

## **State of Mind: Inventing the American Identity** *Konami Compton*

### **RATIONALE**

The importance of this curriculum unit is limitless. As an individual living in the United States, whether a legal citizen or not, one is a member of the American society. Through everyday events, whether one realizes it or not, he/she is buying into the American national identity through recreational activities, sporting events, and the economy. Immigrants come to this country, citizens protest their government, and children go to school because they value the ideas that form our national identity: liberty, freedom, and individualism. This unit is about everyday life, not just about a group of dead white men (as students often complain history is). The creation of a national identity personalizes history for the students.

The formation of the American national identity, while historical in nature, is modern in its applicability. The United States is a relatively new country, yet we have the longest working Constitution in the world. In a time when dozens of countries are violently torn apart because of religion, ethnicity, and economics, how has America managed to retain an identity that still conveys meaning to the majority of its citizens? After discussing the beginning of our national identity, students can use current events to discuss the evolution and transformation of the American identity. The importance of this unit is that it connects America's past to its present and future.

In this modern day era of multiculturalism, some students have a hard time connecting to early American history, which often happens to focus on the lives of dead white men of European heritage. This curriculum unit offers a way to unite the classroom, yet still encourage individuality. One activity of this unit has the students writing down their own interpretation of what the American identity is. After discussing the values and ideas of American society that they enjoy (like freedom and individuality), they hopefully will begin to see that they are not so different from their classmates as they thought. Then, after introducing how the Revolutionary heroes put the radical ideas of the Enlightenment into practice (the same ideas that the students just supported) in *The Declaration of Independence*, the students can realize that they have a connection to the dead white men. Another example of how this unit encourages unity among multiculturalism is to have students discuss how minorities groups have contributed to the national identity. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson are not the only heroes who spoke about natural rights, freedoms, and social contract theory.

This curriculum unit offers a framework on which to build multiple units, a semester or even an entire year. When discussing the events and people of America's past (whether it is during the Western Expansion, Civil War, Great Depression or Vietnam), one can always ask the question, "how did it impact America's identity?" "Has the definition of what an American is changed because of this person/event?" The formation of an American identity is not just a topic the students will learn about and then never be exposed to again. This subject lends itself to multiple interpretations and discussions throughout the entire school year.

Another strength of this curriculum unit is that it focuses almost exclusively on higher-level thinking skills, including discussion, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating. This unit is not about the memorization of facts, but instead relies on students using the facts and personal experiences to explain the development and evolution of the American identity. Students have to examine documents like *The Declaration of Independence* and the *Constitution* and explain how the ideas contained in them helped to develop our identity. The students will analyze primary sources to examine how or if the identity has changed over time. The students become an active participant in the classroom as they seek to explain their own interpretation(s) of the American identity. The discussion of the invention of America's national identity is a topic that our students can experience for themselves; it is NOT an obsolete fact.

## **ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

### ***Nevada State Content Standards:***

History Content Standard 1.12.1 – Analyze a current event and develop a position

History Content Standard 2.12.1 – Frame and evaluate historical questions from multiple viewpoints

History Content Standard 2.12.2 – Integrate, analyze and organize historical information from a variety of sources

History Content Standard 2.12.3 – Research, analyze, and interpret informational tools including: charts, diagrams, graphs, tables, maps, political cartoons, and photographs

History Content Standard 6.12.3 – Explain the political and economic causes and effects of the American Revolution

History Content Standard 6.12.4 – Identify the ideas of John Locke, Thomas Paine, and Thomas Jefferson and their influences on the American Revolution

History Content Standard 6.12.7 – Describe the Constitution’s underlying principles, including: checks and balances, federalism, limited government, popular sovereignty, and separation of powers

Civics Content Standard 1.12.2 – Explain the role of social contract theory, natural rights philosophy, and republicanism in the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution

Civics Content Standard 1.12.3 – Explain symbols and documents of a nation and how they represent its identity

**Objectives:** Students Will Be Able To

1. Define what a national identity is
2. Explain the importance of having a national identity
3. Describe their vision of what America’s national identity is
4. Work together and formulate a class vision of what America’s national identity is
5. Identify symbols of the United States
6. Explain how those symbols express the national identity of the country
7. Interpret documents and other artifacts for their contributions to our national identity
8. Identify historical and modern day heroes who personify America’s national identity

**CHRONOLOGICAL CONTENT OUTLINE**

This introductory curriculum unit is intended for a high school classroom on the 105 minutes block schedule. This unit is designed to occur after the American Revolution and Beginning of Government units so that the students have the necessary background information and understanding of the following:

- What the American Revolution was, its causes and main ideas
- The people involved in the Revolution
- The Declaration of Independence
- Impacts of the American Revolution on society
- Beginnings of government for the new nation
- The *Constitution*, the ideas contained within it, and why it was needed
- The People involved in forming the new government
- Significance of the *Constitution*

***Day One:***

- I. Introduce the concept of an American national identity
  - A. Define what an identity is
  - B. Define what a nation is and the requirements of being a nation

1. The requirements of a nation as defined by Anthony D. Smith in *National Identity* are: territory, people, common myths and historical memories, public culture, common economy, and common legal rights.
  2. Questions to consider:
    - a. Are all these requirements necessary to be considered a nation?
    - b. Who defines who is a nation (the people, other countries)?
- C. Discuss when the American national identity was formed - before 1750s, 1776, or 1800
1. Central to this debate is the question, "when did America become a nation?" While there is no wrong or right answer, the students should be able to prove their answer using facts from the text and other sources
- II. Describe the American national identity
- A. Individually, students will come up with their own definitions and write them out on colored "bricks" (long pieces of construction paper) to be hung up around the room.

