

AMERICAN STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF UTRECHT

# American Between the Lines

National Imagination and Identity in European-American Autobiographies  
1850-1890

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## Introduction

In 1861, the northern section of the United States of America commenced a bloody Civil War over national unity. Its soldiers gave their lives to keep the southern states under federal control, while southern soldiers fought to maintain independence from this national American government. Formulated in this manner, the war's parties and their objectives seem clear-cut, but difficulties arise when we try to define the 'Union' for which the North was fighting or when we attempt to pinpoint the differences between northerners and southerners. When the war began, the United States had barely celebrated its hundredth anniversary and its territory as we know it today had only been complete for eight years, which raises the question how this young nation could be on the verge of dissolving. Indeed, the nation's population lived in small villages and cities scattered over its vast country.<sup>1</sup> Within its communities there existed a strict distinction based on race, ethnicity, and lifestyle, dividing America's rapidly growing population among itself. Yet, the idea that the northern victory of the Civil War in 1865 preserved the 'unity' of the United States persisted in the nation and still prevails today.<sup>2</sup> How can this be explained?

This thesis will address this question by discussing the imagination of national unity among this scattered population that survived and overcame the Civil War. It will also explore ideas about national identity, the character of this nation and its population. However, it will not follow the beaten track that was commenced by J. Hector St. John De Crèvecoeur (1735-1813), among other thinkers, who wondered who "the American, this new man" was, as early as 1782.<sup>3</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> Cecilia Elizabeth O'Leary, *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Morton Keller, *America's Three Regimes: A New Political History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 105-106. Civil War disunity is ignored at websites of American political parties and the government today.

<sup>3</sup> St. John De Crèvecoeur. "Letters From an American Farmer: Letter III – What is an American?" in *An Early American Reader*, ed. J.A. Leo Lemay (Washington D.C.: United States Information Agency, 1988), 118-129.

thesis argues that *the* American identity did not exist, since this would require an unjust generalization of America's extremely diverse population. Instead, it will be discussed how the American experience and imagination of 'Americanness' was subjective.<sup>4</sup> A majority of Americans believed in national unity and had ideas about the country's identity, despite various differences among themselves. Therefore this thesis will argue that American national imagination was stronger than the population's acknowledgement of racial, political, and ethnical divisions in reality. It is the objective of this thesis to analyze to what extent a form of this national imagination existed in the decade before the Civil War and in the years between 1870 and 1890. It will ask to what extent American citizens viewed themselves as Americans, in any way interpretable, and what characteristics they prescribed to Americans and to their nation at large.

First-hand references to these questions can be found in the autobiographical genre. Autobiographies hold specific relations with the imagination of the individual and the national identity, as will be discussed in the individual sections. This thesis will therefore use autobiographies to test theories of national imagination and identity. Although published autobiographers of the years before and after the Civil War were often not explicit about their opinions and feelings regarding nationality, they surprisingly often gave their ideas away by the selection of topics they chose to address and the way they described these topics. This way it can be determined to what extent the subjective idea of America as a unity had taken root among the population, as well as to what extent Americans perceived of themselves as, indeed, Americans and, finally, what they perceived to be 'American' in this nation and themselves.

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<sup>4</sup> An early use of the term 'Americanness' was by Leo Marx, eds., *The Americanness of Walt Whitman: A Reader* (Boston: D.C. Heath, 1960). In this book Americanness is described as 'the essence of the American way,' and for the purpose of this thesis it will therefore refer to all that is American in a person or of the nation at large.

However, this study has been limited to the exploration of national experiences among Euro-Americans and as expressed in their autobiographies. This group was politically, economically, and culturally hegemonic in nineteenth-century America.<sup>5</sup> This social position enabled them to determine American society based on their ideas on nationality and, indirectly, also influenced other social groups in society with these ideas. Therefore Euro-American views on nationality were more representative for a great part of the population than minority views.<sup>6</sup> The Euro-American group, as perceived in this thesis, existed of American citizens whose ancestors had been born in northwestern-European countries, about thirteen percent of the American population in 1860, or who had been born there themselves.<sup>7</sup> Almost without exception, these Americans were white, held Christian beliefs, and did not doubt their own legitimacy as American citizens.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, it is difficult to determine the borderline between members of the Euro-American groups and outsiders. Americans did not consciously perceive themselves part of any particular group in the nineteenth century and Euro-Americans greatly differed among themselves.<sup>9</sup> The autobiographies that will be discussed in this thesis were written by authors who we now perceive as Euro-Americans. Jewish Americans will not be considered part of this group in this study, despite their European heritage and whiteness, because their experiences in nineteenth-century America were considerably different from any non-Jewish group.<sup>10</sup> Their

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<sup>5</sup> Rogers Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (South Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997); The term Euro-American is borrowed from Walter L. Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy: National Identity and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London 2008), 14.

