

THE ANATOMY OF NATIONALISM: A FRESH APPRAISAL BASED ON RECENT CASE STUDIES

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1. Introduction

NATIONALISM IS ONE of the most pervasive forces of human culture and society. In all of nationalism's forms, from socialist statism to the "God and country" mantra of the Americanized West, the consciousness of the individual is eclipsed in the triumphant ethos, mythos, and authority of the societal group. This atmosphere is notoriously foggy, so it is often difficult for the average citizen to both see and identify the properties of nationalism at any given time.

An insightful way of cutting through the fog, however, is contemporary description. This is perhaps what made Rothbard's essay "The Anatomy of the State" so persuasive to his readers.¹ In no uncertain terms, Rothbard courageously sidestepped political debates and public opinion (viz., "We all know what the government is"), and simply described the state's nature and functions. The result was a remarkably short and disturbing diagnosis of countless societal evils.

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¹ Murray Rothbard, *Egalitarianism as a Revolt against Nature and Other Essays* (Auburn: Mises Institute, [1974] 2000), 55–88.

In this article, I want to offer a similar appraisal of nationalism—specifically, contemporary American nationalism. The primary sources for this brief analysis will consist (firstly) of three recent editions of Hillsdale College’s *Imprimis*, and (secondly) of the inaugural speeches of Presidents Obama and Trump.

Regarding the first, *Imprimis* is a mass-mailing publication that reaches over 3.7 million (primarily neoconservative) readers per month.² There are many other contemporary venues one might turn to in locating the vibrant spirit of the nation. But, for reasons that cannot all be explained here, this particular publication largely represents the current on-the-ground spirit of American nationalism as good as (or better than) any other. The authors are either popular pundits or qualified professors, and the essays themselves are often transcripts of speeches given at political events across the country. Expositing the content of *Imprimis*, which may often be described as political propaganda, reveals the inner mechanics, rhetorical strategies, and mythologies of one of the most integrated, dogmatic, and influential social fabrics of contemporary society. My selection includes “The Problem of Identity Politics and Its Solution” by Matthew Continetti (editor of *Washington Free Beacon* and political commentator), “Immigration in the National Interest” by Tom Cotton (senator from Arkansas, JD graduate of Harvard, and first lieutenant of the US Army), and “How to Meet the Strategic Challenge Posed by China” by David Goldman (columnist for *Asia Times*, journalist, and former consultant for the Department of Defense).³ Thus, within a half-year period, this single publication features a spectrum of dimensions and perspectives, such as the political, cultural, and economic.

The second source of analysis is the inaugural speeches of presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump, which I tabulate according to topic and then compare and contrast. The point of this exercise is to show (a) that nationalism is used to justify the work of the state, and (b) the rhetorical strategies of this enterprise are fundamentally the same for the political “left” as they are for the political “right.”

Before beginning this project, it should be mentioned that the rise of the Trump administration spurred a massive resurgence of American nationalism. Slogans such as “America First” and “Make America Great Again” continue to saturate the ears of millions, and legislation on immigration, global trade, and foreign policy regularly make headlines. It is

² This statistic is featured on the cover of *Imprimis*.

³ These essays were published in the October, November, and March editions of *Imprimis*, respectively. Full citations are given below.

therefore an ideal time to appraise the inner workings of this social phenomenon, and to do so in detail and without party loyalties.⁴ The general outline for this article is to discuss some introductory issues such as the definition of terms, then to engage in the two case studies described above before concluding.

2. Defining Terms

To begin, how is “nationalism” typically defined?

This is not an easy question to answer. As one peruses reference works, such as the *Oxford Reader* on the subject, it becomes apparent that “nationalism” conceptually overlaps with such terms as “patriotism” and “statism,” and evades uniform definition.⁵ In fact, sociologists and political theorists are far from agreeing on what any of these terms mean, mainly because their immediate referents (e.g., “nation,” “state,” and “patriot”) are sometimes diachronically unstable. The etymology of “nation,” for example, shows a gradual shift from a racial and familial sense to a more political one.⁶ Lord Acton (1834–1902), for example, remarked that “nationality is ‘our connection with the race’ that is ‘merely natural or physical,’ while patriotism is the awareness of our moral duties to the political community” (Acton

⁴ As a libertarian anarchist (anarcho-capitalist), my biases are directed at politics in general and not any political party. (I do, however, acknowledge some degree of use for organizations such as the Libertarian Party, but more as a platform for disseminating ideas and less as a means of controlling political machinery.)

⁵ John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith (eds.), *Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁶ The *Online Etymology Dictionary* entry for “nation” contains:

“c. 1300, from Old French *nacion* ‘birth, rank; descendants, relatives; country, homeland’ (12c.) and directly from Latin *nationem* (nominative *natio*) ‘birth, origin; breed, stock, kind, species; race of people, tribe,’ literally ‘that which has been born,’ from *natus*, past participle of *nasci* ‘be born’ (Old Latin *gnasci*), from PIE root *gene- ‘give birth, beget,’ with derivatives referring to procreation and familial and tribal groups. Political sense has gradually predominated, but earliest English examples inclined toward the racial meaning ‘large group of people with common ancestry.’ Older sense preserved in application to North American Indian peoples (1640s). *Nation-building* first attested 1907 (implied in *nation-builder*.” Available at: <https://www.etymonline.com/word/nation> (accessed August 8, 2018).

Note also that ἔθνος (“nation,” or “people”), from which we get “ethnic” and “ethnicity,” exhibits a distinctive us-vs.-them idea in its second-temple Jewish rendering of the word “gentiles” in the Greco-Roman era.

1972, 163).⁷ This differentiation was not uncommon before the twentieth century. As our analysis will suggest, however, “patriotism” and “nationalism” today appear to have swapped emphases.

2.1 “Nations” and “Nationalism”

Walker Conner argues that nations should be sharply distinguished from states (territorial and political authorities), and that perceived national identities (and national borders) do not always correspond to actual nations:

My definition describes the nation as the largest group that shares a belief in common ancestry and it is the largest group that can be influenced or incited by appeals to common kinship. Is there a Welsh or Flemish, or Basque nation? Yes. Is there a British, Belgian, or Spanish nation? No. Nor is there an American, Argentinean, Filipino, Indian or Indonesian nation. A nation, then, is neither a state, nor the population of a state without regard to its ethnic composition. Nationalism is identity with and loyalty to the nation, not to and with the state.⁸

In this particular interpretation, nations are more or less “big families that go way back.”⁹ They need not have a political apparatus, or at least one distinctive enough to be easily confused with a state. They also need not have “national borders” (which can therefore occasionally be an oxymoron). Nevertheless, because of its generally collective orientation, and because of the collectivist orientations of states, nations can easily be confused with states, or, indeed, ultimately evolve into states (hence “nation-state”). There often is, after all, some kind of formal organization of nations. Furthermore, when distinctive genetics, language, and cultural customs are not so easily identified, demarcating the boundaries of “in” and “out” for a nation becomes particularly difficult, and since the nation is inherently an identity marker, whatever nation that did exist can no longer be called a nation. Both in principle and in history, nations come and go with the ebb and flow of time.

⁷ Nenad Miscevic, “Nationalism,” cited in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward Zalta (Stanford: The Metaphysics Research Lab, 2018). Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nationalism/>.

⁸ Walker Conner, “The Dawning of Nations,” in *When Is the Nation? Towards an Understanding of Theories of Nationalism*, edited by Atsuko Ichijo and Gordana Uzelac (New York: Routledge, 2005), 40.

⁹ Consider the Han dynasty, the world’s largest ethnic group (“nation”), which makes up 92 percent of mainland Chinese and almost a fifth of the world population.

Consider the Sioux nation or Lakota tribe in (and yet distinguished from) the state of South Dakota. The complex dynamics of the situation are revealed when observing interracial adoption. If two foster parents of a Native American child are white, they cannot adopt the child, regardless of their location (unless given special exemption by a tribal court).¹⁰ This is because the Indian Child Welfare Act, a federal law enforced by the American nation-state, seeks to “promote stability and security of Indian tribes and families.”¹¹ That is, the purpose of the law is to preserve (another’s) national (group) identity.¹² In this somewhat awkward organization and mixture of property rights, the tribe or nation has distinct jurisdiction (e.g., over reservations, its own courts) and yet does not have clearly defined borders (e.g., interracial adoption within US borders is forbidden). The nation also functions with legal and coercive authority.¹³

Like any nation, with enough time, cultural convergence, and “dilution,” the Sioux and Lakota tribes might no longer self-identify as a nation. This has already happened to countless nations throughout history. It is witnessed most vividly in contemporary multiethnic and multicultural cities, where it is not uncommon for younger generations to be ignorant of their ancestry entirely. Many adopted persons, furthermore, never discover

¹⁰ See Native American Rights Fund, *A Practical Guide to the Indian Child Welfare Act*, 9.17. Available at: <https://narf.org/nill/documents/icwa/faq/recognition.html#Q17>.

¹¹ See the National Indian Child Welfare Act (1978), at <https://www.nicwa.org>.

¹² The political philosophy of nationalism significantly overlaps social-identity theory in psychology, which addresses intergroup behavior and discrimination: “Tajfel et al (1971) attempted to identify the minimal conditions that would lead members of one group to discriminate in favor of the ingroup to which they belonged and against another outgroup.” University of Twente, “Social Identity Theory.” Available at: https://www.utwente.nl/en/bms/communication-theories/sorted-by-cluster/Interpersonal%20Communication%20and%20Relations/Social_Identity_Theory.

¹³ Note that in this paragraph I am not making any judgments about the legitimacy or morality of tribes or tribal-governance structures in general, nor am I making judgment about the concept of cultural and national preservation. My own view is that peoples, nations, and families have every right to preserve whatever cultural identity they wish, so long as it does not involve coercion (whether directly through physical violence, or indirectly through political means). I would therefore take issue with laws that (for example) force a child or group to “assimilate,” as well as laws that force a child or group to depart from their family (whether biological or nonbiological). For a modified Rothbardian-anarchist solution to the relationship between child and parent/guardian (and their respective rights), see the relevant portions of Creative Common Law (creativecommons.com).

their “race” or lineage at all. The concern of many is straightforward: Is all of this a travesty, or a blessing? And does it warrant legislation? Answering questions like these (especially the first) extend beyond the scope of this paper.¹⁴ But they highlight the sensitive ideological, cultural, and social nature of this subject.