### ***Day Two***

- I. Describe the American national identity (continued)
  - A. Students share their personal interpretations of the American national identity
  - B. Cooperative learning activity: examine primary sources and discuss what each source is saying about America.
    1. *The Declaration of Independence*
    2. *The Constitution*
    3. *Bill of Rights*
    4. Excerpts from *Poor Richard's Almanac*
    5. "Remember the Ladies" - letter to John Adams from Abigail on March 31, 1776
  - C. Using the primary sources as evidence, determine the ideas that are fundamental to our national identity: liberty, individualism, equality, & republicanism
    1. Explain/discuss and elicit examples for each idea
- II. Answer the following question, "what is an American?"
  - A. Students come up with their personal descriptions of what an American is
  - B. Examine sources and discuss how each describes what an American is
    1. "Yankee Doodle" song
    2. Excerpt from J. Hector St. John De Crevecoeur's "What Is An American?"
    3. Henry Lee's Tribute at George Washington's funeral

4. Joseph Hopkinson's 1798 song "Hail, Columbia"
  5. Joel Barlow's 1793 poem "The Hasty Pudding"
- C. As a class, create a cluster about what an American is

### ***Day Three***

- I. Identify and discuss the symbols used to portray our national identity
  - A. Questions to consider:
    1. If an identity is intangible, how do we know it exists?
    2. Do the symbols that represent America ever change?
  - B. Examples: Bald Eagle, Liberty Bell, Independence Hall, George Washington, Paul Revere, *The Declaration of Independence*, the *Constitution*, Uncle Sam White House, Capital Building, US dollar, "Stars and Stripes," etc.
- II. Connect the symbols to the ideology of the American identity – Freedom Activity
  - A. Each group will choose a new symbol of freedom (one that is not already in use) and create an illustration.
    1. Presentations of freedom symbols
- III. Newspaper Activity
  - A. Find a newspaper article that deals with the American national identity or symbols that represent our identity and do a write-up on the article explaining how the articles relates to our national identity
- IV. Assessment: Write a poem/ create a children's picture book about America's identity

### ***Throughout the year***

- I. After major events/issues/people, discuss if there has been any changes in America's national identity based on the event/person since Revolutionary Era
  - A. Examples: Civil War, Westward Expansion and treatment of Native American, Industrialization and immigrant factory workers, American imperialism, World War I, Red Scare, women's suffrage movement, treatment of migrant farm workers during Great Depression, Executive Order 9066, McCarthyism, Civil Rights Movement, student protest movement, 9/11, etc.

### ***End of Year***

- I. Ask the students to once again define the American national identity. Has it changed since the 1700s?
  - A. Examine primary sources to answer discussion question
    1. Martin Luther King, Jr's speech "I Have a Dream"
    2. Helen Reddy's song "I am Woman"
    3. Mario Cuomo's 1984 nominating speech "A Tale of Two Cities" for candidate Walter Mondale at the Democratic Convention

4. *Texas v. Johnson's* decision written by Supreme Court Justice William J. Brennan, Jr. "We do not consecrate the flag by punishing its desecration"
5. Wendell Barry's "The Farm"
6. Ishmael Reed's 1988 "America: The Multinational Society"

II. Final Exam Essay question regarding the development of the American national identity, its symbolism and purpose

### **TEACHING STRATEGIES**

Given the nature of this topic, discussion has to be involved, both in small groups and as a class. Since the subject matter of a national identity is rather abstract, discussions will start out structured with teacher directed questions to get the students involved. Small group discussions will be used in analyzing the primary sources because students often have difficulty interpreting and understanding the language used during the Colonial Era. Whole class discussions will occur to hear what each small group discovers about their documents and to formulate a consensus on what America's national identity was during the Revolutionary Era.

Discussions are a vital part of the classroom for a variety of reasons. Based on the responses, the teacher can gauge if the students are learning the material or if they need more instruction. Discussions allow the students to respond to other students, not just the teacher. They get to hear what everyone else is thinking. Discussion helps a student clarify his/her thoughts as he/she expresses them to the class. Additionally, since this topic is abstract, it focuses on higher level thinking skills as student analyze primary sources to uncover their meaning. Simple recitation or answering worksheet questions will not allow the students to fully grasp the material. A national identity is based on shared feelings and discussions are about sharing the information and learning. The difficulty with discussions is to rid the students of their inhibitions about speaking in front of their peers and making mistakes about interpreting materials.

Another teaching strategy this topic lends itself to is the use of primary sources to trace the development of America's national identity. Textbooks tend to focus on factual information about American history, completely ignoring how the people of the nation felt about their new country. Primary sources can correct this lapse by including documents (letters, speeches, diaries) written by the people who made the history. Primary sources give a personal voice to history and often times make history come alive for the students. History is not just about the facts and dates, but also about the people who lived the events. The use of primary sources in the classroom draws the students in.

A valuable tool to use in the classroom that allows for student interaction is think/pair/share. The students first interpret the document individually. Then they compare information with a partner and reach a consensus. The class then reconvenes as a whole with each team presenting their information. The importance of this strategy is that all students get the chance to express themselves and get guidance in working through difficult material. Cooperative learning strategies have proven successful in the classroom because students are accountable for their learning. By working with others, they are encouraged to become an active participant because they are part of a group and not signaled out. In many cases, this lessens the fear of speaking out.

The last major teaching strategy employed in this unit is the use of the arts and media. Photographs are interpreted as representations of national identity. Songs are played and analyzed for their messages. How does "This Land is Your Land" characterize our national identity? One of the assessments of this unit is to either write a poem or create a children's picture book about America's national identity. The arts/music are an important part of learning because not all students learn the same way or can express what they have learned in a traditional method. By using photographs and songs, I can try to reach those visual students who do not learn through lecture or reading a text. Using the arts in the classroom can also bring history alive for the students by giving the facts and dates a face or image. The students can become a witness to American history.