<sup>6</sup> Manuel Madriaga, "Why American Nationalism Should Never Be Considered Postnationalist," *National Identities* 12, no.1 (2010): 81.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Spickard, *Almost All Aliens: Immigration, Race, and Colonialism in American History and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 95.

<sup>8</sup> Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Idem.

<sup>10</sup> Spickard, *Almost all Aliens*, 123; David Biale, "The Melting Pot and Beyond: Jews and the Politics of American Identity," in *Insider/Outsider: American Jews and Multiculturalism*, David Biale, Michael Galchinsky, Susannah Heschel (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 17-33.

experiences in American society with respect to American identity will be unique and deserve a separate study.

Another distinction was made between political and apolitical authors for the selection of autobiographies discussed in this thesis. First of all, political autobiographies have been extensively studied in any decade since they were published, while most ‘regular’ memoirs have not. Therefore, politician’s ideas about American nationality are relatively well-known, which was also due to their legacy of tracts, letters, speeches, and pieces of legislation available for historical research. Moreover, their political activities required strong national imagination and affiliation and encouraged beliefs in national unity. Therefore politicians’ views on these topics were not representative for most of the American population and were discarded from this research.

The selection of autobiographies was further narrowed down to those written by men. Female experiences in American society differed greatly from male experiences because they were excluded from American citizenship by nineteenth-century American law. Therefore their relations with the nation might have been of an apolitical nature and their ideas on national unity and identity, if they were allowed to express any, might have sprung from different experiences and outlooks on life than those of male Americans.<sup>11</sup> There is no space for gender comparisons in this thesis, but female nationality deserves a separate study.

Summarizing, this thesis will discuss to what degree male, Euro-American autobiographers with non-political professions imagined American unity, and what ideas they had on American identity. However, the research would be incomplete without placing the autobiographical genre in a literary context. This genre followed the trends of American literature and was subject to

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<sup>11</sup> Dana W. Michaels, *How Confederate Women Created New Self-Identities as the Civil War Progressed: A study of their diaries* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 4.

dynamics on the book market.<sup>12</sup> The explosively expanding book market had various relations with nationality and increased the likelihood that autobiographers were affected by various relations between literature and nationality. The exact degree of influence will always be a matter of speculation, but it is important to be aware of the whole range of possible influences autobiographers drew from in forming their ideas on national unity and identity and will therefore be addressed in this thesis.

### **An Academic discussion**

In order to examine American feelings towards nationality, it is important to know to what extent America was a national unity. In this thesis, the discussion of national unity focuses on America's physical territory and on coherence between different regions and states in the second half of the nineteenth century, but it also entails economical and cultural aspects of coherence. A clear idea of the extent to which America was united on a national level is relevant because it needs to be determined what country autobiographers lived in and referred to in their memoirs. We can only determine the extent to which Americans imagined their country as a unity knowing to what degree the country was a unity in reality.

Moreover, the American Union was vast and it was impossible for all Americans to know their fellow-countrymen or to be familiar with all regions. Therefore, this thesis will continue discussing national imagination. This term and this theory have been initiated by Benedict Anderson, who argued that “[a]ll communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face

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<sup>12</sup> Diane Bjorklund, *Interpreting the Self: Two Hundred Years of American Autobiography* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), x, 2.

contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined.”<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, this imagination of the nation had far-reaching effects on society because “although imaginary, a sense of American-ness is very real.”<sup>14</sup> In this thesis, national imagination will refer to the degree in which Americans imagined the national unit. Whereas national unity does not include the question of whether an autobiographer views himself as a part of a nation, national imagination does. It deals with the role that the nation played in the autobiographer’s life. Few other scholars than Anderson have discussed this, among whom Priscilla Wald and Manuel Madriaga. Therefore, this thesis will attempt to contribute to this field of study and possibly be the first to do so by drawing from the information found in autobiographies.

Additional aspects of national imagination are the experience of national affiliation and patriotism because these determine the intensity of citizens’ connections with their nation. National affiliation refers to the extent to which Americans felt connected to their country, when imagining it. Strongly developed affiliation can transform into nationalism or patriotism. In this section, only patriotism will be used as nationalism was a European invention of the mid-nineteenth century and was not adopted in a similar form in American politics.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, nationalism is often explained as the “actions people take in order to achieve self-determination,” but this did not apply to the American nation as it already was self-determining.<sup>16</sup> The term “patriotism” does not focus on its political aspects. In this thesis, the significance of the term patriotism is borrowed from philosopher Stephen Nathanson, and involves “special affection for one’s own country, a sense of personal identification with the country, a special concern for its

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<sup>13</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2006), 5.

