

## The Subversive Effects of Nationalism on the American Civilizational Structure throughout the History of the United States of America

Zoubir Aissani\*

<sup>1</sup> University of Oran 2 Mohamed Ben Ahmed, Oran (Algeria)

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### Summary:

Nationalism is one of the most influential political ideologies in human history. In fact, the sentiment has drastically reshaped the international political map in the two centuries since its first formulation in the writings of European philosophers in the 18th century, notably in regions accommodating ethnic or cultural minorities imperfectly integrated into their respective national societies. Thus, the problems and frequent failures of national integration are issues of central importance in the contemporary world, namely, the United States of America. The present paper examines the question of whether nationalism is detrimental to the civilizational structure of the USA; if so, then to what extent? The present paper will attempt to answer this question by conducting an objective investigation of different historical events and evaluation of their respective ramifications on the American community and politics

**Keywords:** Nationalism, Politics, Community, Ideology, Ethnicity, USA, History.

### I. Introduction

Human conflicts were and continue to be common in history, whether between individuals, groups with different characteristics and ideologies, or, on a larger scale, between countries. Disagreements are often instigated by a strong need to preserve security and self-assertion, and most frequently, conflicts of ethnic nature. As a definition, an ethnic conflict is a dispute that occurs between two or more ethnic groups, often triggered by social, political, economic, or religious reasons for self-determination and position within a larger society. Besides conflicts over territories for their resources and wealth, conflicts may also arise in a country when a given ethnic group declares secession from a state because they are deeply unsatisfied with the government; therefore, they attempt to overthrow it. Equally, disputes may also occur between two allied parties who have formerly been engaged in a war against a common colonizer because they have opposing ideologies.

Fundamentally, nationalism is regarded as a sort of social glue that brings individuals together in terms of ethnicity, history, language, religion, and culture into a single characterized and unique population, connected to a designated geographic area. There are many cases in which rebels have been intensely impacted by, and have indeed taken part in, battles propelled by nationalism, such as the resistance pursued by indigenous nations against their colonial oppressors. The issue with nationalism lies in its propensity to cover social inconsistencies among a populace. In this manner, it permits for the propagation of hierarchies, which in turn end up creating a new state structure, which is another way of stating that nationalism may be a drive that bunches people together in a way that tends to preserve the division of the human race into competing states.

This article deals with the negative effects of nationalism on the community and politics of the United States of America throughout its history. The problematic question to be discussed in this article is whether nationalism can be considered disruptive to the American civilizational structure and, under what circumstances? This question is to be answered by conducting an objective investigation of different historical events and evaluating their respective repercussions on the American community and politics. This study depends on applying a historical and systemic approach, joined with methods of synthesis, analysis, abstraction, analogy, comparison, and generalization, in addition to a method of individual assessment.

## **II. The Ideological Perception of Nationalism**

In nations with powerful state institutions, nationalism is more commonly referred to as patriotism. In fact, citizens of various countries are taught from an early age that unconditionally adoring their nation is crucial to their existence, and they are constrained to stand each morning in schools in respect for the national anthem and are instructed in an intensely sanitized form of the history of their nation. Since patriotism is so imbued in our lives, traditions, and beliefs, many people would be shocked to know that it is a relatively modern phenomenon. Whereas a few nations, such as China, have existed as a unified entity for thousands of years, others, such as Italy and the United States, have been around for less than two hundred and fifty years, and others have existed for even less than that.

In spite of the fact that nationalism emerged in several parts of the world at diverse times, the advancement of the present day nation-state is always associated with the early emergence of capitalism and European colonial expansion starting in the 16th century. During the intense times of imperialism, in which many parts of the world were robbed of their wealth and assets, a serious competition was instigated between kingdoms in Europe, leading to the proliferation and progressive solidification of states with politically designated borders. Within the modern world, settlers from an assortment of European countries manufactured modern collective national identities, born of their shared involvement in the experience of racial domination over indigenous nations and subjugated Africans.

More importantly, nationalism is heavily reliant on narratives of unification to unite populations in the pursuit of a common destiny, whether this includes the individualistic nature of the pursuit of the American Dream or the intensely militarized protectionism of ethnicity and religion. Nationalism creates an ideological system that controls large numbers of social groups. It generates a sense of collective belonging and a shared future; at the same time, it justifies the legitimization of state violence against any separatist acts and attempts that would presumably jeopardize its existence.