## CONTENT ESSAY

The United States of America. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, it sits as the most powerful nation in the world. America may be a relatively young country (from a global perspective), but it is one of the longest lasting republics. The country began as a collection of thirteen ragamuffin colonies struggling for survival as a cog in the vast British empire, but eventually they began to flourish. After less than two hundred years of settlement, this area accomplished something hitherto never done by a colony. The influential men and women of the Founder's Generation set about establishing the American colonies' independence from the Mother Country and forming a new nation during the late 1700s. These people had the awesome task of uniting the multitude of ethnic and socio-economic groups into a common corps. While *The Declaration of Independence* declared the birth of the United States of America and the *Constitution* created a strong federal government to guide the young republic, there was also an invisible force at work. This force gave the colonists a reason to believe in and follow the government. This force united the thirteen regions into one nation and gave the people a common foundation on which to build. This force was a new national identity called *American*. This new identity gave hope and provided the adhesive to bind the new country together. Without it, the United States of America would not be where it is today.

Before examining the development of the American national identity, a definition of what an identity is needs to be established. *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines identity as "the condition or fact of being the same; oneness; the condition or fact of being a specific person or thing; individuality" (Guralnik, 696). Historian and Cornell University Professor Clinton Rossiter explains in *The American Quest* that an identity is a continuing process (Rossiter, 39). An identity is an intangible feeling. It is something that is felt; one cannot go up to an identity and touch it. A national identity therefore is part of or within a set of people who feel that they are the same because they belong to the one nation (Krakau, 19). An identity is also not static. Feelings and processes change with time and therefore, so can an identity.

A national identity is obviously based on a nation as the first word in the term implies. The question then becomes when did America become a nation? This is a debatable issue among historians. Some will argue that America became a nation in the mid-1700s when many colonists began identifying themselves with each other and sharing similar feelings: "To be a nation they must *think* they are a nation" (Rossiter, 39). Historian Elie Kedourie states that an individual feels freedom when he identifies "...himself with the whole, belonging to which endows him with reality" (Kedourie, 30). Before the 1750s, most colonists identified themselves as British. Unity meant loyalty to Great Britain. However, in *This Almost Chosen People*, Historian Russel B. Nye states that by the 1750s, the term "American" had come into use as someone separate than "British" or



"English" (Nye, 52). This separation between British and American also broke "the century-and-a-half hyphen in the Anglo-American identity, thereby releasing the full force of American nationalism" (Mann, 57). The American colonists became a new and distinctive nationality.

Another fact that supports the emergence of an American national identity in the mid-1700s focuses on language. The language spoken in the colonies ceased to be pure British English and instead became a mixture of English with French, Dutch, German, and Indian. By 1754, there were so many "linguistic divergences" with words like "lightening bug" and "back country" appearing in the vernacular, that "...lexicographer Samuel Johnson thought that there might well be an American brand of English" (Nye, 53).

Contributing to the emergence of a shared identity in the mid-1700s was the end of the British policy of salutary neglect. With the passage of the Sugar and Stamp Acts, the British crown was becoming more involved in the colonists' lives. The colonists resented this intrusion and began to see Britain as the enemy and united around that cause. Previously, the colonists saw themselves as British first and their colony second. There were differences between Rhode Islanders, Marylanders, and Virginians. But by the eve of the American War for Independence, Patrick Henry claimed that "'the distinctions between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers, and New Englanders, are no more' and that they are, first and foremost, and unquestionably Americans" (Greenfeld, 47). By the time *The Declaration of Independence* was signed in 1776, an American national identity had already been formed.

Some historians take quite a different point of view, claiming that it was not until the 1800s that an American national identity was formed. In *National Identity*, Historian Anthony D. Smith states that the fundamental features of a national identity include: a shared political community, a single code of rights for all members, territory, common myths and historical memories, a common mass public culture, a common economy, and a community of common descent (Smith, 11-14). According to Rossiter, a nation must have independence, territory, popular cohesion, and self-identity (Rossiter, 27). One requirement these two lists have in common is a shared community or cohesion. While the thirteen colonies ultimately united together to sign *The Declaration of Independence*, some historians such as John Murrin or Liah Greenfeld claim the unity was a façade. Regional differences between the New England and Southern states threatened to tear apart the Continental Congress in 1776 and continued in the Constitutional Convention of 1789. Many delegates such as John Dickinson of Pennsylvania wanted to remain part of the British empire and saw independence as treasonous (Adams, 76). To renounce the British meant ignoring what had been the major unifying force in the colonies: their shared heritage. They may be Bostonians or Jamestownians, but they were still British

(Murrin, 340). Liah Greenfield expresses the same sentiment when writing that although the colonies had a sense of themselves as Americans, "...it was not accompanied by a sense that constituted a unity" (Greenfield, 32). Even the *Articles of Confederation*, while establishing the first attempt at a national government actually created a union of states that gave the states more power than the nation. Historians Colin C. Bonwick and Liah Greenfield point out that the word "nation" (the basis for national identity) does not even appear in *The Declaration of Independence*, *The Articles of Confederation* or the *Constitution*, the documents which helped form the United States of America (Bonwick, 38 and Greenfield, 34).

Another requirement, according to Smith, for a nation to have a national identity is shared rights. *The Declaration of Independence* states, 'we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.' As Abigail Adams, wife of the Massachusetts delegate John Adams, was quick to ask, where are the women in that famous sentence? Additionally, it was common knowledge that all men were not created equal during the 1700s. Native Americans men were thought of as savages while African men were considered property of their owners. The common man may have had more rights than he had in Great Britain, but the white men who owned property still made all of the important decisions (Cayton et al, 80).