Whatever the case, it is increasingly difficult today to directly associate “race” with the nation.¹⁵ This is particularly true in the United States and other multicultural and multiethnic communities, where dozens of different peoples are native-born citizens and yet (allegedly) live “*the American dream.*” As one walks the streets of New York City or San Jose, it is common to see a variety of skin colors and forms of cultural expression, and hear a variety of languages spoken.¹⁶ Constructing a single socio-political category from this mixture is next to impossible.¹⁷ It is almost as if *diversity itself*, and not any particular combination of characteristics, is what constitutes the “American.” In countries where the native populations are a minority, associating any common characteristics beyond current geographical location easily becomes somewhat arbitrary.¹⁸ To an American citizen’s neighbors who are Dutch, Asian, and African American, none of whose ancestors lived on the continent four centuries ago (much less had the same experience living in America

¹⁴ For starters, the answer may depend on who is answering it, and on, among other things, the kind of values and culture one’s ancestors promulgated in the past. (Or it may not.)

¹⁵ Note that “ethnicity” is increasingly used to refer to one’s biological family (“race”) instead of one’s national association. It is now common in literature and popular communication to see “nationality” being distinguished from “ethnicity” (despite their tight historical connection), with “race” falling out of use altogether (it is not inaccurate to say that “race” has become an almost racist term). I here use “race” merely to draw attention to this delineation, not because I uphold all the connotations associated with it.

¹⁶ Consider also the development and significance of mixed ethnic categories (e.g., *mestizo*), though this anthropological phenomenon is as old as humanity itself (consider, for example, the various ethnic debates in the first century regarding Samaritans, the Arab-Jewish Herodian dynasty, etc.).

¹⁷ Clifford Geertz in *Nationalism*, 32–33, identifies six common variables in this discussion: “assumed blood ties,” “race” (“common decent as such”), “language,” “region,” “religion,” and “custom.”

¹⁸ Cf. Walker Connor, “A Nation Is...,” cited in *Nationalism*, 36: “Defining and conceptualizing the nation is much more difficult [than defining a state] because the essence of a nation is intangible.”

when first moving there), the fact of all now being “American” simply cannot bear the weight of a truly unified identity.¹⁹

If people cannot be grouped, one can either (a) abandon the collectivist attitude and group identity in the first place and search for more meaningful (and naturally emergent) categories, and stop trying when categories do not emerge, or (b) double down, and fabricate a narrative of shared experience, language, heritage, values, and so on to create an artificial “sense of homogeneity,”²⁰ even if the evidence points in the opposite direction. This second option, as will become evident below, is a primary feature of American nationalist propaganda.

“Nationalism,” then, may more generally refer to celebration of the national entity and its values, narratives, institutions, and cultural markers, whether defined by borders or not and whether there is coercive power or not. Those who perform such celebrations are nationalists. In the words of some scholars, nationalism’s overarching features are said to be “autonomy, unity, and identity.”²¹ Or, as Joseph Stalin put it, the nation can be defined as “a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis

¹⁹ The same may also apply to “the West.” Eric Hendley summarizes Samuel Huntington’s views on this matter in reviewing a critique of Huntington’s thesis:

“Huntington famously argued that all inhabitants of Western civilization share a common heritage. Features of this heritage include Christian religious traditions and an emphasis on human rights and the rule of law. In Todorov’s view, this is an oversimplification. Even within supposed ‘civilizations,’ there are often clear differences of cultural traditions and political values. The individual is born into a particular culture, and exposed to its various traditions, but this individual can make independent judgments in the case of moral or political ideals. For this reason, though democracy may have matured during the Western Enlightenment, it is not, Todorov thinks, exclusive to Western civilization.” (“Freedom Fear,” *Harvard Political Review* [December 6, 2010])

This topic is fiercely debated today, as witnessed (for example) in the “defense of the West” work of popular social-media personalities and intellectuals such as Jordan Peterson, Laura Southern, and others. Because “civilization” is so remarkably broad, it is debatable to what extent “the West” is or is not a meaningful category. Nevertheless, one can read standard works on the subject, such as Jackson Spielvogel, *Western Civilization*, 10th edition (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2017), and judge for themselves whether a single grand story can be coherently told.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, *Nationalism*, 36.

²¹ Hutchinson and Smith, *Nationalism*, 5. “These three,” the authors contend, “have been pursued by nationalists everywhere since Rousseau, Herder, Fichte, Korais, and Mazzini popularized them in Western and Central Europe.”

of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.”²² To the extent that this popular definition is true or meaningful, nation is a relative concept and exists on a spectrum. One nation can be more “national” or “nationalist” than another based on how well it exists as a “stable community” and shares the “common” traits.

But, as nations and peoples have scattered and become more closely associated with states, “nation” and “nationalism” have come to concern (*political* not ancestral) identity. This is for many reasons, some intentional (e.g., increasing political power over a people or peoples through unification) and others unintentional (e.g., the cumulative effect of immigrations, intermarriages, conquests, etc., over time within a certain political domain). Against Conner’s distinctions, “nation” and “nationalism” now *do* generally refer to Americans, Canadians, Indonesians, and so on, whether we like this or not. A nation without national borders is difficult to imagine, as is a large city without a good “Mexican” restaurant.²³ As nations and peoples have lost their distinctive group identities, so has the older meaning of “nation.”

2.2 “Statism” and “Patriotism”

This political form of “nationalism” is almost synonymous with “statism,” and also exists on a spectrum. Some nationalisms are more statist than others. Statism glorifies the political apparatus. Military parades are one vivid example of this glorification. Men and women, of various ethnicities and histories, are dramatically displayed marching in step in the same uniform holding the same guns defending the same country. There is therefore less focus on statism than nationalism when it comes to cultural heritage. But, despite this distinction, the two concepts have often gone together, as witnessed in the near obsession with genealogies, ancestry, and ethnic identity in the statist regimes of Hitler, Stalin, Kim Jong Il, and others.

²² Joseph Stalin, “The Nation,” in *Marxism and the Natural Question*, from *The Essential Stalin: Major Theoretical Writings 1905-1952*, edited by Bruce Franklin (Croom Helm: London, 1973), 57–61.

²³ The limits of contemporary imagination on this issue are being challenged by projects such as Bitnation (bitnation.co), Ulex (tomwbell.com), the Creative Common Law Project (creativecommons.com), the Seasteading Institute (seasteading.org), and others, all of which propose borderless governance.

“The state,” we should be reminded, typically refers to political authority in general, and it is always associated with territory and violence.²⁴ It involves “the right to coerce and the duty to obey” (to borrow from Huemer),²⁵ presumed upon ownership or regulation of specific property. It is typical to attribute these features to only the modern nation-state. But the political apparatus exhibits these same basic features whether in the form of an ancient pharaoh, king, feudal lord, democracy, republic, etc.²⁶ This oppressing class, often labeled by sociologists as “the political means” (Oppenheimer), or “the state” for short, is “the only organization in society that obtains its revenue not by voluntary contribution or payment for services rendered but by coercion.”²⁷ It is a territorial monopoly on physical violence.

The “nation-state” solidified boundaries of jurisdiction and the wielding of power, and operated according to contemporary models of political rule (e.g., democracy). Other sociologists, such as Anthony Giddens, therefore make definitions such as the following: “The nation-state... is a set of institutional forms of governance maintaining an administrative monopoly over a territory with demarcated boundaries (borders), its rule being

²⁴ This delineation is noted by a number of authors in Hutchinson and Smith, *Nationalism*. Few, however, give it the significance Oppenheimer and Giddens do.

²⁵ Michael Huemer, *The Problem of Political Authority: An Examination of the Right to Coerce and the Duty to Obey* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

²⁶ For instance, Thomas Woods (*The Church and the Market* [Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005], 202) argues that “sovereignty [with reference to the modern nation-state and its self-defining powers] is a thoroughly modern notion.” If I understand Woods correctly, I disagree. The nation-state is distinctive but not with respect to the kind of sovereignty addressed here. It can easily be argued that the pharaohs of Egypt and Caesar Augustus in the Roman Empire exhibited as much, or even more, of a sense of sovereignty and power as the modern nation-state.

²⁷ Rothbard, *Egalitarianism*, 57. Cf. Franz Oppenheimer, *The State*, translated by John Gitterman (Black Rose Books, 2007, 15; Bruce Benson, *The Enterprise of Law* (San Francisco: Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy, 1990), 43; Max Weber, “Politik als Beruf,” in *Gesammelte Politische Schriften* (Muenchen, 1921), 396–450; David Friedman, *The Machinery of Freedom*, 3rd edition (Createspace, 2014), 108; Robert Higgs, *Delusions of Power: New Explorations of the State, War, and Economy* (Oakland: Independent Institute, 2012), 12; Anthony Giddens, *Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985), 2:121; Rose Wilder Lane, *The Discovery of Freedom* (New York: John Day Company, 1943), 139; Isabel Paterson, *The God of the Machine* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, [1943] 1993), 88.

sanctioned by law and direct control of the means of internal and external violence.”²⁸



In any case, all political authorities—whether they are called “nations,” “states,” “nation-states,” or otherwise—operate on a “proprietary theory whereby ruling elites claim a material share of all things: land, production, traded goods, and labor.”²⁹ There is a ruling, taxing, and parasitic class, and a ruled, taxed, and productive class.³⁰ There are those with a monopoly on

²⁸ Giddens, *Contemporary Critique*, 2:121.

²⁹ Warren Carter, “Taxation,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 4:478.

³⁰ It is noteworthy that the phenomenon of taxation is transcultural and transhistorical. It can be found in almost every civilization in almost every period of human history and in almost every form of government, from Ancient Near Eastern

force (who exercise *involuntary* exchange) and those that without it (who exercise *voluntary* exchange). Concrete proof of this arrangement is found not only in the regular threats for noncompliance (e.g., for owning a “dangerous” plant, for failing to obtain a dog license, etc.) and double standards of ethics,³¹ but in the existence of borders (typically walls and fences).