As a matter of fact, nationalism is one of the most influential political ideologies in human history. The international political map has been drastically reshaped in the two centuries following the formulation of the sentiment in the writings of European philosophers. Nevertheless, nearly all of these states accommodate ethnic or cultural minorities within their borders that are imperfectly integrated into national society. Thus, problems and frequent failures of national integration have been issues of central importance in the last four centuries, notably in the United States of America.

It is paramount to know the meaning of "civilizational structure". Actually, it is related to everything that results from creative human thought, which primarily aims to create an environment that responds to the basic human needs and requirements of daily life, the most important of which are security, food, health care, and education. This environment is the overall result of people's actual behavior on the ground; this behavior must be positive to a large extent not only to build a prosperous country, live in peace, and maintain the desired standard of living in all fields, but also to avoid the pitfalls and problems that eventually expose the civilizational structure to collapse. This equation is considered one of the most complex issues in the West in light of the presence of many fundamentalist ideological currents, the most important of which is nationalist thought, or nationalism, which has begun to return strongly to the fore of the political, social, and cultural arena in the United States of America, especially after the election of Donald Trump as president. It is worth mentioning that the difficulty of the equation lies in the complexity of social and racial structures in America, which has long erupted primarily due to conflicts that almost led the country to the brink of collapse, the most important of which is the Civil War (1861–1865) and the Civil Rights Movement, which reached its climax in the sixties of the last century.

## **III. Negative Repercussions of Nationalism in USA**

A profound assessment of nationalism in multinational states is dependent on the degree of integration of nations with the body of the state (Ma, 1992, p. 298); the higher the integration, the more we can say that nationalism is indeed civilization-building and the more cohesive the state can be because the gathered loyalties of nations within the body of the state shall form a support for the state. However, as soon as this support is compromised, integration between sub-nations and the state will arguably

collapse. The main reason here is the two forms of dispute that may appear afterwards: disputes between loyalties to the nation or to the state, or disputes among or between loyalties of different nations within a state. Thus, this is the foundation on which this article will rely.

Historically, the United States arose free of the restrictions and burdens of the European continent, especially with regard to its identity, nationality, religion, and the conflicts associated with these dilemmas. Yet despite this liberation, today, many are chanting nationalist, racist, and fascist slogans that gave great impetus to the arrival of Donald Trump to power in the elections of November 2016. The United States has always encountered continuous conflicts between two main currents, the first of which has a narrow vision linked to rigid and fanatical templates for the color of its skin, language, and culture, and the other is a broad vision that sees its country as part of a larger diverse world that it quotes from and contributes to its civilized progress. The famous events of "Charlottesville" in 2017, Virginia, represent a disturbing American reality, which in turn reflects a tangible escalation of right-wing racist movements. The election of Trump gave these movements great confidence in themselves, in their leaders, and in the size of their magnitude and the power of their presence among Americans.

Unlike most countries, the United States of America emerged on the basis of practical political balances rather than on ideological foundations related to the history or accumulated cultural experiences of its new citizens. Apart from the crimes and atrocities committed by the new immigrants against the Native Americans, these multi-ethnic immigrants chose to establish a modern state based on the foundations of a secular, representative, federal republican state. Despite the modernity of the American state, which does not exceed two and a half centuries, it has the oldest written constitution in the world, written in 1787 by "the founding fathers". The American people place their constitution on the same level or higher than divine books, with reverence and respect. And many countries in the world, such as Brazil, Belgium, Norway, Japan, and Mexico, have adopted the experience of writing their constitutions based on the American experience.

The US Constitution was not a long document, yet it provided a framework for the most complex systems of government. In fact, the American Constitution came as a summary devoid of useless linguistic phrases, containing only seven articles, which in turn contained sixty-three paragraphs, for a total of 3520 words, about five pages. Even after adding twenty-seven amendments to it during the past two centuries, the last of which was in 1992, his word count did not exceed 6,500 words, about ten pages (Young, J., 2010, p. 53).

After writing the constitution and completing the year-long ratification process, Americans felt the absence of a fundamental element, which is the constitution's failure to protect individual rights. So, as soon as the first congressional meeting in US history was held in 1789 in New York City, lawmakers agreed to introduce ten amendments to the constitution known as the Bill of Rights (Amar, 1991). Those rights formally eliminated any possibility of legal distinction based on race, color, ethnic background, or nationality and completely equalized Americans in their rights and duties.