Another requirement that both Anthony D. Smith and Clinton Rossiter believe a nation must have is common culture. The new United States lacked a united culture. While the majority of colonists were British, there were also Scots, Scots-Irish, Germans, Irish, and French. These are vastly different cultures each with their own customs and beliefs. The last thing an Irishman or a Frenchman would like to hear is that his culture is similar to the English. As a result of the various ethnic groups, America lacked a common folklore and history (Mann, 47). America lacked shared memories that could unite its citizens in a common goal.

While having land, colonial America also lacked territory and a shared economy. The land the colonists occupied was ultimately owned by Great Britain and although the colonies had declared their independence, Great Britain, who had yet to acknowledge their claim, was not about to forfeit any land to them. As for a common economy, this too proved to be a point of tension for the area. Even though the three colonial regions (New England, Middle, and Southern colonies) had all participated in triangular trade earlier, a divergence was occurring and became a breaking point in the Second Continental Congress and Constitutional Convention. The use of slavery separated the North and the South and would eventually tear the United States of America apart.

Acknowledging that the newly formed United States may not have been a nation in the true sense in 1776 and therefore lacked a *national* identity is to totally ignore what an identity is in the first place. An identity is based on shared feelings. "Where there is no vision, the people perish". Proverbs 29:18 (Needleman, iv). Despite their differences, some shared feeling (however small) united these colonists:

"The development of an American identity was a long, subtle process which began with the first settlers who landed at Virginia or Massachusetts. This plain fact that they were Englishmen who were not in England and who intended –for the most part—not to return to England, must have planted in their colonies the seeds of some kind of nationalistic feeling." (Nye, 51)

Without working together and feeling a sense of connectedness, their colonies would not have flourished as they did in the 1750s. Without a shared identity that was separate from the British, the term "American" would not have appeared by the mid-1700s. While some Tories may have objected to the new term, it would appear that for the majority of colonists, "American" became an acceptable way of identifying themselves (Nye, 53). It was a shared sentiment that caused the colonists to unite together and refuse to pay quartering costs for British soldiers in 1765. It was a shared emotion that encouraged the colonial legislatures to form the First Continental Congress in 1774. It was shared feeling of loyalty and resentment against the British that caused fisherman from Maryland, merchants from Massachusetts, and farmers from Virginia to band together and fight in the Continental Army. It was a united sense of wrongdoing by the British crown that called the representatives of the colonies to Philadelphia in 1776 (Cayton et al, 104-105). The Continental Congress had agreed that the vote for independence from Great Britain must be unanimous. When *The Declaration of Independence* was signed in 1776 by all thirteen colonies, the colonists proved to the Mother Country that an American national identity was emerging because sometimes a people establish an identity before they can win the "status of nationhood" (Rossiter, 39).

If one accepts that by the end of the 1700s the United States had at least the *beginning* of a national identity, then the next question to ask is "what is the American identity?" Or in the words of writer J. Hector St. John De Crevecoeur, "What is an American, this new man?" (Crevecoeur, 39). While it is hard to accurately define what the American identity is, given the heterogeneity of the country and fluctuations of feelings, research shows one unmistakable characteristic. America's identity is based on ideas. Unlike Ireland, whose identity is based on a unifying religion, or Britain united around its monarch, America's identity is built on abstract ideas with the intent of making them into reality (Zelinsky, 16).

Influenced by the Enlightenment and the white male elite of the time, three ideas that formed the foundation of the American national identity are

liberty, individualism, and republicanism (Nye, 47; Gellert, 21 and Mann, 47). The Enlightenment advocated the rights of the individual, especially in government. The government was a representative of the people and if a time ever arose that the government neglected the people, then they had the right to oust the government (Delouche, 270). Individuals are guaranteed certain liberties simply because they are human and these rights cannot be taken away. The Enlightenment was about breaking away from tradition, repelling the shackles of authority, and emphasizing the individual. America did just that when it became the first colony to break away from the Mother Country. In America, "All men are by nature free...No man has a right to any authority over another without his consent" wrote James Wilson of Pennsylvania, who later signed *The Declaration of Independence* (Nye, 314).

Another principle that forms a cornerstone of the American national identity is equality: equality of opportunity and equality of rights (Nye, 312 and 314). Every American regardless of birth order, religion, or trade had the same chance for improvement and success. Equality was seen as a natural right of the individual; it was not something given by the government and nor could it be taken away.

So, what is an American? Extrapolating from those ideas, an American is an individual who acts on reason and principles, a new breed of man. Americans are not English; Americans are multicultural beings who have arisen from the melting pot of England, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Scotland, and Ireland. In *Letters From an American Farmer*, J. Hector St. John De Crevecoeur writes that an American leaves behind all his:

"(A)ncient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. He becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our great *Alma Mater*." (Crevecoeur, 43)

An American is an active citizen and willing participant in society. He is not bound by conventional dogma; he seeks liberation from conventional history and the resurgence of innocence and youth (McClay, 4). An American looks toward the future, not the past.

If a national identity is a shared intangible feeling, how does one know it exists? How does one express his/her American identity? The manifestation and portrayal of the American national identity includes essential ingredients like symbols, artifacts, language, and creation of national folklore (van Minnen and Hilton, 5). Two important artifacts that for over two hundred years have united our country and symbolize our identity are the documents that solidified America's transformation into a nation: *The Declaration of Independence* and the *Constitution* (Krakau, 10). Visitors to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., can read those famous paragraphs:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just power from the consent of the governed." (Cayton et al, 1091)

"We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America." (Cayton et al 1094)

While *The Declaration of Independence* separated America from Great Britain, the *Constitution* firmly established a federal government that protected the rights of the individual and later became a symbol to the rest of the world of the resilience of the United States of America (Kammen, 86 and 94).