“Patriotism” used to be more “civic” (politically oriented).³² Currently, however, it denotes more focus on love for the homeland, family, and (often nonpoliticized) cultural traditions than on the political apparatus. *Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary* defines it simply as “love for or devotion to one’s country.”³³ It is therefore not uncommon to hear some libertarians make such comments as “I’m patriotic but not nationalist.” Although this may not make much sense historically, the purpose of such comments is clear: to pay due loyalty to family and property (even as they exist within the national borders), but without giving credit to the state (i.e., politicians).

Thus it appears “nationalism” and “patriotism” have essentially swapped meanings in the last century; nationalism is what patriotism used to be, and vice versa. Nationalism today, then, can be provisionally thought of as a subset of a political authority’s stories, values, and symbols that are embodied within a particular nation-state and within the lives of its enclosed inhabitants.³⁴

If one were to attempt to crassly summarize the conceptual relationship between patriotism, nationalism, and statism as they are frequently and

tribal societies, to Middle Eastern Greek city-states, to medieval European monarchies, to twenty-first-century nation-states.

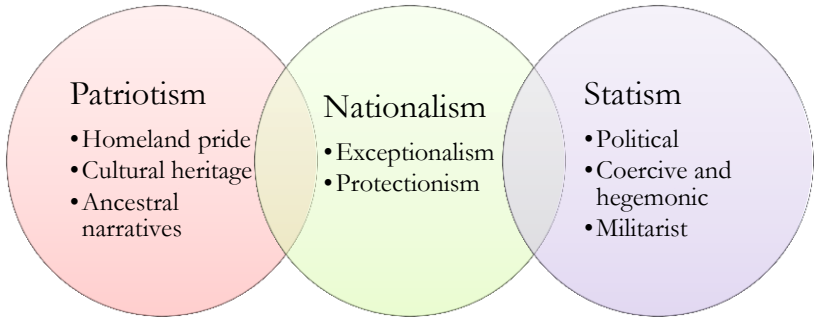
³¹ Huemer, *The Problem of Political Authority*, 332–33: “Acts that would be considered unjust or morally unacceptable when performed by nongovernmental agents will often be considered perfectly all right, even praiseworthy, when performed by government agents... Why do we accord this special moral status to government and are we justified in so doing? This is the problem of political authority.”

³² Refer to the quote of Acton above, and also the remarks of Conner, “The Dawning of Nations,” 40.

³³ “Patriotism.” *Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary* (2018). Available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/patriotism> (accessed August 9, 2018).

³⁴ This mixture of meanings is adequately captured in the current Wikipedia definition of “nationalism”: “Nationalism is a political, social and economic system characterized by the promotion of the interests of a particular nation, especially with the aim of gaining and maintaining sovereignty (self-governance) over the homeland.” Available at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nationalism> (accessed September 17, 2018).

popular understood (not how they are technically or historically situated), one might arrive at a loose relationship such as the following:



Again, this is a crass and contemporary illustration that only serves as a provisional construct. But it adequately gives justice to (a) the kind of contemporary discourse we encounter on this subject (more on this below), (b) the ways in which nationalism contains elements of both patriotism and statism, and (c) the ways in which nationalism can exist on a spectrum, with some nationalisms being more patriotic or more statist than others.

2.3 *Nationalism and Religion*

Another pertinent issue surrounding nationalism is its connection with religion. It is necessary to address this controversial subject in any discussion of nationalism because (a) nationalism so plainly and often resembles formal religion,³⁵ and (b) nationalism and religion almost always, historically and especially in a contemporary American context, hijack each other in a variety of ways.

Regarding (a), nationalism on full display is highly religious. It exhibits symbols (e.g., flags, icons, emblems, tattoos), rituals (e.g., removing headwear at recitations, physical gestures, pledges, festive calendars), sacred documents (e.g., keeping constitutions, decrees, and letters of correspondence behind glass), histories and narratives (e.g., the founding of the nation inaugurated a “turning point” in world history,³⁶ prophecies, miraculous interventions),³⁷

³⁵ Contrary to some scholars, I am assuming there is such thing as “religion” that, while not always clearly definable, and not necessarily bound to modern categorical distinctions, is, at the very least, a legitimate and observable anthropological phenomenon (just like music, sexuality, communication, etc.).

³⁶ Elie Kedourie, cited in *Nationalism*, 51, remarks that “nationalists make use of the past in order to subvert the present.” Later in the volume (221), Mary Matossian describes

institutions (e.g., departments, agencies, associations, training organizations), authoritarian and charismatic figures (e.g., presidents, senators), buildings and memorials (e.g., the Lincoln Memorial, Pentagon, Washington Monument), heroes (e.g., legendary military leaders), artifacts (e.g., weapons, manuscripts), and veneration (praise-and-worship response with national hymns at services). Similar arguments have been made regarding other quasi-religions such as Marxism, humanism, and consumerism, thus raising questions about the modern category of religion.³⁸ Regardless, one is left asking: how and why is nationalism so religious?

Many explanations have been offered, but René Girard's anthropological account of violence and religion is particularly noteworthy. Girard argued that all people have psychological "mimetic" desires that ultimately terminate in envy and rivalry between individuals. These accumulate, infect society, and threaten to break down the social order. The escalation of this conflict then becomes focused on a single individual or group chosen by the social whole, who becomes a scapegoat for discharging the conflict. Hostile desires of "all against all" become "all against one."³⁹ The victim of this sacrifice becomes sacred (even divine) because crises give way to peace, and because the victim is essential for regularly keeping violence in check. Fundamental aspects of religion emerge from this whole repetitive process, such as prohibition (things not to be done), myth (narratives and stories), and ritual (procedures of how to bring restoration).

Two major implications of this theory should be noted. First, because of the basic restraining function of religion, a society that rejects all religion puts itself at risk for increased violence. As one scholar put it, "While the injustice of scapegoating the innocent has certainly become evident to

a similar feature: the "attempt to resurrect a supposed 'golden age'—which is known as 'archaism.'"

³⁷ E.g., the "Valley Forge Prayer."

³⁸ "Once colonies were established...Western scholars and bureaucrats began to fit indigenous cultural systems into taxonomies of 'world religions.' Confucianists and Hindus protested that Confucianism and Hinduism were not religions. The religious/secular dichotomy was nonetheless imposed on non-Western cultures; as in Europe, the distinction encoded acts of power." William Cavanaugh, "Girard and the Myth of Religious Violence," in *Does Religion Cause Violence? Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Violence and Religion in the Modern World*, edited by Scott Cowdell, Chris Fleming, Joel Hodge, and Carly Osborn (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 13.

³⁹ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, translated by Patrick Gregory (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1979).

modernity, this moral advance comes at the expense of weakened cultural protections. It leads to the possibility of unrestrained, ‘apocalyptic’ violence, according to Girard.”⁴⁰

It seems Girard may have been right. While the generic idea that more religion equals less violence is overly simplistic, impossible to verify, and in desperate need of qualification, the statist, postreligious twentieth century is the most violent century on record, not to mention the way it has given birth to new waves of religious fanaticism, Islamic terrorism, and the like. “Both Hitler and Stalin were hostile to religion,” Girard reminds readers, “and they killed more people than all past religious wars combined.”⁴¹ Philosopher David Bentley Hart makes this point more eloquently:

We live now in the wake of the most monstrously violent century in human history, during which the secular order (on both the political right and the political left), freed from the authority of religion, showed itself willing to kill on an unprecedented scale and with an ease of conscience worse than merely depraved. If ever an age deserved to be thought an age of darkness, it is surely ours. One might almost be tempted to conclude that secular government is the one form of government that has shown itself too violent, capricious, and unprincipled to be trusted.⁴²

The modern “myth of religious violence”⁴³ is therefore turned on its head. For Girard, it is the loss of the sacrificial mechanism, “the only system able to contain violence,”⁴⁴ that poses a new threat to the modern world.

Girard, of course, was not arguing for the reinstatement of animal or human sacrifice, but (along with Jean-Pierre Dupuy) simply that political substitutes are not adequate:

⁴⁰ Joel Hodge, “Why Is God Part of Human Violence? The Idolatrous Nature of Modern Religious Extremism,” in *Does Religion Cause Violence?*, 42.

⁴¹ Cited in *Does Religion Cause Violence?*, 18.

⁴² David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 105–6.

⁴³ I.e., (a) there is a transcultural and transhistorical essence to religion that separates it from politics and economics and (b) this core religion “has more of a tendency to promote violence than secular phenomena have.” For an explanation and refutation of this popular perspective, see Cavanaugh, “Girard and the Myth of Religious Violence,” in *Does Religion Cause Violence?*, 8, as well as his monograph, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, Cavanaugh, “Girard and the Myth,” 18.

Dupuy argues, then, that although sacred terror evokes (we might say) sacral resonances, it fails either to transcend or contain its own violence. It is thus a sham form of the sacred, a simulacrum—that is, an image without the substance of the original. This violence no longer functions to bring even a provisional peace, and thus reveals the collapse of the power of the sacred even as it clads itself in religious garb.⁴⁵

This point relates to a second and more pertinent implication: “The functional equivalent of archaic religion is still operative in many societies.”⁴⁶ This is seen in the judicial system, which shares the same function of sacrifice (i.e., to put a final end to the conflict). It is also seen in the modern nation-state:

The state in this context is inevitably a latecomer, an upstart that wants to take away from religion some part of the management of violence, until with the modern state it finally claims the monopoly on the use of legitimate violence, that is, the sole authority to distinguish between good and bad violence. From the beginning, religions and politics (or the state) have been in competition for the management of violence and their relationships have rarely been peaceful.⁴⁷

In other words, the nation-state has functionally replaced (or attempted to replace) the traditional role of ancient religion—namely, systematically managing violence.⁴⁸ Nuclear bombs, for example, now play the role of the sacred: “We must not be too close to the sacred, because it would release the violence that it keeps in check, like a Pandora’s box; we must not be too far from the sacred, because it protects us from our own violence.”⁴⁹ The bomb is our own “violence exteriorized in the form of a nonhuman entity,” which threatens our own survival.⁵⁰ Modern nation-states cannot live with nukes, but cannot live without them either.

⁴⁵ Ibid., Sarah Batchelard, “Forms of the Sacred and the Texture of Hope,” 108.