In terms of religion, the American Constitution does not contain any mention of the word "God" or "gods." Only the word "religion" was used to emphasize non-discrimination between citizens on the basis of their beliefs. The sixth paragraph of the constitution states that it is not possible to conduct a religious test for anyone wishing to occupy any government job. Years later, the first amendment to the US Constitution was adopted to ensure that Congress would not in any way to legislate a law based on religion. Despite this, America's passion, and since its inception, was unquestionably Christian Protestant, as the great majority of the founding fathers were white Protestant immigrants (Witte & Nichols, 2016, p. 15).

Thus, the other large Christian denominations, such as Catholicism, were not represented among the founding fathers, and America has never known in its history any president other than a Protestant, with the exception of John Kennedy the Catholic. And many American Protestants did not consider their Catholic counterparts to be Christians in the same way that they were. Nor did they consider black Protestant Africans to be brothers in religion. American Protestants have always represented the majority voice in religious affiliations among Americans, which is what made America's liking of Protestant whites. However, American society enjoys a dynamic and interaction that has been shaped by the

demographic changes that the United States is witnessing and witnessed during the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to change this reality. During this period, nearly 60 million immigrants from Central America, mainly Catholic and non-Christian, have immigrated to America. This has made American society more diverse and different from what many believe.

In 2016, statistics showed that the population of America was approximately 323 million, of whom 61% were white, compared to 17.6% of Hispanics (mainly Mexican Catholics), 13.3% of black Africans, 5.6% of Asians, and the rest varied. At the same time, the percentage of Protestants fell from 51.4% in 2007 to 46% in 2016, and at the same time, the percentage of Christians in general decreased from 78% in 2007 to less than 70% in 2016 (Newport, 2016). Many white Protestant fanatics reject the new American reality; they see in it an existential threat to them and to America in their collective imaginations. In fact, when Barack Obama was elected as America's first black president in 2008, they branded it the decline of white dominance. Therefore, racist calls that believe in the supremacy of the white race and for hostility to Hispanics, Muslims, Jews, and blacks are revived.

The arrival of Donald Trump in the Oval Office shocked many people inside and outside the country. This victory marked a new birth certificate for the extreme right-wing racist currents in it. These currents are trying to reconstruct American history to appear as if it is a white Protestant history. Despite the existence of a state of political polarization and a sharp societal division outside Washington over all important domestic issues such as health care, gay rights, the role of religion in public life, the right to bear arms, and many others, these divisions remain far from obstructing the American process due to the clarity and strictness of the rules of politics. During the reverence of the constitution, which sets equations appropriate for the American case, everyone realizes that a coup against it is enough to demolish the American temple on everyone's heads. However, American society has been witnessing alarming unrest since Trump came to power; he adopted the slogan "Make America great again," which is in fact understood by Trump supporters as "Make America white again."

### **III.1. White Supremacy and Subjugation of African Americans**

Unarguably, the background of the social unrest in America during the 19th century was mainly a product of massive and institutionalized campaigns of enslavement of Africans in the 17th century. The European colonization of Africa and America led to the subjugation and mobilization of millions of Africans, including women and children. The next 400 years entailed horrifying stories of adversity, struggle, and sacrifice.

For decades, most white people in America believed that blacks were inferior and fundamentally different from their ancestors; such beliefs were always used to justify their manipulation, expulsion, and restriction of their movement, as well as limiting the range of rights, privileges, and opportunities available to African Americans (Robinson, 2001, p. 02). The African American image was widely deprecated by white American society. Generations of both races have viewed Africa as savage; this view was purposefully imported to America and other parts of the world to justify European colonization of Africa and to be seen as the ones who brought "civilization" to the "Barbarians." As a result, every aspect of African culture was suppressed in both Africa and America.

As a matter of fact, slavery in the USA was an institution according to legislation. It spread to North America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and continued in the southern states until the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1865 as a result of the Civil War. This form of slavery consisted of the subjection of workers purchased from slave traders in Africa to their use as servants and laborers on colonial farms. Virginia was the first English colony to bring slaves to North America in 1619, after the arrival of a ship carrying Africans, as it served as the starting point for the spread of slavery to the Spanish colonies in South America. Many slaves were black Africans, and a small percentage of them were Native Americans. Some free blacks owned slaves, and few of the forced laborers were white.

In terms of education, it is held as one of the most important components of civilization, and it aims to build civilization by building individuals through education, so they will become good citizens and in turn contribute to creating a good society, which is the basis of civilization. Therefore, we must provide

educational opportunities for all groups of society, and we must also know that depriving people of education will inevitably lead to the deterioration of their social, economic, political, and cultural situations, meaning the destruction of civilization. Unfortunately, proper education opportunities in the history of America were limited to white Americans due to the devastating effects of enslavement views on American society, of which black Americans were the biggest victims.