Another artifact serving as an expression of the newly formed nation was the creation of a national currency in 1792, which economically united the thirteen states into one union and was something tangible that everyone had no matter what region they were from. An additional recognizable symbol was the new national flag allegedly designed by Betsy Ross in 1777, which replaced the English Crosses of St. George and St. Andrew with thirteen stars to represent the colonies. The new flag was called the "Stars and Stripes" and has become a powerful representation of American unity (Ross, 40).

Verbal recitations like the Pledge of Alliance and the singing of national songs are other sources of national identity. In his article "'God Save the \_\_\_\_' American National Songs and National Identities, 1760-1798," Robert James Branham explains how songs are used to inculcate schoolchildren and immigrants to the American way of life. Songs "...offer clear and concise statements of national identity, sung en masse in ceremonies of civil affiliation" (Branham, 7). Branham continues, "As explicit vehicles of unification, subsuming the many into one, national songs obscure significant difference among citizens and their circumstances" (Branham, 8). Famous American national songs include "The Star Spangled Banner" (which became our national anthem in 1931), "America" or "My Country 'Tis of Thee" (which interestingly is set to the melody of the unofficial British national anthem of "God Save the King"), and "Yankee Doodle" (which started out as a song sung by the British to insult the backwardness of the colonial soldier, but the Americans became proud of it after the Battle of Lexington and Concord) (Branham, 1 and Hakim, 74).

The American national identity is also expressed with the creation of an American folklore, through monuments, the celebration of holidays, and the idolization of heroes (Arieli, 848). Heroes are essential to the propagating of a

national identity. Not only do our heroes embody the principles of the nation like liberty, adventure, and individualism, they also inspire the country toward greatness and its sense of purpose (Gellert, xii). In his book *The Fate of America*, retired Humanities professor Michael Gellert identifies one type of hero developed during the 1700s: the Revolutionary. The Revolutionary is the "...prototype of the American heroic ideal" (Gellert, 29). The Revolutionaries helped to stop the British tyranny and form the government that would guide the new country, but it was their virtues and commitment to the cause that gave them hero status. Perhaps the best-known national hero of the Founding Fathers is George Washington. Washington's integrity, dedication, and willingness to fight the tough battles canonized him (Zelinsky, 32). Today, Washington's birthday is a national holiday (only one other president has that distinction). He set the precedent for all future presidents and his portrait graces our currency. Children are encouraged to tell the truth like Washington did. George Washington has become the quintessential American.

A national identity is the personality of a country. It unites the people and provides the foundation on which to construct a new country. Despite arguments stating that America lacked a national identity until the 1800s, there had to be some spark that united the revolutionaries from around the thirteen vastly different colonies to band together, form the Continental Army, and ultimately sign *the Declaration of Independence*, a document that separated them from Great Britain if not politically at least in spirit. This spark was the beginning of the American national identity, an identity based on the ideas that we are individuals with natural rights, a voice in the government, and the opportunity to succeed in life. Despite civil wars and political turmoil and increasing multicultural differences, there has been a bond holding the heterogeneous country of America together for over two hundred years. While the American national identity may be changing, its existence is still seen in parades and at sporting events when our national anthem is sung. It is seen in stores when the national currency is used and in buildings wherever "The Stars and Stripes" is displayed. Our national identity is seen in the streets when all Americans gather together to pray for lost comrades, people they did not even know, after tragic events.

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### ***Reading List for teachers:***

The only books and articles I found that actually discuss the formation of America's national identity are not light reading material; they are very scholarly in nature.

Arieli, Yehoshua. "Nationalism." *Encyclopedia of American Political History* 2 (1984): 841-862.

This journal article describes the theory of nationalism and uses the development of American nationalism as a case study. Despite the various ethnic groups in the country, the US has created a cohesive nationalism that has not been seriously threatened since the Civil War. This article presents some confusion because the author does not differentiate nationalism from national identity and discusses the two concepts as if they are one. The author makes an interesting statement when he explains that if an individual does not buy into the ideas of an American identity then he is considered "un-American."

Bennet, William J. ed. *Children's Book of Heroes*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.

This is a valuable resource for teachers to pull information out about the development of heroes throughout American history, from colonial times to the modern era. For the 1700s, it focuses not on the big names like Washington, Jefferson, Adams or Franklin, but instead describes how the common soldier at Valley Forge contributed to the success of America's War for Independence.

Bonwick, Colin. "American Nationalism, American Citizenship, and the Limits of Authority, 1776-1800," in von Minnen, Cornelis A. and Sylvia L. Hilton, eds., *Federalism, Citizenship, and Collective Identities in U.S. History*. Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2000, 29-42.

1776 to 1800 was a time of uncertainty for the new fragile nation as it struggled to form a sense of nationalism and design a government to unite all. Bonwick makes the claim that the US lacked a complete national identity until the 1800s because the foundations of government were still being built. Government provides unity and nationalism while culture is secondly. Bonwick does not acknowledge that a distinct American culture existed prior to the *Constitution* and even then national interests took a back seat to regional affairs.

Branham, Robert James. "'God Save the \_\_\_\_\_!': American National Songs and National Identities, 1760-1798." *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 85.1 (1999): 1-20

There are two facets to this interesting article. One part deals with how America strived to separate itself from its mother country yet created a mundane national song "America" based on Britain's unofficial national anthem "God Save the King." The other part of this article discusses the role and power of national

songs and how the songs are institutionalized within the country by using "God Save the King" as a case study.

