of these empires found themselves suddenly and directly involved in these colonial wars. As for the Anglo-American colonists, they greatly desired to expand their settlements further west into the Ohio Valley. The latter expanded from the Great Lakes (in the north) to the Ohio River (in the south), and from the Allegheny Mountains (in the east) to the Mississippi River (in the west). This region separated the British colonies from the French colonies and the region's control by either the British or the French was one of the major causes of the European colonial wars of the eighteenth century. France had claimed the Valley of the Ohio by reason of the discovery of the Mississippi by the French explorer René-Robert Cavelier de La Salle a century earlier. On the other hand, Britain had asserted its claim to the same valley forasmuch as the valley was near Britain's thirteen colonies. In order to halt the rapid territorial advance of Anglo-American settlements to the west, the French wished to control this zone too. Therefore, war between France and Britain became ineluctable.

This war lasted from 1754 to 1763. Europeans know it by the name of the Seven Years' War while Americans call it the French and Indian War. During the seven years that this war lasted, the Anglo-American colonists showed a powerful expression of British identity. Their British identity developed in a context where another opposing identity, i.e. French identity, was developing as well, and notably in a proximate area, i.e. Canada. The Anglo-Americans' sense of belonging to Britain was further stimulated by the final victory of Great Britain in the War and the coming into force of the treaty of Paris in 1763. The Treaty of Paris ceded all of Canada to Britain, hence eliminating French threats against Anglo-American colonists altogether.

Nevertheless, Native Indian allies of the French soon organized into a confederation which comprised the Shawnee, Miami, Potawatomi, Ottawa, Delaware, and Seneca under the leadership of Pontiac. The confederation launched successive violent attacks on Anglo-American colonies and was recorded in American history as Pontiac's war (1763-1764). As the confederation's chief demand was to keep their ancestral territory and because the Seven Years' War had been so costly to the British, the latter responded to the confederation by ceding territory (the Indian Reserve) to the Natives in order to secure peace. The Anglo-American colonists soon chafed at the strict restrictions imposed on their westward expansion by the British government. Then American identity passed through a distinct stage in the historical process of its construction.

As referred to earlier, the Seven Years' War was very high-priced for Great Britain. The heavy debts that the country incurred during the course of the war were paid by the British colonies of North America in the form of new taxes, although the Anglo-American colonists were not represented in the British Parliament. The Stamp Act of 1765, for instance, is a perfect illustration of the perception of the Anglo-American colonists of the idea of "no taxation without representation". This Act was not the only act which seriously restricted the economic and commercial activities of the colonists; other acts were passed by the British Parliament before and after the Stamp Act.

This aroused the bitter hostility of the colonists, who were also circumscribed from settling in the Indian Reserve. Consequently, the powerful alliance that had been well sealed between Britain and its thirteen American colonies in the Seven Years' War began to waver. Likewise, this alliance grew extremely weak as soon as the Anglo-American colonists' acute anxiety over French threats had been totally eliminated after the war. In a word, by restricting the Anglo-American colonists from settling in the Indian Reserve, by compelling them to pay British debts during the war in addition to other taxes without being represented in the British Parliament, the colonists reasonably and passionately believed that the British were acting against their territorial, economic, legal and political interests. By acting against the interests of the North American colonists, the British attained at long last the status of the "other", i.e. the "enemy" in the eyes of the settlers. It is against this new "other" that the Anglo-Americans were identifying themselves as simply "Americans".

This grave crisis between Britain and its thirteen American colonies, thus, sharpened even more the sense of the colonists' American identity. These political developments in the relationships between Britain and its thirteen North American colonies set in motion the final stage of the historical process of the construction of American identity.

It is premised that this last stage of the historical process of the construction of American identity is of true political nature essentially. Americans' eighteenth-century rebellion against Britain sealed the disunion with Britain invariably. The Americans fiercely fought a violent revolution that terminated their identification with the British definitively as "the American Revolution represents the triumph of American nationalism, the final catharsis enabling the colonists to shed their British skin and emerge as a new American people" (Torsella, 1988, p. 168).