⁴⁶ Ibid., Cavanaugh, “Girard and the Myth,” 16.

⁴⁷ Ibid., Paul Damouchel, “Violence, Religion, and the Sacred,” 171.

⁴⁸ Cf. Hodge, “Why Is God Part of Human Violence?,” 44. “Girard’s position is not that religion motivates violence... but that violence gives rise to and is remedied by the cultural functioning of religion. The original function of religion according to Girard was to mitigate and minimize violence in order to prevent social collapse and to stabilize human societies.”

⁴⁹ Jean Pierre Dupuy, “The Sacred Is Back—but as Simulacrum,” 103.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

The merits of this perspective can be debated on their own terms. However valid or invalid Girard's perspective is though, it does offer a sophisticated explanation regarding why nationalism so naturally resembles ancient religion: it performs many of the same functions, including the management of aggression.⁵¹

Regarding point (b) above, nationalism and religion often appear to hijack each other. This becomes evident as one reads important volumes such as *Violence and the World's Religious Traditions* by Juergensmeyer, Kitts, and Jerryson. I have elsewhere pointed out that this relationship is actually the dominating theme of the entire subject:

There is, in fact, a semantic thread that binds all the contributions together, namely, the inescapable relationship of the political apparatus (the state) with religious violence... It becomes clear that religious adherents do not always cause government machinery to wield influence (though this certainly happens), but rather the reverse often occurs: the government wields religion to serve its political ends... The so-called "religion of the state" (or "statism") is practically a thematic subtext underlying the book, as the authors frequently and explicitly lament the marriage of religion and state. This emerging triangle (religion, state, violence) did not merit a chapter in this volume, but it will hopefully get attention elsewhere.⁵²

Indeed, because of the raw power of religion—its grand narratives, symbolic systems, ethical imperatives, and so on—those operating the political machinery have a ready-made tool to seize control.

It should finally be noted that American nationalism emerges from a unique religious context that utilizes a select strand of Christianity—namely, conservative evangelicalism. For however substantial the association is

⁵¹ It is noteworthy that Christianity, in Girard's account, is not like ancient religion in this respect, but actually challenges this dominating framework. Hodge, "Why Is God Part of Human Violence?", 43, summarizes: "In contrast to the mythic gods, the recognition of Jesus' divinity is because of his *nonviolence*, that is, his ability to live outside the cycles of mimetic violence even in this death as *crucified and risen victim*. The gospels' recognition of the injustice and self-sacrifice of Jesus' death saw them relocate the experience of the transcendence in the nonviolent love of Jesus, rather than in the violence of the mob."

⁵² Jamin Hübner, review of *Violence in the World's Religious Traditions*, edited by Mark Juergensmeyer, Margo Kitts, and Michael Jerryson, in *Reading Religion* (November 8, 2017). Available at: <http://readingreligion.org/books/violence-and-worlds-religious-traditions> (accessed September 19th, 2018).

between white evangelicals (80 percent of whom voted for Trump in the last presidential election)⁵³ and American nationalism, the connection is evident. Numerous scholars have demonstrated that the association is so tight that being “Christian” (read: a contemporary American evangelical) and being “American” (read: pro-US nation-state) are almost indistinguishable.⁵⁴

The theological argument behind this relationship is essentially the following: if “God” (whatever this might mean)⁵⁵ is active and living in the world, then this activity and divine purpose can be known. And if they can be known, they can be wielded for political purposes. The problem with this argument (especially the second premise) has been pointed out by both those who advocate the standard myth of religious violence and those who do not, and need not be elaborated here.⁵⁶ The main problem is not “What is real?” or even “What is right?” but “What can be known?” and “How certainly can we know it?” Standing behind the American nationalist’s “will to power,” then, is the ability and *will to know* (to borrow from Nietzsche and Foucault).

⁵³ Sarah McCammon, “After Alignment with Trump, Some Evangelicals Are Questioning Movement’s Leaders,” on *All Things Considered*, NPR Radio (March 14, 2018). Cf. Janelle Wong, “This Is Why White Evangelicals Still Support Donald Trump. (It’s Not Economic Anxiety.)” *Washington Post* (June 19, 2018).

⁵⁴ See George Marsden, *Religion and American Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018); Kenneth D. Wald and Allison Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, 8th edition (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2018); John Fea, *Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018); Daniel Williams, *God’s Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Matthew Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017); Mark Noll and Luke Harlow (eds.), *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Brian Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott* (Downers Groves: InterVarsity Academic, 2013); George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Harriet Harris, *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁵⁵ For a critical discussion of this topic, see Gordon Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). For a more traditional perspective, see Thomas Oden, *Classic Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2009).

⁵⁶ See, for example, Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery*; Juergensmeyer, et. al., *Violence and the World’s Religious Traditions*; Cowdell, et. al., *Does Religion Cause Violence?*; Sathianathan Clarke, *Competing Fundamentalisms: Violent Extremism in Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017). See also the various articles published in the *Christian Libertarian Review*.

This concludes our introductory remarks to our study of contemporary nationalism. Much has been unraveled and hopefully clarified. But the best way to understand nationalism is not hammering out nuanced definitions as much as giving the microphone to a person (or group) unconditionally committed to “their” country. Definitions can be refined from there.

3. *Imprimis* Articles

3.1 “*Immigration in the National Interest*” (Cotton)

Senator Cotton begins his essay on immigration with a hearty lament. Many Americans have “lost faith in both the competence and the intentions of our governing class—of both parties!”⁵⁷ From the start, the aforementioned dichotomy between the regulating, taxing, political class (the “governing class,” in his words) and the regulated, taxed, productive class is both explicit and central to what follows. How consistently this distinction is maintained throughout the essay is arguable. At any rate, the author then unfolds a story of the victorious emergence of President Trump and a brief history of the immigration controversy. Immigration is a key topic for nationalists because the acceptance of different peoples has the potential to threaten homogeneity (real or imagined) of the extant group. Cotton is well aware of this “problem,” as noted below.

The use of first-person plural becomes immediately evident as one reads on (e.g., “*we* killed it,” in reference to an immigration bill; “*our* country,” contrasted with the country as it would have been under Clinton’s policies), as well as a mentality of domestic warfare between the plans of an ambiguous “cosmopolitan elite” and “the people’s legitimate concerns.”⁵⁸ The competitive “our side”/“their side” framework stands in plain view. The basic problem, we read, is that the elite has “put its own interests above the national interest.” Immigration is attached to this national interest, as it “touches upon fundamental questions of citizenship, community, and identity.”⁵⁹ Allowing anyone to become a citizen therefore trivializes the nationalist triad of “autonomy, unity, and identity.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Tom Cotton, “Immigration in the National Interest,” in *Imprimis* 46:10 (October 2017), 1.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Hutchinson and Smith, *Nationalism*, 5.

This problem is said to have begun with former president Obama (often framed as the polar opposite of President Trump), who at least once referred to himself as a “citizen of the world.” This phrase, in Cotton’s view, “revealed a deep misunderstanding of citizenship” and a “globalist mindset” that renders “real citizenship... meaningless.”⁶¹ It should be noted, however, that this is a rather odd objection because the concept of non-national citizenship and a united humanity finds its location in a variety of cultural and literary contexts. In fact, the idea of the “citizen of the world” can be traced to at least the Renaissance humanist scholar Desiderius Erasmus,⁶² is transformed in a Roman context in Paul’s first-century letter to the Christians in Philippi (a Roman colony),⁶³ and has a variety of contemporary manifestations, such as in the writings of Gandhi.⁶⁴ The choice of Obama therefore appears more of a convenient one designed to erect a political contrast—and perhaps invoke negative political memories for the audience—than a matter of principle. Ultimately, this creates the impression that the ideal political party is nationalist and the problematic political party anti-nationalist.

Cotton goes on to construct a case for citizenship, which “by definition means that you belong to a particular political community.”⁶⁵ By “political community,” Cotton apparently assumes that this term does not have any

⁶¹ Cotton, “Immigration,” 2.

⁶² Desiderius Erasmus, *The Correspondence of Erasmus*, vol. 9 (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1989), 185: “My own wish is to be a citizen of the world, to be a fellow-citizen of all men—a pilgrim, better still.” Cf. Leon Halkin, *Erasmus: A Critical Biography*, translated by John Tonkin (New York: Blackwell, 1993); Desiderius Erasmus, *The Essential Erasmus*, edited by John Dolan (New York: Meridian, 1983), 174–204.

⁶³ See Philippians 3:20 (ἡμῶν γὰρ τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει; “for our citizenship exists in heaven”) and the discussion in Todd Still and Bruce Longenecker, *Thinking through Paul* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 193–209; 336–45; N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 1.1.5, 2.4.12; James Dunn, *The Theology of the Apostle Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 506–37.

⁶⁴ Mahatma Gandhi, *The Essential Gandhi* (New York: Vintage, 2002), 308: “Whatever the legal pundits may say, they cannot dominate the mind of man. Who can prevent the friend from declaring himself as a citizen of the world even though legally he is not, as though he may be, as he will be, prevented from entering many States under their laws? Legal status should not worry a man who has not reduced himself to the state of a machine as many of us have.” It is no coincidence that all three of these citizen-of-the-world figures were profoundly antinationalist, and harshly criticized (even killed) for being such.

⁶⁵ Cotton, “Immigration,” 2.

alignment with a political party, but is rather a feature of being under the authority of a political entity. In proof-text fashion, we read that “America is a real, particular place with real borders and real, flesh-and-blood people. And the Declaration [of Independence] tells us it was so from the very beginning.”⁶⁶ In other words, the concept of the nation is not currently arbitrary. Why not? Because the Founders meant to create “one people,” using “the words ‘we’ and ‘us’ throughout the Declaration.”⁶⁷ And what is this one people? In Cotton’s view, the united people can be seen in the process of “naturalization,” where foreigners “can cast off... race, class, ethnicity—and take on, by reflection and choice, a new title: American. This is a wonderful and beautiful thing.”⁶⁸ How exactly one casts off “race” is not explained. (Might one cast off their sex, height, and religion as well—to become “American”?) The category error is obvious, but the implication is more pertinent to underscore: for all practical purposes, the concept of “the American” is totalizing. Modern citizenship consumes all fundamental aspects of human existence and creates an entirely new human identity, nullifying any previous identifiers.