Butler, Jon. *Becoming America: The Revolution Before 1776*. London: Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Traces the development of America from settlement to 1776 by describing the people, economy, politics, religion and materials of the colonies. One interesting chapter, "Peoples," examines not only the white European's (Scots, Scot-Irish, British) contribution to America, but also the Native Americans and Africans. Another interesting chapter, "Religions" discusses how Puritans, Quakers, and Lutherans influenced the colonial cities. This section also includes information about Native American spirituality and the role of women in religion.

Crevecoeur, J. Hector St. John De. *Letters From an American Farmer*. London: Everyman's Library, 1912 (originally published in 1782).

This collection of letters describes America through the eyes of a farmer. While the majority of letters focus on the town of Nantucket, one chapter titled "What is an America?" provides interesting insight into the character of this new man as seen by the farmer. His ideas, actions, background, and the location of his home (whether by the sea or woods) shapes the soul of this new man, the American.

Delouche, Frederic, ed. *Illustrated History of Europe*. New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2001.

This is a concise history of Europe from Prehistory to the present day, including the formation of the European Union. There are many strengths to this book, including vivid photographs, detailed maps, excerpts from primary sources, and a chapter on the identity of Europe. This book combines geography with history to offer a succinct, but thorough history of Europe.

Gellert, Michael. *The Fate of America. An Inquiry into National Character*. Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, Inc., 2001.

I mentioned this book in my content essay because it discusses America's heroic ideal. While I only focused on the Revolutionary as a hero, the second part of Gellert's book discusses modern day influences on heroes in American's society and their roles. How do drugs, religion, war, racism, cults, and materialism alter America's definition of and use for heroes? There is a particularly interesting section on the heroes that dies young (JFK and Elvis Presley) and their impacts.

Greenfeld, Liah. "The Origins and Nature of American Nationalism in Comparative Perspective," in Krakau, Knud, ed., *The American Nation – National Identity – Nationalism*. Muster: Lit Verlag, 1997, 19-52.

Traces the formation of America through the rise of nationalism in the country. Westward expansion, slavery, immigration, and women, while challenging our traditions, in the end actually increase our nationalism as we seek to encompass



the new land and people. America's strength is its commitment to liberty and equality, but that is also its weakness. In its consuming desire to become the greatest nation and protect what is ours, we may ultimately be trampling upon our principles in our failure to compromise.

Guralnik, David B. ed. *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*. New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1986.

This is your standard dictionary. It provides a strong foundation and definitions on which to build and enlarge the meaning of words.

Kammen, Michael. *A Machine That Would Go of Itself: The Constitution in American Culture*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986.

Examines the power of the *Constitution* from its inception to present day and its place in today's society as a symbol. While offering a lot of history about the *Constitution* and the ongoing debate surrounding it, little is given to the role the document has played in creating a shared American identity. It focuses more on the current role of the *Constitution* in protecting our national identity.

Kedourie, Elie. *Nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.

The focus of this book is on the theory of nationalism and how the individual and politics fit into it. Very little is said about the theory of national identity, which is unfortunate because nationalism and national identity are intertwined.

Krakau, Knud, ed. "Introduction," in *The American Nation – National Identity – Nationalism*. Münster: Lit Verlag, 1997, 7-15

Each section of this collection of essays focuses on a theme that has caused one to rethink our national identity: Native Americans, slavery, immigration, and expansionism. The author states that in our push to become the post-modern industrialized country in a global community, we may have inadvertently declared nationalism dead. We were wrong. Nationalism is alive and well and very strong; it is just being redefined for America's new role in the global society. The weakness of this collection is that some of the articles are very narrow in focus: Puritan piety and citizenship in the CCC.

Madsen, Deborah L. ed. *Visions of America since 1492*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994.

The central theme of the essays in this book is the evolution of America's cultural identity with the premise that our identity is not solely based on the British settlement. Instead, a variety of cultures including Native Americans left behind their imprints on America's self-image. The beginning essays focus on the impact of European (mainly British and French) imperialism on the indigenous peoples of North America, while the remaining pieces look at what it means to be an American.

Mann, Arthur. *The One and the Many: Reflections on the American Identity*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Examines the dilemma of trying to create unity amidst diversity, focusing on the turbulent decades of the 1960s and 1970s. The crisis of these decades caused many people to rethink about what an America is and the ideas of liberty and equality. If these ideas are so valued in our society, how can a race of people be denied them? This book also explores the concept of citizenship and naturalization for immigrants and their place within the American culture.

McClay, Wilfred. "Is America an Experiment?" *Public Interest* 133 (Fall 1998): 3-23.

Examines the history of America by asking the question, "is America an experiment?" This article is a hodgepodge of ideas from using literature to gain insight into history to America being a last refuge for "undesirables", from an exploration of what an American is to trying to decipher what the nation is really apart. The conclusion reached is not earth shattering: so far the experiment of America is successful, but it is still being worked on.

Murrin, John M. "A Roof Without Walls: The Dilemma of American National Identity," in Beeman, Richard, Stephen Botein, and Edward C. Carter II, eds., *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987, 333-348. Murrin makes two startling claims. First, the American Revolution was not the end result of a deepening sense of unity and shared identity among the colonists because the colonists were not unified in any sense of the word. Second, the American Revolution was an accidental fluke. Nobody really wanted an independent America, but the colonial elite kept it anyway. The *Constitution* became the glue that held this fragile nation of differences together. While I do not agree with many of Murrin's claims, his description of the importance of the *Constitution* is valuable.

Needleman, Jacob. *The American Soul*. New York, Jeremy p. Tarcher/Putnam, 2002

Needleman once met a Vietnam vet who criticized the college age youth of America for not knowing what they have. Needleman seeks to correct this injustice. Written for his college students, this book describes how the idea of America came into being, the men responsible for it, and the crimes that have been committed in the name of America. Slavery and the treatment of Native Americans have damaged the American soul. The last section discusses the meaning and character of America and asks the question, "is America necessary?"