The early American education system was segregated from the beginning. Considerable differences in the learning environment created an inferior educational environment for blacks; minorities are still facing challenges in the current American education system. African Americans have always had difficulties in public education due to their historical status, as they were first viewed as property, then as inferior citizens, and then as citizens with inferior rights in a larger segregated community. Segregation was a major setback for African American students during early integration into schools. The establishment of racially segregated schools was primarily justified by claims of attempting to prevent violence against African Americans as well as providing a safer and easier learning environment (Coats, 2010).

To conclude, the historical attempts by African Americans as well as laws and policies issued by white officials to address equal rights and defy discrimination in American society provided undeniable opportunities for blacks in education. Nevertheless, more efforts are required in order to achieve more, notably supporting the multicultural educational needs of America's education system. Such prospects will benefit not only African Americans, but also other ethnic groups and cultures across the country. Arguably speaking, a large segment of the American population has a misconception about policies such as affirmative action. They think that these policies were made only to help African Americans and other minorities. However, the spirit of the policies is actually to make sure diversity and multicultural perspectives are integrated into the social structure of the country as a whole.

In terms of politics, according to Hans Kohn, a Jewish American philosopher and historian, nationalism, based on race, created a social revolutionary dimension in the 20th century, often in which it claimed the right of equality for the oppressed minorities as well as supremacy for those who claimed to be the founders of the state. For instance, the oppressed constantly organized large demonstrations in which they demanded greater participation in politics as well as the economy and cultural determination. Kohn believed that the most important element of the nationalist struggle was the political one; cultural and social self-determination were equally important because they set the groundwork for political self-determination (Pinkney, 1976, p. 03).

Before the end of the Civil War (1861–1865), black Americans organized many campaigns to protest the right to vote. For instance, in the summer of 1864, free blacks gathered in the province of Syracuse, New York, in order to form the National Equal Rights League. In fact, a delegation of African Americans, including Abraham Galloway, a fugitive slave, had a meeting with President Lincoln to discuss the cause. Unfortunately, the president could not react to the campaigns as he was assassinated in April 1865. After the end of the war, Galloway moved to North Carolina and established a movement for the league to operate as a voice to advocate for the political concerns of the African American population. Throughout the Southern states in 1865 and 1866, speakers at the different rallies argued that enfranchisement was a pivotal and inseparable element of self-government; the spirit of the Declaration of Independence was constantly invoked to justify the cause (Davis, T. J., 2012, p.101).

For the most part, as African Americans continued to struggle with civil rights, official institutions were unwilling to grant blacks a fair share. For instance, even though Congress issued the Fourteenth Amendment, which included a defined citizenship to include blacks as citizens and recognize their rights to equal protection under the law, and had it ratified by the states, the amendment did not directly grant blacks the right to vote. Instead, Section two of the amendment prohibited the state from depriving male citizens over the age of 21 of the right to vote; women were not accounted for. As a punishment, any state's representation in the lower house of Congress will be significantly reduced. The amendment was ratified in 1868, but the prescribed punishment has never been implemented, despite cases of disenfranchisement (Salvatore, 2007, p. 06).

In recent years, the arrival of Barack Obama to the White House in 2008 is considered a turning point in the history of a country that has not fully recovered from the repercussions of slavery, and after more than a decade, the 2020 presidential election campaign was centered on the relationship between ethnic groups; it was a central issue for President Donald Trump's campaign and his Democratic opponents. Andrea Gillespie, professor of political science at Emory University, considers that the early stages of the election campaign showed that the election of a black president was not the magic solution to the United States' problems on the racial issue; the problem is related to the structure of the system itself. However, racism remains the biggest national problem in the country.

### **III.2. Stimulation of Ethnic Nationalism**

Nationalism in the United States is a very complicated issue which has come to the forefront in recent years. Considering the fact that nationalism puts loyalty to one's nation above all others, the concept of patriotism should be separated from the concept of nationalism, because nationalism is often provoked more by racial and ethnic superiority than love for the country. Statistically speaking, a large number of Americans are considered extreme patriots, expressing undeniable pride in their Americanism. However, many warn that ethnic nationalism is posing a serious threat to overall American nationalism, notably the so-called white nationalism, which is currently seen in all aspects of American life, from the economy, politics, and right-wing extremism.