Naturally, this new human has new rights. It is wrong to suggest that “because anyone can become an American, we’re morally obligated to treat everyone like an American,” for everyone who wants to be associated with the nation must “play by our rules.”⁶⁹ “In our unique brand of nationalism,” the author goes on, “among our highest obligations is to ensure that every working American can lead a dignified life.”⁷⁰ This means that (referencing James Madison in 1790) we must “increase the wealth and strength of the community,” which is to say that “our immigration system... ought to benefit working Americans and serve the national interest.”⁷¹

At this point, the argument for “America first” has come full circle. The thrust of the argument is this: the nation’s responsibility (*qua* nation) is first and foremost to benefit itself; the main responsibility of Americans (*qua* Americans) is to benefit Americans. What is puzzling about this reasoning is that it explicitly requires the “working American” to sacrifice a substantial degree of freedom from the start. In a strange and ironic twist, Cotton claims it is *against* the national interest to “allow American businesses to import as

⁶⁶ Ibid., 2–3.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 3–4.

⁷¹ Ibid., 4.

much cheap labor as they want.”⁷² This leaves readers asking: What is “the national interest” if it is not located in the entrepreneurial pursuits of “hard-working” Americans? How then can the “national interest” even be known? In Cotton’s argument, the national interest can (evidently) be completely cut off from the desires of “hard-working Americans.” This trivializes the entire concept and immediately implies that the true source of identifying the “national interest” is from outside or above—that is, from federal interest and decree (or, perhaps even more ironically, from the mysterious “cosmopolitan elite”). Whatever the case, it is clear that the sacrifice of individual and corporate freedom is absolutely essential for achieving the (apparently higher) goal of “the national interest,” which is not actually expressed by the people as much as it is expressed by the “political community.”

The grotesqueries of past American immigration policy—the Chinese Exclusion Act, the national-origins quota system imposed by the 1924 Act, the indifference to the Jews in the 1930s⁷³—are then given quick acknowledgement followed by a rediagnosis and defensive galvanization: the political class simply should have “heeded the concerns of the working Americans,” and people should not have been “ignoring those concerns and slandering the people as bigots.”⁷⁴ That is, the reason Chinese people and Jews were treated inhumanely by past immigration policies was not really because the laws were a poor idea and stemmed from a problematic anthropology, but because anti-immigration advocates were not given due political attention.

Turning to the economic argument, Cotton argues that “there’s no denying that a steady supply of cheap unskilled labor [in addition to automation and globalized trade] has hurt working-class wages.”⁷⁵ “There is *no job* Americans won’t do... Americans will do any job.”⁷⁶ This is a popular phrase in contemporary nationalist discourse and, for many readers, appears to make sense. (After all, if Americans do not work hard at so many jobs, why is national GDP so high?) But it is actually a bold claim that implies at least five major concerns worth iterating.

First, it is unclear what “American” means in this context and how it is meaningful, since, as noted in the introduction of this essay, it might easily

⁷² Ibid., 3.

⁷³ Ibid., 4.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 4–5.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 5.

include a variety of persons from a variety of countries, languages, and ethnicities. (And must one really believe illegal immigrants do not do “any job”?) Second, even if this is not true, can it really be suggested that Australians and Canadians (or any other group) fall outside the proposition that “if the wage is decent and the employer obeys the law,”⁷⁷ they will do any job? There are serious questions as to whether one nationality is really more willing to be employed than another, even if one could make such a generalized observation in the first place.⁷⁸ Third, the argument is further problematized by the common nationalist claim that people are immigrating to America precisely because the quality of the work is better than in other countries. If many Americans are living in America because they would rather work there than elsewhere, does not that suggest Americans *do* have a strong preference over the kinds of work they will accept and reject? Fourth, does not a large quantity of unemployed, work-searching American citizens combined with a supply of vacant American jobs suggest that Americans are *not* really willing to perform any kind of work? In other words, if one is economically consistent with the claim that Americans will do any job, jobs should be instantly filled by the unemployed to the extent that it is possible. But we do not witness this kind of economic phenomenon. Especially given the welfare state, there is no question that many native-born citizens of the United States would prefer to be unemployed until next week rather than flip burgers today. If this was not the case, unemployment numbers would be different.

After proposing immigration reform, the essay ends with a reminder about national blessing: “Citizenship is the most cherished thing our nation can bestow.”⁷⁹ National identity—not legal systems, economic resources, or even national security—is considered the greatest gift of political lordship.

3.2 “How to Meet the Strategic Challenge Posed by China” (Goldman)

Global trade reveals nationalist agendas about as much as immigration does. China’s remarkable growth as an economic superpower has become the center of much discussion, especially for American citizens, many of whose

⁷⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁷⁸ The cultural indicators regarding this fierce debate are visible almost anywhere. For example, I recently saw a meme of a Hispanic man leaning against a fence wearing a t-shirt that reads, “Roses are red, tacos are enjoyable, don’t blame a Mexican just because you’re unemployable.”

⁷⁹ Ibid., 7.

possessions are produced in China.⁸⁰ As we turn to the second essay, we once again notice the peculiar framework that motivates the discussion: “China poses a formidable strategic challenge to America.”⁸¹

This statement assumes, of course, the legitimacy of competition among nation-states. This is problematic. Even if it was not, countless other peoples and countries have benefited from American production and economic activity, so it seems worth asking why another country’s economic success should be immediately perceived as a challenge instead of a blessing.

Indeed, Goldman tries to direct his (apparently) alarmist audience toward more national concerns: “The greatest danger to America is not a lack of strength, but complacency.”⁸² Again, one wonders what exactly the danger is (and why it is great). Readers are not told. Readers also are not given any clue as to why such danger is associated with “strength.” The rhetorical approach from the beginning seems to emerge from a covert xenophobia (i.e., “Get ready, the Chinese are coming for you”), Western masculine values (i.e., “We have to be strong, not sissies”), and a wartime mentality, even if the two countries are at peace.

On all these counts, one might easily argue the contrary, and many have since the violent twentieth century came to a close. Indeed, the greatest danger to any nation or people is not interdependence, but the intentional, isolating centralization of power and monopolization of economic production (which is the most straightforward explanation for over 120 million deaths due to murder and forced famine). It would therefore seem that the quicker the American empire can dissolve into powerlessness (and even irrelevancy), the safer and more empowered individuals around the world might become. Especially given the sober insights in such works as *The Black Book of Communism*⁸³ (by Courtois and coauthors) and Higgs’s *Delusions of Power*,⁸⁴ one would think the most pressing concern of American citizens today would be disarming the government, its war-making machine, and the

⁸⁰ A recent (and insightful) work on this subject is Bradley Gardner, *China’s Great Migration: How the Poor Built a Prosperous Nation* (Oakland: Independent Institute, 2017).

⁸¹ Goldman, “How to Meet,” 1.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Stéphane Courtois, Nicolas Werth, Jean-Louis Panné, Andrzej Paczkowski, Karel Bartošek, and Jean-Louis Margolin, *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, translated by Jonathan Murphy and Mark Kramer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). Although critiques of this work exist, its total numerical estimates for democide have proven somewhat conservative.

⁸⁴ Higgs, *Delusions*.

power of politicians. For “with regard to large-scale death and destruction, no person, group, or private organization can even begin to compare to the state, which is easily the greatest instrument of destruction known to man.”⁸⁵ Instead, from a nationalist perspective, the entire framework for discussing global economics and non-American nations—nations that are now (ironically) imitating a number of “American principles” in a significant manner—is presented in terms of alarm and conflict. This is all the stranger when one considers the indisputable economic facts: millions of Chinese are no longer starving, and millions of Americans are now wealthy from Chinese products. This state of affairs is worth pondering, yes, but is it really cause for alarm?

For Goldman, the American way and the Chinese way are diametrically opposed. They have to be because there is only one America. Just how are they opposed? According to Goldman, China “is an empire based on the coercion of unwilling people. Whereas the United States became a great nation populated by people who chose to be part of it, China conquered peoples of different ethnicities and with different languages and has kept them together by force.”⁸⁶ One wonders how Native Americans and African Americans would respond to these remarkable claims. In any case, Goldman once again refuses to acknowledge the violent nature of the political apparatus itself, regardless of geographical location, structure, political affiliation, or otherwise. “Here in the West,” he elaborates, “we have a concept of rights and privileges that traces back to the Roman Republic—we serve in the army, we pay taxes, and the state has certain obligations in return. There is no such concept in China. Beijing rules by whim.”⁸⁷ These types of statements border on the absurd. In this scenario, it is as if American citizens can simply demand that the federal government do A, B, or C and the government will automatically obey—and as if entire agencies (run by unelected officials) in Washington, DC, never “rule by whim.”⁸⁸ This is not to suggest there are no differences of governance between the two nations. But, just as the media plays up differences between the political left and right,

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁸⁶ Goldman, “How to Meet,” 2.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁸ It hardly needs to be stated, but the power of the US federal government is, by definition, superior to the individual and is demonstrated by regular demands that are explicitly followed by threats of physical punishment. Whatever rights the individual does have in text, theory, or elsewhere, they are contingent on the federal government’s own interpretation and enforcement of them, again pointing to the final power and authority of the state.

so it seems the nationalist must manufacture an epic battle between two sides to vindicate the values and disposition of one's own team.

In more insulting images, Goldman depicts the lack of unity in China in various ways: "In Hong Kong, you'll see two Chinese screaming at each other in broken English because one speaks Mandarin and the other speaks Cantonese and they don't have a word in common,"⁸⁹ and "If you go to a Chinese wedding or a restaurant where families gather, the same people are loud and bumptious."⁹⁰ Readers are given the impression that it is not really desirable to be Chinese, at least, not when compared to being American. Again, all of this is presented in the overarching context of American concern (i.e., what American wants to be like the Chinese?).