Nye, Russel. *This Almost Chosen People*. East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1966.

Like Crèvecoeur's *Letters*, this book also tries to describe the new American, but focuses more on the ideology and how it has shaped the character of America. Nye investigates how man's ideas about progress, nationalism, a capitalist economy, and the environment have influenced the development of America.

Renshon, Stanley A. ed. *One America: Political Leadership, National Identity, and the Dilemmas of Diversity*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2001.

Renshon has compiled a selection of essays that look at today's American national identity and the issues that challenge it: multiculturalism, affirmative action, and dual citizenship. While admitting the maybe the American identity lacks diversity, some of these essays point out that the violent push to incorporate race into the national identity may cause it to break. While one essay asks the question, "Is this the end of the American Identity?" because of the racial tension plaguing the US, another offers hope that race, class and politics will be able to achieve a unified nation once again.

Rossiter, Clinton. *The American Quest/ 1790-1860*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971.

An interesting book that focuses on the evolution of the American identity from 1790 to the 1860. Although acknowledging that there was a spark of nationality for Americans in 1790, it was not until the crisis of 1860, that America emerged as a whole nation with a distinctive character. To lend credence to his claim, Rossiter explores the concept of nationhood (which he says America lacked until 1860) and the country's quest for modernity. I do not necessarily agree with his findings, but he does provide a lot of historical information about the transformation of America before the Civil War.

Smith, Anthony D. *National Identity*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991. The goal of Smith's book is to describe the nature, causes, and consequences of national identity. It differentiates between national and ethnic identities, identifies the requirements of a nation, and distinguishes between nationalism and national identity. Smith makes the premise that a national identity is not just based on politics or ideology, but on culture as well. The strength of Smith's book is it incorporates case studies of national identity and nationalism from countries around the world.

Van Minnen, Cornelis A. and Sylvia L. Hilton, eds. "Introduction," in *Federalism, Citizenship, and Collective Identities in U.S. History*. Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2000, 1-6.

A collection of essays that examine the changes and course of American history, focusing on how politics, citizenship, businesses, the masses and Native Americans affected America's identity. One interesting chapter traces the development of the US dollar and how it solidified the economy and personality

of newly formed US. One other thought-provoking chapter examines the issue of race and citizenship using the film *The Birth of a Nation* as a case study.

Zelinsky, Wilbur. *Nation Into State: The Shifting Symbolic Foundations of American Nationalism*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988. Focuses on the creation and expression of civic nationalism. One section I found useful that relates to national identity discusses the formation of the national hero and its use within American culture as a symbol of national pride. The colonial hero started out as a hero based on British culture, but soon evolved as a distinct American hero. The first American hero was the Revolutionary and his name was George Washington.

### ***Reading List for Students:***

I could not find any books for the high school student about the invention of America's national identity. So, I took a slightly different approach for this list. Below are movies and children books about the Revolutionary Era or American History in general, which help the students to see the events, men, and ideas that played important roles in forming America. Rather than reading or watching something that specifically states this is America's identity, the students will have to use the information contained within these sources to draw their conclusions about America's identity.

Adams, Russell B. Jr. ed. *The American Story: The Revolutionaries*. Virginia: Time-Life Books, 1996.

This is a great informational children's book about The Revolutionary War. Besides offering the basic information, each chapter also includes picture essays that personalize the events. For example, in "Diary of a Quaker Housewife," students can learn about how the Drinker family dealt with the growing tensions and fighting. In "Private Yankee Doodle," excerpts from the journal of fifteen-year old colonial soldier Joseph Plumb are included. Students can read about how someone their age fought in the war and what it was like for him. Includes colorful illustrations.

Altman, Susan. *Extraordinary African-Americans*. Danbury: Children's Press, 2001.

A collection of stories about the achievements of African-Americans in American History from the 1700s to 2000. Since most texts include very little information about African-American men and women and their contributions, this is a useful supplement to the classroom text. Colonial history is often accused of being a European white men's history. This book helps to correct that injustice by offering personal stories about colonial African Americans, including poet Phillis Wheatley, soldier Peter Salem, spy James Armistead, abolitionist Elizabeth Freeman, and Crispus Attacks, just to name a few.

Fradin, Dennis. *The Signers: The 56 Stories of Behind the Declaration of Independence*. New York: Walker & Co., 2002

I have read write-ups about the book and it looks very interesting, but it is not going to be published until October 2002. It looks like it examines the men, ideas, and issues behind the document that separated the colonies from Great Britain.

Hakim, Joy. *A History of US: From Colonies to Country*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

*A History of US* is a series of ten books that colorfully trace the development of the United States. While including dates, people, and events like textbooks do, Hakim presents the information using personalized stories, fictional accounts, anecdotes, pictures, quotes, and trivia to grab the reader's attention. The cover of *From Colonies to Country* is a picture of the Boston Massacre and then pulls the reader in by stating that a mistake appears in the picture. A person has to read the text and to find out what it is. This is a wonderful supplement to the textbook.

Keenan, Sheila. *Scholastic Encyclopedia of Women in the United States*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 2002.

American history often focuses on the men that helped make America; very few women receive attention. This book helps to correct that mistake by including information about the women and their contributions to American history, from the Colonial Era to present day. These biographies can be used to supplement the classroom text. Women from the Revolutionary Era include writer Abigail Adams, Mercy Otis Warren, land owner Margaret Brent, soldier Deborah Sampson, and more known women such as Pocahontas and Anne Hutchinson.

Langguth, A.J. *Patriots: The Men Who Started the American Revolution*. New York: Touchstone Books, 1989.