<sup>14</sup> Madriaga, “Why American Nationalism Should Never Be Considered Postnationalist,” 81.

<sup>15</sup> John Higham, “The Problem of Assimilation in the United States,” in Jon Gjerde, *Major Problems in American Immigration and Ethnic History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 19.

<sup>16</sup> Stanford Encyclopedia of philosophy, “Nationalism,” <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nationalism/#1.1>.



well-being, a willingness to sacrifice to promote the country's good."<sup>17</sup> American patriotism in the nineteenth-century has not been extensively studied yet, but it has been addressed in studies of symbols and national expressions, like national anthems, flags, the Goddess of Columbia, holidays, and the eagle as the nation bird.<sup>18</sup> Symbols "carry a particular meaning only recognized as such by those who share the culture."<sup>19</sup> Moreover, it has been argued that "symbols of one cultural group are regularly copied by others." This thesis will be one of the first to explore affiliation and patriotism through the genre of autobiography and contribute to an understanding of the degree of patriotism among Euro-Americans.

Furthermore, national identity will be studied in order to identify feelings of Americanness among nineteenth-century Euro-Americans. In this thesis, national identity refers to the identity of a nation as a whole. It encompasses both objective characteristics of its territory and population, as well as individual opinions hereon and feelings regarding it. It also includes the identity of a citizen within this nation, one's nationality. America's identity has been studied extensively since the nation's founding. Until the 1980s, it was assumed that American identity could be objectively described and this description was presented as a characterization for the whole of the American territory and its population. America was also believed to be an exceptional country, unique in the world. De Tocqueville was one of the earliest arguing American "exceptionalism" in the 1830s.<sup>20</sup> He was supported by De Crèvecoeur, who argued that 'the American' was a distinct type of human-being. He was convinced that the circumstances of

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<sup>17</sup> Stephen Nathanson, *Patriotism, Morality, and Peace* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1993), 34-35.

<sup>18</sup> Arnaldo Testi, *Capture the Flag: The Stars and Stripes in American History* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 10.

<sup>19</sup> Geert Hofstede and Gert Jan Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (New York: McGraw – Hill, 2004, second edition), 7.

<sup>20</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996). Lipset was one of the earliest scholars using the term 'American Exceptionalism' in scholarly research.

the country itself made the people what they were.<sup>21</sup> This “distinctiveness of America” was re-emphasized by thinkers like Henry Adams and Frederick Jackson Turner in the 1890s.<sup>22</sup>

However, America’s heterogeneousness was completely overlooked in these traditional theories on American identity as they ignored ethnic, racial, and class distinctions as well as differences between states and areas. Since the 1980s, these distinctions have been recognized in academic study and identity-studies have diversified enormously, focusing on minorities and gender among other fields of study.<sup>23</sup> David Hollinger even argued that America made for a “postethnic era,” in which race distinctions would not exist and ethnic affiliations could be individually chosen.<sup>24</sup> Clearly, it became accepted that the American identity was too complicated to catch in few pages, if it could be pinned down at all. Indeed, scholars like Priscilla Wald viewed ‘America’ as an idea rather than a reality.<sup>25</sup> She argued that it is impossible to look at America from any perspective without contradicting views from other perspectives. Therefore, many versions of America are possible, each holding a portion of truth. This thesis will draw on her and Anderson’s arguments that any nations’ identity is chiefly subjective.

As a specific possibility within the field of national identity studies, it has been argued by contemporary scholars like Smith, Gleason, and Lipset that, at least for the Euro-American

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<sup>21</sup> De Crèvecoeur, “*Letters of a farmer*,” 928-929.

<sup>22</sup> Richard P. Horwitz, “Approaches and Concepts,” in *Encyclopedia of American Studies*, ed. George Kurian, Miles Orvell, Johnella Butler, and Jay Mechling (Bethel: Grolier Publishing Company for the American Studies Association, 2001), 114.

<sup>23</sup> Alice Kessler Harris, “Cultural Locations: Positioning American Studies in the Great Debate,” in *Locating American Studies: The Evolution of a Discipline*, ed. Lucy Maddox (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 335-352.

<sup>24</sup> David H. Hollinger, ‘An Attempt to Move Beyond Multiculturalism to a Postethnic America’ in *Major Problems in American Immigration and Ethnic History*, ed. Jon Gjerde (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 440-449.