Goldman then digs into economic statistics about Chinese and American production. The us-vs.-them mentality saturates charts and tables. "The Chinese have pushed us out," we read at one point.⁹¹ Talk about the benefits of economic competition is absent—which is all the more significant coming from a perspective that would traditionally uphold such free market values. The various economic imbalances and distortions are argued to be non-trivial. The lopsided importing of technology is particularly alarming: "America can't build a military aircraft without Chinese chips. That's a national security issue."⁹² As with any facts, however, there are many possible interpretations. One might look at the same situation and *celebrate*: "The two biggest national superpowers depend too much on each other to go to war. Hooray! Peace and prosperity for everyone!" But that is not the attitude taken. Mutual, voluntary exchange, free markets, and economic interdependence are considered problems, not blessings. "I'm a free trader," Goldman conclude, "but national security sometimes supersedes the free market."⁹³

The same goes for economic success. China has grown substantially, and Goldman spends some time surveying China's economic successes in

⁸⁹ Goldman, "How to Meet," 2.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 5. This statement is reminiscent of George Bush's remarks during the Great Recession: "I've abandoned free-market principles to save the free-market system." Cf. "Bush Says Sacrificed Free-Market Principles to Save Economy," *The Economic Times* (December 7, 2008). Available at: http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/3848694.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst (accessed September 19, 2018).

various sectors—transportation, telecommunications, finances, innovation and invention, education, and so on. Readers of this portion will be tempted to rejoice about all that is happening around the globe—until finding themselves smitten with nationalist envy, because little of this is happening in America. When the question comes, “So what do we do about China?”, the answer is not “Nothing; let’s keep calm and carry on,” and certainly not “Let’s stop privileging certain war factories in the name of nationalist interest.” Instead, the answer is, “If we’re going to compete with China, we’ve got to do it the American way... innovation.”⁹⁴ And what does innovation mean in this nationalist context? Private innovation? Serving each other in peaceful, productive ways across languages, borders, and cultural traditions? No. It means funding the Pentagon and various government agencies. In fact, readers are told that “we get the best kind of innovation” from developing weapons.⁹⁵

Thus, the real answer to the China “problem” is not to establish free trade agreements, thus making mass death a lesser possibility and increased freedom and prosperity a greater possibility. Rather, the answer is to gear up, hold high the stars and stripes, and consciously spoon-feed the most notorious military machine in history.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5. One cannot help but read this section with a bit of *déjà vu* from the national events of the early twentieth century and Cold War period. The national government of the United States showed signs of envy of Soviet Russia’s communism. At one point, it was proposed to essentially socialize huge portions of the entire American economy (e.g., the Swope Plan). Later on, it was argued that the United States should imitate the economy of its greatest enemies. In a similar way, Goldman suggests imitating China as much as distinguishing it from the United States, such as by initiating greater federal subsidies.

⁹⁶ This conclusion highlights an inherent contradiction in neoconservative political thought: big government is bad, but nationalism requires an ever-expanding government to compete with other large governments. A diminished government, one that is severely “limited,” can never serve the “national interest.” Of course, this conclusion could be empirically demonstrated by comparing the size of government (e.g., budget, employee count) under Republican and Democratic administrations throughout history; the difference between political administrations is usually nonexistent, despite frequent rhetoric to the contrary.

3.3 “The Problem of Identity Politics and Its Solution” (Continetti)

As observed above, diversity is a problem for the nationalist. If there is no common humanity under a banner or flag, then the legitimacy of the nation-state itself is thrown into question—and with it, one’s political team. As a modern phenomenon, today’s nationalism abolishes human difference in its effort to create a transcendent anthropological category.

It is unsurprising, then, that in a late/postmodern culture sensitive to and celebratory of difference and diversity,⁹⁷ the nationalist instinctively responds to discourse about diversity with ridicule and scorn, even as general subject matter. Furthermore, with increasing attention given to minorities, those in majority categories within the borders (e.g., white American males such as Continetti) feel increasingly threatened.⁹⁸ This is the essence of Continetti’s essay on identity politics.

After a one-page summary of how the education system is failing, Continetti sounds the sirens: “The Soviet Union had collapsed in a heap of warring nationalities... America [could] be next.”⁹⁹ Citing Samuel Huntington (whose work is now thoroughly discredited),¹⁰⁰ Continetti repeats some of Cotton’s sentiments, but adds more flesh to the bones: “America, Huntington said, has both a creed and a culture... The culture derives from the Anglo-Protestant settlers.”¹⁰¹ Immigration threatens this ancestry with

⁹⁷ On these broader subjects, see Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon (eds.), *A Postmodern Reader* (Albany: State of University New York Press, 1993); Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

⁹⁸ For the privileged majority, moves toward justice and equality can feel like injustice and oppression.

⁹⁹ Continetti, “The Problem,” 2–3.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Chiara Bottici and Benoit Challand, “Rethinking Political Myth: The Clash of Civilizations as a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 9:3 (2006):315–36; Fouad Ajami, “The Summoning,” *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 1993); Bruce Russett, John Oneal, and Michaelene Cox, “Clash of Civilizations, or Realism and Liberalism Déjà vu? Some Evidence,” *Journal of Peace Research* 37:5 (2000): 583–608; Errol Henderson and Richard Tucker, “Clear and Present Strangers: The Clash of Civilizations and International Conflict,” *International Studies Quarterly* 45:2 (2002): 317–38; Jonathan Fox, “Clash of Civilizations or Clash of Religions: Which Is a More Important Determinant of Ethnic Conflict?” *Ethnicities* 1:3 (2001): 295–320; Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fear of Barbarians: A European’s Take on Islam in Western Democracies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

mixed blood: “Intermarriage and assimilation will affect immigrants from these groups just as they have affected other immigrant group[s].”¹⁰² Furthermore, giving attention to people based on their ethnicity proved a failure for Democratic politics during Obama’s presidency and for Hillary Clinton. “Identity politics” therefore does not work.

Continetti does not really define “identity politics” in his essay, though he seems to mean giving attention to various characteristics of a person, and to certain events and properties associated with those characteristics, in public discourse. Presumably, a detailed conversation about American slavery, one of the few versions of slavery in human history that specifically targeted a racial group, would be stigmatized, for in that case one would be having a conversation about identity politics. The same goes for any other popular issue associated with the “progressive left.”¹⁰³

The major concern, however, is summarized by the author in pseudo-Marxist terms. After discussing examples of politically charged legislative issues (e.g., transgendered students and bathrooms, obligatory support for contraception, prosecuting cake bakers for not serving gays, etc.), we read the following:

These stories... are more than [the culture war]: they are examples of a coastal, metropolitan, highly schooled upper-class warring against the traditions and freedoms of a middle American, exurban and rural, lower-middle and working class with some or no college education. In short, examples of a privileged few attempting to impose their will on a recalcitrant majority... The result of this class conflict is an America in danger of coming apart.¹⁰⁴

The extent to which this summary is in any way accurate is beside the point. What concerns us is the conclusion drawn from it: that America is “in danger of coming apart.” This assumes that America was (at some point in

¹⁰² Ibid., 4.

¹⁰³ The inability to publicly address sensitive topics such as these (e.g., racism, sexism, prejudice, discrimination) in the context of a “regressive left” culture has been the subject of constant discussion by highly popular alternative-media (i.e., YouTube) personalities and post-progressives such as Joe Rogan (host of *The Joe Rogan Experience*) and Dave Rubin (host of *The Rubin Report*). Sam Harris (host of the *Waking Up* podcast) has highlighted this problem as well with regard to racial and religious statistical analysis. What is ironic, of course, is that both the neoconservative “right” and “progressive left” suffer from the same inability to discuss such topics without reacting in an allergic and demonizing fashion.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 6.

the near or distant past?) “together.” It is not clear what this means or why it is desirable (e.g., does anyone really know what America’s founders would have said about transgender persons and dimorphic bathrooms?). It is especially odd since America is often held up as an example by its supporters because of its tolerance to diversity of opinion, religion, ethnicity, and the like, which is evidenced by its fierce divisions through time. In other words, a nation that is truly tolerant and free should be more concerned about enforced public uniformity, not the lack of it. Continetti has confused the conditions necessary for long-term social stability.

What is it, then, that holds Americans “together”? The answer given is:

We are united by our creed of freedom and equality, and also by our habits, our manners, our national language, our territorial integrity, our national symbols—such as the National Anthem, the Flag, and the Pledge of Allegiance—our civic traditions, and our national story. We should tell that story forthrightly and proudly; we should continue our traditions of local government and patriotic displays; we should guard the symbols of our heritage against attack; and we should recognize that the needs of our citizens take priority. We should also remember the words of a great American nationalist, Abraham Lincoln... “Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”¹⁰⁵

Thus ends Continetti’s essay.

There is much packed into this closing paragraph that concisely confirms previous observations and deserves further comment. The major problem is that almost every assertion within the definition of unity is potentially incoherent when specifically applied to American history. For instance, what was “our creed of freedom and equality” in a country that recognized slave ownership and did not recognize women’s property as property? What might this mean today, when some US citizens are forbidden from collecting rainwater off their own roofs and others are not, when it is illegal for anyone within the national borders to use gold as currency, when the United States consistently fails to rank among the top-ten countries in the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 7.

world in terms of freedom, even in studies produced by Americans?¹⁰⁶ The American experiment certainly and explicitly made room for more freedoms than other political experiments of the era.¹⁰⁷ But it is highly questionable whether this amounts to license for creating and enforcing (effectively) a national religion—or legitimizing the formation of a timeless “creed”—especially when the very foundation of the republic, its Constitution, assumes the state’s higher claim on the bodies and properties of citizens than the citizens have over themselves.¹⁰⁸

The same concern applies to “our habits, our manners, our national language.” What exactly are the timeless American “habits” and “manners,” and how can they be known? If they exist, are they really desirable? (The US government arguably has a “habit” of invading countries, legitimizing torture, and more recently, drone-bombing innocent women and children.) And is the English language really American, since it has far deeper roots in European and British literature, law, and practice than the United States? In Continetti’s conclusion, one should also observe the capitalization of national symbols, such as the “Flag,” and, of course, the ultimate prioritization of the citizen.

If this portion of Continetti’s essay were taken as seriously as it could be, the American nation should be considered immortal and immutable. It is an eternal empire that does not evolve and change through time, nor should it.¹⁰⁹ It is the responsibility of all citizens to prevent any such change from

¹⁰⁶ See Ian Vásquez and Tanja Porcnik, *The Human Freedom Index* (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 2017) and Terry Miller, Anthony Kim, and James Roberts, *2018 Index of Economic Freedom* (Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation, 2018).