An interesting adult book that examines the events and issues of the War for Independence through the men who participated in it, men like Samuel Adams, Washington, John Adams, Franklin, and Jefferson. From the secret meetings of the Sons of Liberty to the writing of the *Constitution*, this book provides a good understanding of what happened and why.

Ross, Stewart. *The American Revolution*. New York: Franklin Watts, 2001.

This is an informational book that uses excerpts from documents (letters, speeches, newspaper articles, and government papers) to examine the events of the Revolutionary Era. The reader is encouraged to place the documents in context to fully understand their importance. For example, in the section that describes the Boston Massacre, letters from revolutionary John Dickinson and

Thomas Preston (the British Commander) are included to present both sides of the event. Colorful illustrations and pictures of the documents are included.

Rubel, David. *Scholastic Encyclopedia of the Presidents and Their Times*. New York: Scholastic, Inc. 2001.

This book summarizes the contributions and lives of the US presidents from Washington to Clinton. It gives the reader trivia and headlines about the president's administration while placing the actions of the president in context. This is a quick reference guide for information on US presidents.

Torpie, Kate. *Our National Treasures*. New York: Mondo Publishers, 2002.

This is a short children's picture book about places that are important to the United States. Included are buildings and monuments like Mount Rushmore, Independence Hall, and White House as well as physical features like Cliff Palace at Mesa Verde National Park and Plymouth Rock. We always think of symbols like the flag, money and songs as portraying America's identity, but places are symbols too. This book can be used to lead a discussion about why these places are considered "National Treasures" and how they describe what America is.

### ***Reading List for Classroom:***

Similar to the list for students, the sources included here can be used in the classroom and interpreted to see their contribution in shaping the image of America and its national identity.

*America Rocks*. 1995. Produced by Scholastic Rock, Inc. American Broadcasting Company, Inc.

This video is a series of short catchy musical cartoons that illustrate key points in the development of America. The cartoons relevant to the Revolutionary Era include: "No More Kings," "Short Heard Around the Revolution," "The Preamble," "Fireworks." Students love these cartoons and this is a great way to introduce Colonial times.

Border, Louise. *America is...* New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2002.

This is a short children's book that describes what America is. This is one of the few resources I found that, although it doesn't actually use the words, expresses what America's identity is. Included are descriptions about the symbols (flag, songs, pledge), the people, the land, and the political divisions (states) that make the US a unique country in the world.

Bruun, Erik and Jay Crosby. eds. *Our Nation's Archive: The History of the United States in Documents*. New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, 1999.

This is a VAST collection of primary source documents from the pre-Columbian Era to the Clinton Era. These letters, speeches, stories, government policies (*The Stamp Act*, indentured contract), newspaper articles, and published manuscripts

*(The Federalist Papers)* offer first person glimpses into the events and ideas that shaped America.

Cayton, Andrew, Elisabeth Israels Perry, and Allan M. Winkler, eds. *America Pathways to the Present*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1998

This is the assigned classroom text for Washoe Country high school students. While it does try to incorporate various points of view from different groups, sometimes the information given on certain topics within the Colonial period is not very detailed. One of the strengths of this text is that it does include a lot of pictures, graphs, maps, and charts.

Cheney, Lynne. *America: A Patriotic Primer*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002. An ABC children's picture book about the principles, ideas, and people that help create this country. This is one of the few books that although it doesn't actually say it, discusses the ideas and heroes that influence America's national identity. For each letter of the alphabet, an idea or person is given and then described. For example: E=Equality, H=Heroes, N=Native Americans, and R=Rights. Includes great illustrations.

*Liberty! – The American Revolution*. 1997. PBS Home Video. 6 hours. Middle March Films.

A long documentary that uses interviews from historians, excerpts from diaries and other documents, and live re-enactments to show the events and men of the American Revolution. Starting from the Stamp Act to the passing of the Bill of Rights, *Liberty* provides extensive coverage of the War for Independence. Due to time constraints, I would pull out clips that identify the emerging national identity of America and the ideas that help formed the new country.

Miller, Marilyn. *Words That Built A Nation*. New York; Stonesong Press, 1999.

A collection of primary sources including government documents (*The Declaration, Constitution*), manuscripts (*Common Sense*), speeches (Patrick Henry), letters (The Adams), and public addresses ("Washington's Farewell Address"), from the settlement of America to the modern day. After each document, there is information about the author(s) and the response(s) to the document. The purpose of this book is to personalize America. These excerpts give a voice to those who created and shaped our nation.

O'Reilly, Kevin. *Critical Thinking in United State History Series: Colonies to Constitution (Book One)*. Pacific Grove: Critical Thinking Press & Software, 1983.

This is collection of activities for the upper grades to do in the classroom. The strength of this book is that it requires the students to use higher level thinking skills to complete the activities. Students are given historians' interpretations/arguments about events/issues, or conflicting pieces of opinions about events and then asked to analyze the information and draw their own conclusions.

*Revolution*. 1985. Produced by Chris Burt and Irwin Winkler. 126 min. Warner Brothers Film.

A movie starting Al Pacino as New York farmer Tom Dobb who joins the army and fights against the British even though he doesn't believe in the cause. He joins to protect his son who has been drafted and eventually meets the aristocratic Daisy who helps to change his opinion of the war. Dobb realizes that he must take a stance and supports the colonies in their fight for independence. This movie is long and a little slow in some parts and hard to understand. Therefore, I would show clips to complement points you want to make about the ideas and people of the Revolution.

*Sing America*. 1999. CD. (Sung by various artists)

It is a collection of songs all having to do with America sung by various artists, including "America" by Neil Diamond, "This Land is Your Land" by Peter, Paul, and Mary, and "This is My Country" by Impressions. Songs are a great way to have students interpret other people's visions of the American national identity.