<sup>25</sup> Priscilla Wald, “The Idea of America,” in *Encyclopedia of American Studies*, ed. George Kurian, Miles Orvell, Johnella Butler, and Jay Mechling (Bethel: Grolier Publishing Company for the American Studies Association, 2001), 82-86.

population, in order to be an American, it was essential to accept a set of ideals, rather than being born within the nation.<sup>26</sup> These ideals have been summarized as the American Creed and include “liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and laissez-faire.”<sup>27</sup> This thesis will explore to what extent Euro-Americans in the nineteenth century supported the view that Americanness was obtained by adoption of these ideals, rather than by birth. We will see that nineteenth century autobiographers, who belonged to America’s dominant group, did not specifically support this view of Americanization and that they seemed to agree with Smith’s argument that the American society supported both systems.

Furthermore, this thesis draws from concepts in autobiography studies. The linguistic turn, which influenced most fields of study during the late 1970s and 1980s, marked the beginning of serious study of the autobiographical genre. Foremost, it changed the scholarly understanding of language. The use of language was long thought to be rather straightforward and therefore it was assumed texts could only be interpreted one way, but since the 1970s, scholars acknowledge that language often contains complicated structures of meanings and references.<sup>28</sup> The linguistic turn initiated a different approach to history as well, as historical texts were no longer perceived as straightforwardly interpretable and needed reinterpretation. Scholars started to realize that history was not an indisputable succession of events, and that historical texts did not simply reflect the past as it truly was.

Some historical texts were that were previously thought to be useless to historical research now became subject to serious study, such as autobiographies. Before, it had not been recognized

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<sup>26</sup> Smith, *Civic Ideals*, 14-15; W. Petersen, M. Novak, and P. Gleason, *Concepts of Ethnicity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 59; Lipset, *American Exceptionalism*, 31. Smith added that not only the commitment to these ideals, but also birth within the nation functioned as an Americanizing force.

<sup>27</sup> Lipset, *American Exceptionalism*, 19.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Lauter, *From Walden Pond to Jurassic Park: Activism, Culture and American Studies* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001).

that autobiographers could contribute to knowledge of the past. Moreover, research was focused on master narratives, those stories written by Americans belonging to the dominant groups. Famous people were influential and thus their value for historical research was easily acknowledged. Scholars such as Roy Pascal, William Spengeman, James Olney, and John Eakin were the first to recognize the autobiographical genre as a valuable historical source. They argued that personal narratives were useful to understanding the past, recognizing that individuals were part of society and of historical processes at large. Also the lives of common individuals were now believed to be part of large historical processes and therefore received historical exploration.

For the purpose of this thesis, a set of criteria describing the term ‘autobiography’ will be used. Firstly, a narrative is autobiographical when the writer tells about his or her own life and person. An autobiography contains a consciously structured story, retrospectively written from a certain point during the writer’s life.<sup>29</sup> Most autobiographers write their stories during the last phase of their lives, but autobiographies can also be written earlier in life. It is difficult to decide when a narrative covers enough lifetime to be considered an autobiography, but it does not necessarily start by birth and end by death. An autobiography should contain different topics and events linked together as a coherent story, stretching over a substantial period of one’s lifetime.

The dividing line between fiction and autobiographical narratives is thin, as there is fiction that has autobiographical elements and there are autobiographies that are partially fictive. However, for an autobiography to be useful for scholarly research it should be written with the intention of telling the truth. It would be too uncertain to interpret autobiographies that have fictional elements and to use them for gaining knowledge on the past because it is often unclear

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<sup>29</sup> Weintraub, Karl, “De ontwikkeling van de autobiografie als vorm van zelfbewustwording,” in *Over de autobiografie*, ed. Els Jongeneel *Over de autobiografie* (Utrecht: HES, 1989), 11.

which sections of an autobiography were written truthfully and which were partially or wholly fabricated. For sure, it is challenging to determine the truthfulness of each autobiography, but the autobiographer would have received correcting feedback of his or her friends and family in case of untruthfulness. It is therefore argued by scholars that many autobiographers refrained from twisting the truth. However, one of the difficulties of analyzing autobiographies is that the events of one's life are vulnerable to interpretations of the author himself. Autobiographers tend to highlight their admirable acts and characteristics and often ignore their mistakes and weaknesses.<sup>30</sup> In those cases they are not telling lies yet they manipulated the reader. Taking these possibilities into account, it is still possible to draw valid and useful conclusions from the study of autobiographies.

### **The Structure of This Research**

This thesis attempts to contribute to the discussion of feelings of nationality in nineteenth-century America by studying twelve autobiographies. The selection of autobiographies for this thesis is distilled from the *Bibliography of American Autobiographies* by Louis Kaplan.<sup>31</sup> The selection includes life-writings by male Euro-American citizens who did not have political positions in American society and was further confined to authors who lived in the northeastern states Massachusetts, North Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. There are relatively few autobiographies available by southern authors who lived in comparable regions to be able to draw sensible conclusions on national imagination in the South. The South comprises a vast area in which frontier experiences, like in Texas and Louisiana, differed greatly from life

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<sup>30</sup> Albert E. Stone, ed., *The American autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1981), 185.