¹⁰⁷ See Murray Rothbard, *Conceived in Liberty* (Auburn: Ludwig Von Mises Institute, [1979] 2011).

¹⁰⁸ As a libertarian, I would suggest that those who protected their property from foreign aggression in the American Revolution are to be respected and remembered (especially by their own familial descendants, or whoever thereafter owns the property) precisely for that reason—not because of any secondary political loyalties, political actions, elections, or other reasons. Continetti may be right: symbols, stories, traditions, and the like should both be perpetuated and protected, but it can be argued that the referent to all of these things must be the people, families, and property themselves, perpetuated as they freely choose to in their own lives. In short, to the extent that the revolution was an expression of voluntary defense of private property and the freedom of the human spirit, it can and should be celebrated, but to the extent that it was a project of aggression and political interests, it should not.

¹⁰⁹ Hence the name of the nationalist tune “Stars and Stripes Forever” (1987), the official “national march” of the United States.

occurring, no matter what new challenges get in the way. Again, all of this shows the all-encompassing, hegemonic nature of contemporary nationalism.

4. The Inaugural Speeches of Presidents Obama and Trump

Dominant political discourse suggests that the political left and right exhibit fundamentally opposing perspectives with little common ground. Yet as we see all too often, just the opposite is the case. A number of basic aspects unite the “one party” in Washington—such as support for drug wars, the police state, the surveillance state, taxation and regulation, crony capitalism and political favoritism, and more. Above all, however, is the uniting force of nationalism.

This is vividly demonstrated in presidential inaugural speeches. The table below compares Obama’s and Trump’s inaugural speeches according to topic and rhetorical strategy. Key agreements are marked in bold text.¹¹⁰

Subject matter	Obama	Trump
Historical significance of this present moment	“ At these moments , America has carried on not simply because of the skill or vision of those in high office... On this day, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord.”	“You came by the tens of millions to become part of a historic movement the likes of which the world has never seen before. ” “ We stand at the birth of a new millennium , ready to unlock the mysteries of space, to free the Earth from the miseries of disease, and to harness the energies, industries and technologies of tomorrow.”
Perpetual problems demanding an immediate political solution	“Our nation is at war against a far-reaching network of violence and hatred. Our economy is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility on the part of some, but also our collective	“Mothers and children trapped in poverty in our inner cities; rusted-out factories scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our nation; an education system, flush with

¹¹⁰ The text of the speeches comes from WhiteHouse.gov. Bold text indicates thematic nationalist agreement.

	<p>failure to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age. Homes have been lost, jobs shed, businesses shuttered. Our health care is too costly, our schools fail too many—and each day brings further evidence that the ways we use energy strengthen our adversaries and threaten our planet... These challenges... will be met."</p>	<p>cash, but which leaves our young and beautiful students deprived of knowledge; and the crime and gangs and drugs that have stolen too many lives and robbed our country of so much unrealized potential. This American carnage stops right here and stops right now."</p>
<p>The call to action and loyalty to the state</p>	<p>"And those of us who manage the public's dollars will be held to account, to spend wisely, reform bad habits, and do our business in the light of day, because only then can we restore the vital trust between a people and their government."</p>	<p>"At the bedrock of our politics will be a total allegiance to the United States of America... "We will no longer accept politicians who are all talk and no action—constantly complaining but never doing anything about it. The time for empty talk is over. Now arrives the hour of action."</p>
<p>Divine favor and authorization</p>	<p>"This is the source of our confidence—the knowledge that God calls on us to shape an uncertain destiny." "With eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations."</p>	<p>"The Bible tells us, 'how good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity.'" "We are protected by God."</p>
<p>The historical myth</p>	<p>"Our Founding Fathers faced with perils that we can scarcely imagine, drafted a charter to assure the rule of law and the rights of man—a charter expanded by the blood of generations. Those ideals still light the world, and we will not give them up for expedience sake."</p>	<p>N/A</p>

<p>Continuing the myth</p>	<p>“Time and again these men and women struggled and sacrificed and worked till their hands were raw so that we might live a better life. They saw America as bigger than the sum of our individual ambitions, greater than all the differences of birth or wealth or faction.</p> <p>“This is the journey we continue today.”</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>National superiority (“exceptionalism”)</p>	<p>“We remain the most prosperous, powerful nation on Earth. Our workers are no less productive than when this crisis began. Our minds are no less inventive, our goods and services no less needed than they were last week, or last month, or last year. Our capacity remains undiminished.”</p>	<p>“Do not let anyone tell you it cannot be done. No challenge can match the heart and fight and spirit of America. We will not fail. Our country will thrive and prosper again.”</p>
<p>Homage paid to those sacrificed</p>	<p>“As we consider the role that unfolds before us, we remember with humble gratitude those brave Americans who at this very hour patrol far-off deserts and distant mountains. They have something to tell us, just as the fallen heroes who lie in Arlington whisper through the ages. We honor them.”</p>	<p>“We will be protected by the great men and women of our military and law enforcement and, most importantly, we are protected by God.”</p>
<p>Political authority and the people</p>	<p>That “we are in the midst of crisis is now well understood. Our nation is at war... America: In the face of our common dangers...”</p>	<p>“And this, the United States of America, is our country. What truly matters is not which party controls our government, but whether our government is controlled by the people...</p> <p>“At the center of this movement is a crucial conviction: that a nation exists to serve its citizens.”</p>

<p>The end of diversity and united people</p>	<p>“On this day, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord. On this day, we come to proclaim an end to the petty grievances and false promises, the recriminations and worn-out dogmas that for far too long have strangled our politics... The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.”</p>	<p>“And this, the United States of America, is your country.</p> <p>“What truly matters is not which party controls our government, but whether our government is controlled by the people...</p> <p>“We are one nation—and their pain is our pain. Their dreams are our dreams; and their success will be our success. We share one heart, one home, and one glorious destiny.”</p> <p>“The oath of office I take today is an oath of allegiance to all Americans.”</p>
<p>The new humanity and nationalism’s power to cure</p>	<p>“For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and non-believers. We are shaped by every language and culture, drawn from every end of this Earth; and because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation, and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace.”</p>	<p>“A new national pride will stir our souls, lift our sights, and heal our divisions.</p> <p>“It is time to remember that old wisdom our soldiers will never forget: that whether we are black or brown or white, we all bleed the same red blood of patriots, we all enjoy the same glorious freedoms, and we all salute the same great American Flag.</p> <p>“And whether a child is born in the urban sprawl of Detroit or the windswept plains of Nebraska, they look up at the same night sky, they fill their heart with the same dreams, and they are infused with the breath of life by the same almighty Creator.”</p>

<p>Ultimate meaning found in service to the state</p>	<p>“We honor [dead soldiers] not only because they are the guardians of our liberty, but because they embody the spirit of service—a willingness to find meaning in something greater than themselves.”</p>	<p>“Through our loyalty to our country, we will rediscover our loyalty to each other.”</p>
<p>Self-serving citizenship and protectionism</p>	<p>“Starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America.</p> <p>“For everywhere we look, there is work to be done. The state of our economy calls for action, bold and swift. And we will act, not only to create new jobs, but to lay a new foundation for growth. We will build the roads and bridges, the electric grids and digital lines that feed our commerce and bind us together. We’ll restore science to its rightful place, and wield technology’s wonders to raise health care’s quality and lower its cost.”</p>	<p>“At the center of this movement is a crucial conviction: that a nation exists to serve its citizens. Americans want great schools for their children, safe neighborhoods for their families, and good jobs for themselves... For many decades, we’ve enriched foreign industry at the expense of American industry... We’ve made other countries rich while the wealth, strength, and confidence of our country has disappeared over the horizon... One by one, the factories shuttered and left our shores, with not even a thought about the millions upon millions of American workers left behind.</p> <p>“Every decision on trade, on taxes, on immigration, on foreign affairs, will be made to benefit American workers and American families. We must protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies, and destroying our jobs. Protection will lead to great prosperity and strength.”</p>

“Distinctive” values of the nation defined	“Values upon which our success depends—honesty and hard work, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism—these things are old.”	“We must speak our minds openly, debate our disagreements honestly, but always pursue solidarity... There should be no fear.”
Threats of punishment	“And for those who seek to advance their aims by inducing terror and slaughtering innocents, we say to you now that our spirit is stronger and cannot be broken—you cannot outlast us, and we will defeat you. ”	“We will reinforce old alliances and form new ones and unite the civilized world against Radical Islamic Terrorism, which we will eradicate completely from the face of the Earth. ”
Hopeful eschatology	“With hope and virtue, let us brave once more the icy currents, and endure what storms may come. Let it be said by our children’s children that when we were tested we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back nor did we falter; and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God’s grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations.”	“We Will Make America Wealthy Again. “We Will Make America Proud Again. “We Will Make America Safe Again. “And, Yes, Together, We Will Make America Great Again.”

Most of the content of each speech is substantially the same. This is true across a wide variety of subjects, the vast majority of which function to bolster key elements of nationalism (e.g., autonomy, identity, superiority).

This is also true for specific topics. For example, each president believes that God’s blessing is specifically upon him, and that the state is both able and willing to “defeat” (Obama) and “eradicate completely from the face of the Earth” (Trump) evil-doers. More disturbingly, involvement in the nation-state is shamelessly portrayed as a bridge to the meaning of life itself. For Obama, the service of the state’s primary protectors (soldiers) is to “find meaning in something greater than themselves,” and, for Trump, “through our loyalty to our country, we will rediscover our loyalty to each other.” Nationalism offers a remedy for existential angst.

There are differences, of course, but they pale in comparison to the similarities. Both presidents are right about one thing: national identity absorbs and nullifies all other identities, including political polarities between red and blue. In that sense, the sovereignty of the state comes into its own.

5. Critically Defining Contemporary Nationalism

Having reviewed three essays propounding nationalism and comparing two presidential speeches, what now can we say about nationalism's meaning and function, at least within the context of present-day America?

First, *nationalism is inherently collectivist*. Individual freedoms, desires, and characteristics are always subordinate to the larger, social goals of "the people." The extent to which the individual must be sacrificed is never explicitly mentioned (for obvious reasons), but it remains an ever-present subtext in the discussion.