One of the worst characteristics of American society is the clear division between the various groups of society, and despite the many advantages of cultural diversity, ethnic diversity has not witnessed stability since the beginnings of the establishment of the American state, and it is one of the worst problems that American society has suffered from until today. American history is full of bloody events that were caused primarily by racial differences and in which large numbers of citizens of all races were killed. Undoubtedly, the shape of the state in its early days and even before its founding and the principles on which it was built still cast a perversion on America despite the passage of a long time and the many disasters from which American society seems to have learned nothing from it.

As a matter of fact, it is noticed that the issue of ethnic diversity has been either treated superficially or ignored as a result of its effects on building or destroying civilizations, i.e., states. Many scholars have emphasized the fact that most states around the globe are ethnically homogeneous or that ethnic diversity does not trouble the stability of states. Moreover, we should note that the element of integration of the diverse ethnic groups in multinational states into the body of the state represents a very serious issue due to its complexity. In the USA, in comparison to the experiences of the rest of the world, Americans disregard the role of ethnic nationalism in politics in general because people of ethnic origins in the United States live in relative peace. During a long time of integration, generations of immigrants and their identities have been infused into American society through cultural assimilation and intermarriage.

Historically, in the United States, the issue of ethnic nationalism actually posed a big problem. Far more detrimental is the belief that the matter poses no serious concern. If to be considered, the validity of this belief will supposedly rest upon one of two propositions: first, that loyalty to the ethnic group is necessarily compatible with loyalty to the state; or second, that identification with ethnic belonging will prove to be of short duration and will drift away with the progress of modernization. Thus, a number of nation-building theoreticians propose that cultural autonomy, as in the case of Singapore and confederalism, and the case of the USA, will reduce the matter of conflicting loyalties to manageable proportions.

As a matter of fact, many Americans find the issue of ethnic nationalism rather discomfiting, both morally and intellectually. Social scientists hold the issue as a cultural product, often deliberately constructed. Immigrants usually arrive in the United States willing to fully integrate into their new country and cope with the community accordingly. However, those who remain in the lands of their ancestors' political identities often assume ethnic forms, resulting in competing demands for political power. In fact, the establishment of a peaceful order in multinational states has usually been a product of a violent process of ethnic separation; in areas where ethnic separation has not yet occurred, politics is more likely to remain disturbed.

Observers of the social and political scene in America conclude that thinking about national identity takes two forms. The first one is that all citizens of the country are integral parts of the nation, regardless of their ethnicity or religious beliefs. This view is described as liberal or civic nationalism, and a large number of contemporary Americans are more likely to identify with it. However, this almost idealistic view has been fiercely confronted and defeated by a different view known as ethnic nationalism. The gist of ethnic nationalism is basically the idea that nations are defined by common traits such as shared heritage, a common language and religion, and, more importantly, a common ethnic ancestry; the latter is what fuels major conflicts and disagreements between ethnic groups.

### **III.3. The Impact of Coronavirus on Social Disparities in America**

At the beginning of 2020, the new coronavirus spread all over the world; it was first identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. As a result of the pandemic, millions around the world were infected and many have lost their lives, especially the elderly and people with chronic diseases. Although the seriousness of the virus is only related to the health of the body, its effects have also impacted the social aspect. As a result, social relations around the world have been deeply affected by the health measures imposed to prevent the spread of the virus. The impact on public health was very large in the United States, despite the early banning of international travel into the country. Unfortunately, the effect has evolved a lot for the worse, where the rate of social tension has increased to high levels, and the incidence of bullying and racism against Asians and Asian Americans has increased due to the fact that the virus originated from China. And it seemed that the world had to endure another outbreak of racism that had already existed for centuries.

As history records, hatred is an authentic American feature. Racist white Americans, both liberals and conservatives, have a fondness for hatred of non-white and even white Americans of different backgrounds. In fact, it was the same early hatred for the indigenous peoples. They also hated African Americans when they enslaved them and even after emancipation, as they still do today in the era of the new "Jim Crow" system. They also hate non-white immigrants, from whom Obama expelled nearly three million "illegal" immigrants before Trump continued Obama's campaign. Moreover, they also hated white Americans of German descent during World War I and placed them in concentration camps, and chased them out again alongside Japanese Americans during World War II and deposited more than 130,000 of them in concentration camps (History.com Editors, 2021). Since then, white American racism has expressed its hatred for all victims of American imperialism, from the peoples of Indochina, to the peoples of Cuba, to the Arabs and then to the Muslims, and to the competitors of American influence, mainly the Soviets and the Chinese after them.

Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic in Wuhan, China, racist anti-China tweets have increased by 900 percent. In light of President Donald Trump's racist campaign against the COVID-19 virus, the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the United States has warned of an increase in hate crimes against East Asians and Asian Americans, reportedly stating that members of an Asian family have been stabbed. The suspect indicated that he stabbed the family because he believed that the family was Chinese and that they were transmitting the coronavirus; these incidences came in line with Trump's propaganda and persistence in using the term "the Chinese virus." Regardless of Trump's naming of the virus, the virus is also known as "Kung Flu," a term derived from the expression "Kung Fu" (From 'Illmatic' to 'Kung Flu': Black and Asian Solidarity, Activism, and Pedagogies in the Covid-19 Era, 2020). Some US politicians and racist press commentators have publicly blamed Chinese food habits as the cause and source of the virus.

In fact, racists put both the Chinese and Asians in America in one basket; they were beaten, shouted at, and insulted. As a result, this has prompted members of the affected minority to buy weapons in anticipation of the worst, as it continues to spread in the United States. However, xenophobia is not limited to the United States; similar incidents of anti-Asian sentiment have occurred wherever the virus has spread.

Economically, unemployment rates among Asians have relatively increased. Researchers from the UCLA Center for Neighborhood Knowledge in the UCLA Asian American Studies Center conducted "The New Analysis" research in order to trace Asian American social status during the pandemic. They

synthesized employment and labor data from New York City and California to overlook the magnitude of the COVID-19 economic impact on Asian Americans between March and May 2020. The report revealed that the difference in unemployment and joblessness rates between Asian Americans and whites during this period has significantly increased in comparison to the post-pandemic period; the report indicated that the rates were nearly identical. As the report shows, for Asians the unemployment rate was 15% and the jobless rate was 21%, while for whites it was 12% and 16% by May 2020 (de la Cruz-Viesca, 2020).

Moreover, in terms of health care, at a time when it is most needed, African Americans witnessed discriminatory practices against them in the health-care system. In fact, as COVID-19 largely devastated the social status of blacks, a new national poll by The Undeclared and the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) in America showed that seven out of ten African Americans say that they are treated unfairly based on their race when they are in need of medical care. In a report published on October 16, 2020, by Michael A. Fletcher, he reported that African Americans have had unpleasant experiences with the health care system in the country, in which they believe it is deeply infected by the same kind of racism they encounter in the workplace, in schools, or when dealing with the police. Hence, African Americans see that the long history of inequality has been intensified by the coronavirus pandemic.

In these dire circumstances, with the poor handling of the outbreak by the Trump administration, fanaticism has to be reminded that America needs to unite more than any other time in history to fight the terrible virus which does not differentiate between nations and races. Although the medical advice is good, which is to maintain a sufficient distance in areas where high cases of the epidemic have been recorded, it is foolish and malicious to hold the Chinese or any group responsible for the spread of the virus or to assume that anyone carries it. In times of fear and danger, there is a need for humanity, solidarity, sacrifice, and hope, not hysteria or hatred. And this should be the message to the political, social, and religious worlds and corporate leaders who are racing against time to find ways to deal with this deadly virus.

#### **III.4. Detrimental Ramifications of Political Loyalties and Polarization in USA**

Political loyalties and polarization in the United States posed serious challenges, some of which were detrimental. The main effect of the issue is more likely to be divisive and contribute more to the problems of the American community. As a matter of fact, historically, polarization is one of the common tenets of American politics. However, the rise of political polarization in the mid-90s urged citizens and scholars to become increasingly worried. The questions to be investigated here are the following: what is the true impact of modern polarization in the history of the USA; what is the actual magnitude of political loyalties and polarization compared to the past; and more importantly, to what extent has such polarization become a feature of current American politics and society?

The phenomenon is defined as the division between two conflicting points of view or philosophies, both in politics and in everyday life; it describes a state of rivalry rather than diversity. In America, the vast majority of the population is divided into two major parties: Democrats and Republicans. The main source of this division is the different methods each party's approach assumes to address economic and social issues of everyday life of the American people.

Studies show that the Gilded Age of the late 19th century (1870–1901) was one of the most politically polarized periods in history; open political violence and discourse often took place in public spaces. During this period, America witnessed an abundance of wealth and prosperity, as well as unprecedented growth in industry and technology. Nevertheless, the Gilded Age was a period of greed and vast corruption among Americans, notably bankers, merchants, industrialists, and politicians; the latter enjoyed remarkable wealth at the expense of the working class. In terms of politics, the most iconic event in this era was the election of 1896, which, according to some scholars, led to one-party rule. As a result, elected officials had golden opportunities to build their careers as politicians and increase the homogeneity and polarization of the Republican Party. Political polarization generally escalated, as Republicans consolidated their control of industrial regions and Democrats lost ground in the North and Upper Midwest (Jenkins, J. A., Schickler, E., & Carson, J. L., 2004, p. 543).