<sup>31</sup> Louis Kaplan, *Bibliography of Autobiographies* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1961).

in eastern states like Georgia or the Carolinas. A comparison between southern and northern experiences of nationality would certainly make an understanding of national feelings in nineteenth-century America more complete. On the other hand, northeastern states formed the political, cultural and economical center of the United States at the time. It was part of the original thirteen colonies, housed the federal government, possessed most industry, and produced most literature and newspapers.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, northern autobiographers' ideas on nationality might have been more representative for a greater part of the American population than southern ideas. Lastly, autobiographies written by Midwesterners and westerners were discarded because frontier memoirs mostly dealt with survival and adventure and revealed little of nationality. These parts of the United States produced a smaller amount of useful autobiographies for the purpose of this thesis than the northwest.

The selection of twelve autobiographies out of the remaining suitable titles was made randomly. Six autobiographies of this selection were published in the period 1850-1860 and the other six in the period 1870-1890.<sup>33</sup> They were written by autobiographers who were born within the nation and abroad and who came both from poverty and riches, but they all meet the requirements of the

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<sup>32</sup> Sarah Wadsworth, *In the Company of Books: Literature and Its "Classes" in Nineteenth-Century America* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>33</sup> The selection of autobiographies studied for this thesis and published in timeframe 1850-1860 are Joseph T. Buckingham, *Personal Memoirs and Recollections of Editorial Life* (Boston: Ticknor, Reed & Fields, 1852), Grant Thorburn, *Life and Writings of Grant Thorburn* (New York: E. Walker, 1852), Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Magic Staff: An Autobiography* (New York: J.S. Brown, 1857), James J. Jarves, *Why and What Am I? The Confessions of an inquirer* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson & Co., 1857), John H. Griscom, *Memoir of John Griscom, LL.D. Late Professor of Chemistry and Natural Philosophy; With an Account of the New York High School; Society for the Prevention of Pauperism' the House of Refuge' and Other Institutions* (New York: Robert Carter & bros., 1859), and Benjamin B. Bowen, *A Blind Man's Offering* (New York: Benjamin Bowen, 1860, Fourth edition).

Autobiographies of the second timeframe are Edward Mitchell, *Five Thousand Year: And How I Made it in Five Years' Time, Starting Without Capital* (Boston: Loring, 1870), Daniel Noyes Prime, *The Autobiography of an Octogenarian* (Newburyport: W.H. Huse, printers, 1873), William H. Winans, *Reminiscences and Experiences in the Life of an Editor* (Newark: 1875), Frederick Swartwout Cozzens, 'Autobiographic Sketch' in Frederick Swartwout Cozzens, *Sayings, Wise and Otherwise* (New York: American Book Exchange, 1880) xiii-xxii, Peter Smith, *Memorials of Peter Smith* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1881), and Philip Gengembre Hubert, *Liberty and a Living* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1889).

selections made. Exploring these two timeframes before and after the Civil War, any developments in the experience of nationality that would have occurred during the war among autobiographers should have been visible. However, differences between these two timeframes were too small to draw convincing conclusions but will be mentioned when relevant.

In order to organize all arguments, section one of this thesis will discuss the extent to which America was a unity in the broadest sense of the word, based on verifiable aspects. It will argue how this unity was politically, economically, and culturally limited. Secondly, it will discuss the originally European-based literature in the United States, but also how this changed in the second half of the nineteenth century so that literature both reflected and influenced national unity. Lastly, it will show how autobiographies of both timeframes expressed ideas on national unity and how autobiographies related to the American book market.

Having discussed the reality of national unity, section two will proceed with a discussion of American feelings towards national unity, called national imagination. This section will argue that Americans had strong imagination regarding their nation. National affiliation and patriotism will be addressed as markers for national imagination. Both national imagination and patriotism were reflected in the literature, since America had produced its own literary genre called transcendentalism before the war, but after the war, an even more authentically American genre developed; Realism.<sup>34</sup> It will be suggested how these genres could have related to national imagination. Lastly, the role of the autobiographical genre in national imagination is discussed, as well as how national imagination and patriotism reflected in autobiographies.

Section three will take the discussion of national imagination one step further by examining national identity, which also depended on imagination. It argues that ideas about national identity

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<sup>34</sup> William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 374.

were diverse, but that the Euro-American vision on the nation was dominant in society. This was also reflected in American literature and arguably further stimulated national imagination of America's identity. Furthermore, it will be discussed how private and public identity connect. Finally, it will be attempted to determine Euro-American views on American national identity based on how this was reflected in the autobiographies.