Second, *the state's existence and function is never clearly acknowledged, but rather intentionally confused*. The people who are contained within the national walls are regularly and necessarily confounded with the ones responsible for establishing borders in the first place. Entire linguistic categories enter into the fray to make this confusion possible. Most immediately, what central banks and crony capitalists want, as expressed through congressional legislation, is labeled the "the national interest."¹¹¹ This "national interest" is then identified through propaganda with the desire of "the people." As Frédéric Bastiat (1801–50) so eloquently put it, "Government is the great fiction, through which everybody endeavors to live at the expense of everybody else."¹¹² For the nationalist, however, government is the great *truth* through which knowledge is dispensed, decrees are made, and a transcendent category of the human is brought into existence by fiat.

¹¹¹ E.g., "Let's keep the local tire factory open," or "We have a war to fight; these bad guys hate America." Cf. Higgs, *Delusions of Power*, 64–65: "The aircraft companies that suddenly profited so greatly during WWII, for example, became permanent, highly successful feeders at the government's trough, where some of them are feasting lavishly even now, the post-2001 military buildup having proved a godsend and boon to their stockholders... The last thing these vultures want, of course, is an abatement of the perceived terrorist threat, and we can count on them to hype any signs of an increase in such threats and, of course, to crowd the trough, happily slurping the taxpayer's money."

¹¹² Frédéric Bastiat, *The Law*, translated by Dean Russell, forward by Walter E. Williams, introduction by Richard Ebeling, afterward by Sheldon Richman (Irvington-on-Hudson, NY: Foundation for Economic Education, 1998).

Rothbard made a similar point with regard to national conflict:

With the land area of the globe now parceled out among particular States, one of the basic doctrines and tactics of the rulers of each State has been to identify *itself* with the territory it governs. Since most men tend to love their homeland, the identification of that land and its population with the State is a means of making natural patriotism work to the State's advantage. If, then, "Ruritania" is attacked by "Waldavia," the first task of the Ruritanian State and its intellectuals is to convince the people of Ruritania that the attack is really upon *them*, and not simply upon their ruling class. In this way, a war between *rulers* is converted into a war between *peoples*, with each people rushing to the defense of their rulers in the mistaken belief that the rulers are busily defending *them*. This device of nationalism has been particularly successful in recent centuries; it was not very long ago, at least in Western Europe, when the mass of subjects regarded wars as irrelevant battles between various sets of nobles and their retinues.¹¹³

Third, *nationalism is fundamentally incompatible with the diversity of human nature as it exists*. Rothbard argued that egalitarianism (of a certain kind) is a "revolt against nature": to try to make one out of the many does violence to individuals because it is their peculiarities that distinguish them from others.¹¹⁴ The same is true for nationalism. The (imaginary) American, with (imaginary) uniform properties, "manners," and "habits," can nullify one's race (and cultural background, sex, religion, etc.) simply by obtaining citizenship. This "naturalization" is said to be "beautiful." Here, the religious overtones are unmistakable. Like Jesus in the Christian Gospels, all the marginalized, foreigners, and hopeless are now given dignity. Or to use the apostle Paul's words from a different context (cf. Gal 3:28): "There is neither

¹¹³ Rothbard, *Anatomy of the State*, 71.

¹¹⁴ Rothbard, *Egalitarianism as a Revolt against Nature*, xvii: "A fundamental reason and grounding for liberty are the ineluctable facts of human biology; in particular, the fact that each individual is a unique person, in many ways different from all others. If individual diversity were not the universal rule, then the argument for liberty would be weak indeed. For if individuals were as interchangeable as ants, why should anyone worry about maximizing the opportunity for every person to develop his mind and his faculties and his personality to the fullest extent possible?" Cf. Nietzsche on the totalizing function of abstracting universal principles. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 89, summarizes his view as follows: "Although all leaves may share certain characteristics, each leaf differs from every other leaf. We can form the concept of 'leaf' only by overlooking these differences. Nietzsche held that the concept 'leaf' is thus a falsification of the reality of leaves... It... robs reality of those qualities that differentiate individual leaves from one another."

Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in” the United States of America.¹¹⁵

Fourth, *the tone of nationalism is regularly alarmist and apocalyptic*. Discourse is framed in such a way that it either assumes or invokes the audience’s worry. Danger is simultaneously attributed to the present moment. The most pivotal moment in the national story is always right now. And without action, something terrible will happen. Keeping the peace is never the solution. The socio-economic problem is complacency, lack of strength, lack of gall. In short, nationalism regularly thrives on scare tactics.

Fifth, *nationalism is incompatible with the laws of economics and, as such, cannot reap the benefits of free enterprise*. Instead of a market in which buyers and sellers meet to make voluntary exchanges, the state must control prices against private supply and demand out of the “national interest.” Like all price controls—whether price floors or price ceilings for wages, grain, interest rates, imports, or anything else—the result is either a shortage or an oversupply (and therefore waste and excess inventory). Tariffs, limits on imports, and laws forbidding international trade and labor are the most popular form of economic controls implemented by nationalists. The purpose is to force certain jobs to exist within the borders by artificially creating an isolated economic environment in which those jobs can continue, thereby forbidding real economic competition on a global level. Since all voluntary exchange is beneficial to both parties, laws prohibiting such exchange also hurt both parties. In the case of trade laws, select American jobs are temporarily propped up at the expense of everyone else, who must now pay higher consumer costs for certain products than they otherwise would have (e.g., a law forbidding steel imports to “save American jobs” will force Americans to pay more for steel). As the saying goes, “Nobody wins a trade war.”¹¹⁶ But, as is made explicit, free market principles and the laws of economics must be suspended in the name of national security, national interest, or whatever other reason a political power provides.

Sixth, *because nationalism is collectivist and ignorant of basic economic laws, the freedoms of individuals must be regularly violated, which works against nationalism’s own goals*. Continuing to engage in voluntary exchange with business partners and

¹¹⁵ I bring this up not to criticize religion or to impugn nationalism by its mere association with religion, but to demonstrate that nationalism regularly oversteps all sorts of cultural, linguistic, and intellectual boundaries; in other words, the spirit of the collective state is highly infectious.

¹¹⁶ An excellent resource on this is Pierre Lemieux, *A Primer on Free Trade: Answering Common Objections*, Mercatus Center (Arlington, VA: George Mason University, 2017).

friends must result in fines or imprisonment. This violation of freedom leaves “working Americans” with less productive income and, if imprisoned, pulls a productive American entirely out of the workforce. Since all people want to profit and few want to be under constant threat, this creates an underground economy from which the state cannot benefit anyway, alienating the entrepreneurs from any sense of loyalty they once had to their country. When conditions are critical enough, American businesspeople leave “the homeland” for another country to do business. After an entrepreneur is threatened with punishment for moving,¹¹⁷ what strategy is left for the politician? Little but sanctions and war, two more policies that fuel nationalism’s insatiable lust for uniformity.

Dutch prime minister Abraham Kuyper lamented this unfortunate state of affairs in a speech delivered in 1869. It touches upon most of the pertinent concerns regarding nationalism:

For once the peoples have been robbed of their characteristic genius and rendered homogenous, the triumph of imperial unity is assured. Hence the slogan of false unity today has become: through uniformity to unification, by centralization toward Caesarism. Should that effort succeed, the victory of that false unity will be celebrated on the ruins of what land and folk, race and nation, had that was peculiarly their own... The cries for brotherhood and love of fellow-man are but a slogan. Not fraternity but a false uniformity is the goal toward which its glittering images drive us... If multiformity is the undeniable mark of fresh and vigorous life, our age seeks to realize its curse in its quest for uniformity.¹¹⁸

Seventh, *nationalism always presumes some form of comparative superiority*. All governments and nations believe they are superior to others in one way or another. This exceptionalism has its own apologetic, narrative, and process of legitimation to show why America (to use one example) is better than all other nations. This self-aggrandization is necessary to keep the taxpayers from leaving the field and producing a harvest for other national farmers. In extreme conditions, such as those in North Korea, citizens are not even free to cross the border into another country.

Finally, *nationalism is bipartisan*. In an American context (and elsewhere), nationalism cannot be exclusively associated with one political party or

¹¹⁷ See, for example, Damian Paletta, “Trump Working on Bill to Punish Firms for Sending Jobs Overseas,” *Washington Post* (October 10, 2017).

¹¹⁸ Abraham Kuyper, “Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life,” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 23–25.

another. A vivid example of this was witnessed in comparing the inaugural speeches from Obama and Trump, which also serve as excellent illustrations of nationalism in general. This comparison is not intended to trivialize real differences between political parties (or of their representatives). But from a big-picture perspective, the differences are superficial and marginal at best. All political parties serve the same masters (e.g., crony capitalists). This is especially clear when it comes to allegiance to political identity, as any presidential-inauguration speech will testify.

6. Conclusion

If what I have observed above is generally true, then nationalism is (at the very least) an extremely powerful, entrenched, and toxic ideology. This article has not even addressed historical cases of nationalism, which demonstrate the huge costs involved when benefiting the collective becomes more important than the humanity of individuals. Indeed, nationalism is not a concern for libertarians alone, but for anyone who values individuality, freedom, independent thinking, new social possibilities, innovation, and the faithful preservation of human life.

Committed nationalists ought to consider long and hard the (ir)rationality of their hegemonic ideology, especially one that dictates an existential narrative on behalf of others instead of respecting individuals' right to forge their own life stories with their neighbors (including their "illegal" and "foreigner" neighbors). True, there are many variables in life that are not chosen: the century, place, and context in which one is born, for instance. But these are not factors typically determined by politicians, nor should they be. No political entity can (or should) trivialize one's ancestry, skin color, sex, gender, religion, or other attributes (especially coercively) in the name of *any* cause, for this would mean the abolition of human nature and individuality from the outset. The image of the superior, ideal Aryan human being was thankfully abandoned after the Holocaust. It is high time that the image of the superior, ideal American human being likewise be abandoned.

To conclude with some words from Rose Wilder Lane:

The Nation is nothing at all but simple force. Not in a single Nation are the people of one race, one history, one culture, nor the same political opinion or religious faith. They are simply human beings of all kinds, penned inside frontiers which mean nothing whatever but military force.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Lane, *The Discovery of Freedom*, 139.