Instead, the inhabitants of the thirteen North American colonies, who no longer

identified themselves as British (against whom they carried a war), glorified their newly-found Americanness with great patriotic pride as they became a people with a distinct identity. Subsequently, the American Revolution of 1775 abides as the unique expression of American identity. Yet, another essential aspect of American identity that makes it an exceptional identity and which we are going to discuss below is its geographical-ecological nature.

6. American Geography-Ecology and American Identity

According to anthropologists, the biophysical environment entails constant reciprocity between human beings and biophysical features. As a result, the immediate environment elicits our reactions, regulates our line of conduct, and even makes us what we are. The American people is, thus, made by the environment wherein it was born and grew.

When the first English settlers set foot in North America, they were first astounded to discover a brand-new pattern of environment, strikingly different from the one they had left behind in England. The new land was unspoiled, yet wild and harsh. For instance, the newly-arrived English settlers to North America found the first winters there much more severe than the winters they used to spend in England. Some of them even died out of cold within the first year of their arrival. This encounter has left a lasting imprint on American character since then.

It is starting from the second generation who were born on that new soil, in this new environment, that one can speak of true Americans indisputably. The first generation who had come from England and had reached the shores of North America was a mere continuation of Englishness in an American environment. The first generation of settlers always remembered the old country, hence unequivocally and strongly identifying with England. The end result of this was a strong expression of ethnic identity. Also, for first-generation colonists, North America was more a colonial locus of the assertion of their English identity than an immediate impetus for the advent of American identity (Hartz, 1964, p. 13). To come to the point, what changed for the first-generation colonists was just the land. However, their identity remained the same ethnic, cultural (English) identity. The corroborative evidence for this thesis is that one's ethnoreligious identity is asserted when one is transplanted from one's own ethnic environment to an alien environment. So, when transplanted from England to North America, the first English colonists forcefully expressed their English identity in ways they could not have done among their countrymen in England.

Additionally, the first-generation colonists turned the environment immediately surrounding them into an English environment. In order to Anglicize the area that they inhabited, they expelled the Natives from their settlements, virtually annihilated the local fauna by introducing their own animals which had been brought from England. Even for their domestic animals (such as sheep and cattle), they shaped the area profoundly by clearing more forests for the purpose of providing more grazing land for all the animals that were sustaining the increasing number of the settler population. Concurrently, all these relevant factors had operated efficiently in strengthening the first-generation's sense of English identity and constraining any emergence of an American identity.

Contrariwise, it is the alien constituent of the new land that is taken in by the second

generation and it is these people who are considered the early true Americans, with the conspicuous exception of the Natives, of course. Clearly, this new environment differentiated the second generation of settlers from the first. For the former the new land is a true land, whereas the latter intended this new land to be a continuation of the old mother country.

Summarily, the first-generation colonists in North America maintained their English identity properly, even by shaping the new American environment which they controlled according to their English vision. As relates to the subsequent generations of colonists who were born on the American soil, things went differently. In addition, ecological and geographical factors also influenced them (the first and subsequent generations of settlers) deeply, but the perception of the identity of each generation was not in the least similar.

Conclusion

We approached American identity from a historical perspective. The impulse was generated from the historical and immense significance that ethnicity occupies in the construction of identities, especially an identity of a nation. From the outset of this paper, we pondered over a number of questions about the nature of American identity during the pre-revolutionary era by enquiring into the factors involved in the formation of American identity. In our answers, we attributed importance to the interplay between ethnoreligious groups and the geographical-ecological, political, and cultural structures that these groups interact with. Our analysis indicates that American identity at this point of pre-revolutionary American history is firmly based on ethnicity. The analysis also reveals that a number of various aspects characterize the nature of this identity, and that each aspect characterizes in turn a determined period of pre-revolutionary American history. The historical process of the construction of American identity manifests a more complex self-perception by Americans, which embodies various identities. Additionally, the findings of the present research foreground the positive impact of ethnicity on American identity. Furthermore, we argued that the presence of external enemies has positive impact in the assertion of a unique and distinctive American identity. However, subsequent research is required in order to overcome the inadequacies of the current research.

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