Furthermore, the second half of the 20th century, notably in the 1950s and 1960s, marked an increase in a renewed spirit of political bipartisanship as a result of a post-World War II consensus in politics (Rosenfeld, 2018). However, polarization came to the forefront of public debate in the early 1990s. Major events include the 1992 Pat Buchanan speech at the Republican National Convention, also known as the "Culture War" speech. In his speech, he declared that a culture war is necessary in order to secure the future of the country. In 1994, the economy was also in recession, and internal affairs in general had deteriorated significantly, and the House of Representatives was no longer controlled by the Democrats for the first time in 40 years. Thereafter, the narrative of political polarization was repeatedly used in the elections of 2000 and 2004. In fact, after George W. Bush's reelection in 2004, scholars noted that America had never been so polarized since the end of the Civil War; some even suggested that the USA should rather be called the Divided States of America (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008, p. 565).

The Pew Research Center conducted a study in February 2020 to determine the most polarizing political issues. The method adopted was by highlighting the current controversial political issues. Climate change is one of the findings, with 21% of Republicans considering it a top policy priority, while 78% of Democrats disagree. More frequent issues include gun policy reforms and military funding. In fact, differences in policy priorities occurred as both Democrats and Republicans focused less on economic improvement; since 2011, the two major political parties in America have gradually placed boosting plans for economic development and job growth below their priority list (As Economic Concerns Recede, Environmental Protection Rises on the Public's Policy Agenda, 2020).

In an attempt to identify issues causing the growth of political partisanship since 2002, Gallup conducted a poll. Findings show that, for Republicans, the issue of whether federal governments should be granted much power is relatively polarizing. In 2002, 39 percent of them agreed with the idea, and as of 2016, that percentage jumped to 82 percent. Citizens will become more polarized as partisanship continues to infiltrate and dominate politics (Newport & Dugan, 2017). Yet, even when public opinion agrees on certain issues, political polarization still proves negatively effective. For instance, concerning the issue of health care, 60 percent of Americans believe that it is the government's mission to provide proper healthcare for citizens; however, disagreement is still found among those who adhere to political parties. We find that 85 percent of Democrats agree with the majority of the American public, while 68 percent of Republicans disagree (Kiley, 2018).

More importantly, the impact of polarization on decision-making in the country is significant. The problem stems from within the bodies of the leading political parties. Many scholars argue that diverging parties have become the major generators of polarization in the country as policy platforms have become more distant. This view comes from the fact that recent trends in Congress are oriented by the majority's support of the original party's platform and political ideology (Ura & Ellis, 2012, p. 277). Unfortunately, the increasing ideological distinct positions between political parties will lead to more polarization among both elites and devoted voters.

In America, presidential elections are of great value. Citizens have the right to vote for the political candidate they see fit to represent them. Many scholars believe that political polarization reflects the public's opinions and voting preferences and that it has become a regular and natural phenomenon. They argue that it is the product of people's exaggerated belief in their understanding of complicated issues (Fernbach et al., 2013, p. 939). Other studies show that cultural differences regarding geographical polarization and ideological movements in the American constituency are essentially due to a surge in political polarization between 1970 and 2005 (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2005, p.07).

Among other important factors contributing to political polarization are ethnicity, religion, and culture. It is thought that the ideological divide between Democrats and Republicans is also a result of cultural and religious differences. Democrats are generally viewed as more moderate in their religious views, whereas Republicans are viewed as traditionalists. For instance, some political scientists argue that Republican voters are more likely to vote for a religious candidate than Democratic voters.

Unarguably, the media institutions are significantly contributing to the political polarization of average Americans. For instance, cable news, channels, blogs, radio shows, websites, and notably social media. For politicians, the media is the main and strategic mediator to reach the broad masses to shape

public opinion, ideas, and viewpoints. A successful politician is one who deals well with the media and knows how to pass his political discourse through the media with courtesy and high professionalism. The relationship between the media and political life is an important element in understanding the stakes associated with the development of modern democracies. The media influence the rulers and the ruled; the media change the traditional laws of the democratic game.