These three sections together will sustain the conclusion that Euro-American views of 'Americanness' relied on imagination and that they were not objective descriptions of American society in the nineteenth century. This thesis will determine to what extent Euro-Americans viewed themselves as Americans in the nineteenth century and which characteristics they believed described their nation, themselves, and the rest of the population.



## **1. National Unity**

The Civil War is remembered as a crisis in American national political unity, but this section will argue that politically, as well as economically and culturally, the nation's unity was severely limited in the nineteenth century. An understanding of this reality will help determine the degree of discrepancy between real unity and the imagination of a unity, which will be discussed in section two. In order to determine America's unity, political issues that divided the nation will be first discussed. This will be followed by an exploration of economical relations in the nation. Thirdly, the divisions among the American population will explain how the American nation was disunited. A discussion of the American book market and American literature will argue how these related to national unity. Finally, we will explore how all these aspects of national unity were expressed by autobiographies and conclude to what extent American autobiographers' had knowledge of their nation's scope and disunity. Understanding this will show to what degree they had to use their imagination in order to see their nation as a unity.

### **The United States of America: A Unity?**

The United States was declared a nation-state in 1776. To the outside world America looked like a political unity like other nations, but at the inside the nation was relatively incoherent. The exact scope and organization of the Union was under permanent discussion and construction, arguably until today, and federal government was an abstract organization that did not influence

the majority of the population directly.<sup>35</sup> These political aspects will be discussed first, before we turn to economic and cultural aspects of national coherence.

First of all, it is the question whether Americans of the northeast were aware of the contours and political organization of their country. The borders of their nation moved, constantly changing the United States until the mid-nineteenth century. The young nation expanded westward and southward until it covered the whole area between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, becoming at least eight times larger than the size of the original thirteen states.<sup>36</sup> The last territory was added in 1853, when the United States bought the southern parts of present-day Arizona and New Mexico from Mexico with the Gadsden Purchase. By 1850, the beginning of the period discussed in this thesis, its continental territory looked like it does today, but millions of Americans lived in this nation while it was expanding. It will be explored to what extent Euro-American autobiographers showed awareness of these changes.

Newly acquired territories did not immediately enter the Union as states. They fell under federal supervision and were populated by American settlers, but the vast tracts of land were remote from the nation's political and cultural centers and they were sparsely populated. Federal government barely had the means to influence daily life in these areas.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the Constitution did not offer regulations on non-state policy so that the most suitable political state

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<sup>35</sup> David McKay, *American Politics and Society* (Cornwall: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, sixth edition), 64; Higham, "The Problem of Assimilation in the United States," 19.

<sup>36</sup> These states being, from north to south: New Hampshire, New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. Before 1850, the start of the timeframe discussed in this thesis, these states were joined by Vermont, Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, Louisiana, Indiana, Mississippi, Illinois, Alabama, Maine, Missouri, Arkansas, Michigan, Florida, Texas, Iowa, and Wisconsin, in this order.

<sup>37</sup> Hans Bertens and Theo D'Haen, *Geschiedenis van de Amerikaanse Literatuur* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij De Arbeiderspers, 1983), 52.

of these territories was largely undetermined.<sup>38</sup> Territories held a specific place in the American political organization, leaving it out of influences by federal government and flows of information from the rest of the nation until their admission as states or after Civil War, when railroads connected all parts of the nation.<sup>39</sup> Based on the remoteness of western regions and limited political coherence, it is likely that the western parts, especially non-state territories, played a limited role in American national imagination in the northwest. This will be further addressed based on the study of literature and autobiographies later in this section.

Therefore the conversion of territories into states in the Union seems unifying. Although Arizona and New Mexico were the last two states on the American mainland to ratify the Constitution and become states as late as 1912, a majority of the states had been admitted before 1850. In the years between 1850 and 1890, California, Minnesota, Oregon, Kansas, West Virginia, Nevada, Nebraska, Colorado, North and South Dakota, Montana, Washington, Idaho, and Wyoming entered the Union as states, only leaving Utah, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Arizona to future admission. All autobiographers discussed in this thesis were born in the eighteenth or early nineteenth century and had been in America when new states enlarged the Union during their lives. Thus, their country continuously changed shape during their lifetimes. It is this versatile country that they referred to and reflected upon in their autobiographies, and which scope and identity is discussed in this thesis.

A second reason why the admission of states did not necessarily encourage national unity was that federal government had little authority. Its control on local affairs was limited. Indeed, the constitution granted this government the exclusive right to produce American currency, have

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<sup>38</sup> A separate study on national imagination and affiliation in the West and Midwest would be an interesting addition.

<sup>39</sup> Keller, *America's Three Regimes*, 100, 130.

militias, conduct foreign policy, engage in war with foreign countries, and set tariffs on imported and exported goods between states and nations, all of these powers being denied to the states.<sup>40</sup> But the law denied federal government to alter borders of the states “without the concurrence of the states involved or to prefer one state over another.” Moreover, at least three-quarters of the states had to approve of any changes to be made in the Constitution. Lastly, all states had their own constitutions that decided on local matters in detail. The Constitution determined that “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.”<sup>41</sup> Therefore it has often been argued that state power preponderates, establishing that the Constitution mentions few explicit cases in which only federal government has authority. It also formulates federal responsibilities as ‘delegated powers,’ suggesting that federal government is at the service of the states.<sup>42</sup> Thus, both in complicated national issues and daily government, federal government lacked both Constitutional support and willingness to influence local matters during most of the nineteenth century.<sup>43</sup> An exception is the era of the Civil War, during which the North took decisions without the concurrence of the South, applying them to all states and territories, such as the abolition of slavery.

Due to this relative autonomy of states, laws and policies greatly varied between states. States were highly sovereign in determining criminal penalties like the death penalty. Within states, power was further delegated to counties who were responsible for locally specific issues. This scattering of powers diminished national political unity, even though all states were subject to

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<sup>40</sup> David Mauk and John Oakland, *American Civilization: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995, fourth edition), 141.

<sup>41</sup> The American Constitution, 1776.

<sup>42</sup> Mauk and Oakland, *American Civilization*, 141.

<sup>43</sup> Constitution: mention all sections and articles where these regulations are to be found. Most of them are unchanged.

one national Constitution. Therefore, the differences between various states in the vast country were large compared to nations that were more directly subject to a central government. It also raises the expectation that local or state affiliation was stronger than national affiliation, emphasizing differences rather than similarities between Americans, but this will be further discussed in detail in section two.

After the Civil War, federal government influence increased to some degree, enlarging the likelihood of actual unity and the imagination hereof.<sup>44</sup> New departments, like that of agriculture and justice, were called into existence. Government began to interfere with society more intensely than before.<sup>45</sup> Examples are the passing of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868, which was a federal promise to all American citizens to protect equal rights, and the Fifteenth Amendment of that same year, keeping states and individuals from obstructing suffrage from any citizen of over twenty-one years of age. Despite strong objections from southern states, federal government managed to pass these laws by overruling them with northern support.<sup>46</sup>

However, in the decades that followed, it became clear that federal government was both unable and unwilling to protect the promises made in these laws. Racial discrimination, for instance, would intensify rather than wane in both northern and southern states and lead to racial segregation that divided colored Americans from white Americans in society.<sup>47</sup> Members of Congress were divided among themselves in their opinions on racial issues, but it was determined on keeping North and South peacefully together. Racial issues were second thoughts,

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<sup>44</sup> Mary Norton, ed., *A People and a Nation: A History of the United States* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003, brief sixth edition), 261.

<sup>45</sup> Other examples are growing federal interference with immigration restrictions; see Smith, *Civic Ideals*, 358.

<sup>46</sup> Norton, *A People and a Nation*, 282.

<sup>47</sup> Michael J. Klarman, *Unfinished Business: Racial Equality in American History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 67-80; Smith, *Civic Ideals*, 201.

not in the least because a majority of American politicians supported racist ideas themselves.<sup>48</sup> Therefore the Civil War did not result in a different political order than before as federal power remained limited under the Constitution, although political unity between North and South was ensured and encouraged by the expanding government.<sup>49</sup> Since the protection of racial equality came second, unity between northern and southern *whites* was encouraged whereas the discrepancy between races increased. The imagination of unity among Euro-Americans became more logical, although federal influence remained severely checked by the Constitution and state sovereignty.

The division of powers between state governments and federal government became one of the most contested issues in American politics in the nineteenth century. Early in the century, it led to the creation of political parties that battled for power in Congress.<sup>50</sup> An understanding of these parties is relevant to place political references in autobiographies, which will be discussed later in this section, in a correct context. The seeds of political partisanship sprouted as early as the late eighteenth century, when the Federalists and Democratic-Republicans started to organize themselves along political and sectional lines. Although their differences were initially small, they increased in intensity until the Federalist Party dissolved in 1824. Generally, Democratic-Republicans mistrusted federal government. Jefferson, one of the party's leaders, believed that government provided over various ways of grabbing power and taking decisions against the consent of the people. His party was in favor of a stricter system of checks and balances to control government, while the Federalists favored a strong government that was not limited in its possibilities to protect the nation against foreign intruders and internal threats. Democratic-

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<sup>48</sup> Hixson, *Almost All Aliens*, 171.