In terms of the devastating effects of political polarization, some authors have found a relationship between the polarization of political discourse and violence. As in Rachel Kleinfeld's, senior fellow in the Democracy, Conflict, and Governance Program, and the founding CEO of the Truman National Security Project, statement: "Political violence can't be predicted perfectly, but international conflict prevention practitioners have determined a series of risk factors and warning signs that can begin long before violence occurs." While targeted violence often appears spontaneous, it results from years of groundwork. Across countries, similar patterns of fear, division, and threat catalyze violence, discrimination, and social segregation along identity lines. These markers can be monitored ahead of time. (Kleinfeld, 2019)

Increased polarization among the public provides them with pretenses to justify their political violence, even though they are false. Politicians may use political polarization as a means to further instill some institutions and policies, which may also incite political violence.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

By investigating the outcomes of nationalism in America through historical analysis, we have reached a conclusion about the negative impacts of this ideology on American society. This paper focused on understanding the basic characteristics of American society by studying the beginnings and circumstances of its historical formation. We found, as we mentioned previously, that America is a multi-ethnic and multicultural country, and its founding was the result of the expansion plans of European nations, which all eventually gathered together in one country. In the first place, America is considered a diaspora of colonial countries based on nationalist and imperialist foundations. These countries have already exploited vulnerable people around the world through plundering wealth and enslavement. We can say that the moderate nationalist thought upon which democratic countries in Europe were established has changed a lot after the aspirations of these countries evolved from searching for freedom to colonialism and exploitation. As a result, this was the basis for building the American state, a state that gathered the diaspora of imperialist forces.

This paper concluded that the real problem is mainly in the false practice of nationalism that results from its misunderstanding. For centuries, up until now, nationalism has been associated with majority ethnic groups attempting to exclude and persecute minorities. Although this association is detestable by many, it is quite true due to reality instead of, by definition, an ideology that incorporates the whole community of a national entity. In fact, what was assumed by scholars to be called inclusive nationalism, unfortunately, became exclusionary nationalism.

As a matter of fact, the very essence of nationalism lies within its necessity for social cohesion. Nationalism creates a sense of shared identity, which is a pivotal trait of modern societies in order to maintain levels of cooperation and harmony. In multinational democracies, many scholars believe that if people truly understood nationalism as having "shared values," it would result in constructive attitudes. However, if that sense of shared identity is related to politics, while the essence of democracy is division and competition between opposing groups, it will inevitably become disruptive; this has proved to be the case in America.

One particular kind of nationalism became a direct consequence of modernization in some communities: ethnic nationalism. Unfortunately, this is more likely to be found in societies undergoing such a process; it is among the most disruptive forces in many regions of the contemporary world. This type is considered the most powerful of all and has dominated American politics and society for centuries. Although the US is considered a world power, the interior is the most fragmented in the world due to this kind. Therefore, if we want to place America in the balance of civilization from the social point of view, we find that America does not enjoy a coherent and harmonious society that incorporates all races and cultures, and therefore it does not possess a real social civilization. And the best evidence for those

heinous practices throughout all of American history resulted from the long suffering of minorities, which we are still witness to to this day at all levels.

In this paper, we do not believe that the negative effects of nationalism are caused exclusively by a lack of understanding, but also by poor morals and deliberate practice of nationalism in selfish and cruel manners, and this is primarily a result of the capitalist mentality that prevails in the America.

To conclude, there are plenty of evidences to establish that Nationalism is disruptive to civilization if misunderstood or deliberately manipulated. In his theory of civilization, Malek Bennabi emphasized that the most important element in the equation of building civilization is the person. A person is properly built through healthcare, stable family environment, proper education and elimination of social unrest. Although America is economically powerful, a large number of Americans live miserably, notably African Americans, due to poverty, drugs, crimes, racism, and poor healthcare conditions mostly as a result of systematic and institutionalized prejudice. In sum, it is impossible for America to build a real humanly-based inclusive and stable civilization if a significant part of the community endures such impediments and setbacks.

Finally, according to the foundation of this assessment mentioned earlier concerning the degree of integration of national groups with the body of the state, we concluded that such forms of nationalism, notably ethnic nationalism and political polarization, definitely resulted in massive disruption to the American civilizational structure due to the divisive nature of such sentiment since loyalties are fragmented between different beliefs and goals; mostly contradicting and conflicting. These are called disputes among or between loyalties of different nations within a state; therefore, it is detrimental to the civilizational structure.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The 1992 Republican National Convention was held in the Astrodome in Houston, Texas, from August 17 to August 20, 1992. The convention nominated President George H. W. Bush and Vice President Dan Quayle for reelection.

<sup>2</sup> A global analytics and advice firm that helps leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems.

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