<sup>49</sup> Keller, *America's Three Regimes*;

<sup>50</sup> Norton, *A People and a Nation*, 133-134.

Republicans were mainly supported by southerners and Midwestern farmers, and included immigrant farmers, like Irish and Germans.<sup>51</sup> The Federalists had the support of northeastern voters, Americans who did not work in the agrarian sector, the richer people. Thus, party affiliation, partisanship, was a fact in American society.<sup>52</sup>

This opposition continued under various names throughout the nineteenth century. Under the leadership of future President Andrew Jackson, a section of the Democratic-Republicans left to establish the Democratic Party. The remaining section continued under the name of National Republicans, but was also called the Whig Party. The latter wished for a stronger national coherence through the establishment of a national bank, but could not convince the incumbent Democrats, who believed in local power and individual responsibility and, thus, opposed a strong federal government controlling national systems. The Democratic Jacksonians adopted Jeffersonian ideas, wishing to keep the economical sector focused on agriculture, and therefore it kept the support of southerners and farmers while the National Republicans attracted northerners and entrepreneurs.

In, 1854, the Whigs became too internally divided and split. Most of its northern members integrated into the Republican Party. It openly advocated anti-slavery, gaining support in the northern states. Therefore, southern voters mostly turned to the Democratic Party that was not explicitly anti-slavery, keeping the nation divided in two political sections. Dichotomy persisted. Although both parties had divisions in all regions of the nation, political partisanship was roughly divided between the North and South. Ethnically and religiously, Jews and Catholics mostly voted democratic while the Republican Party was almost only supported by white

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<sup>51</sup> Norton, *A People and a Nation*, 133.

<sup>52</sup> Norton, *A People and a Nation*, 131-133.

Protestants, further disuniting American society.<sup>53</sup> Thus, party partisanship politically polarized the American population along racial and sectional lines. It is important to be aware of this when discussing national imagination, because despite this political division, national imagination was inspired by the party's emphasis on national issues. It will be explored to what extent Euro-Americans were aware of these issues, testing this theory that partisanship actually led to more intense national imagination.

Proceeding with economical aspects of national unity, interests between northern and southern states began to diverge during the nineteenth century, threatening both economical and political coherence. The South was successful in the agrarian section due to its warm climate. It depended on the slavery system to ensure cheap labor in the fields until the Civil War. It also did not modernize far beyond the invention of the Cotton Gin in 1793, while the North industrialized eagerly.<sup>54</sup> The climate in northern states was less suitable for agriculture on a large scale and much more densely populated than the South. Therefore, slavery was not necessary in the northern states. Lastly, the North contained many large cities, while the South counted few. On the other hand, the South depended on northern markets for its products while the North counted on this export. Except this mutual dependency, both sections had conflicting interests. This led to political opposition on the national level.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, there was no national banking, taxation, or currency until during the Civil War, as earlier attempts by federal government to establish a Bank had failed.<sup>56</sup> States preferred to control economics locally, rather than being dependent on slow responses from Washington.<sup>57</sup> Thus, northwestern Americans were not intensely entangled

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<sup>53</sup> Norton, *A People and a Nation*, 348.

<sup>54</sup> Norton, *A People and a Nation*, 309.

<sup>55</sup> Bertens and D'Haen, *Geschiedenis van de Amerikaanse Literatuur*, 53.

<sup>56</sup> Norton, *A People and a Nation*, 261.

<sup>57</sup> David McKay, *American Politics & Society*, 63.



in a coherent national economical system before the Civil War since this system was barely coherent and because the economical point of gravity lied in the northeastern states. Americans living in these states were not inevitably reminded of other parts in the nation due to economic interests because all relevant economical means were found in their own surroundings.

During the war, Congress finally managed to create a lasting National Bank that produced national currency. Although state governments opposed this Bank, federal government forced them to join this system.<sup>58</sup> This showed how federal government had become stronger. The Bank simplified cash flows, which stimulated inter-state trade and economic connections nationwide. Federal government also funded the construction of the transcontinental railroads, indirectly improving interstate trade and business.<sup>59</sup> The national mail system, already introduced in the 1840s, was stimulated by these expanding railways.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, economical crises, like the panic of 1873, showed how markets in all parts of the nation were woven together and depended on each other. In this sense, the American economy was coherent. Nevertheless, differences between northern and southern economies remained great during the nineteenth century.

However, political and economical factors that made national unity unfeasible were minimal compared to cultural and ethnic divisions in American society. As referred to in the introduction, the American population was not a unity. America's population existed of various groups deriving from European colonists, African American slaves, and immigrants from all over the world. Although the theory of the Melting Pot was popular when the United States was founded, proposing that all social groups would melt together and become a unique American population, it has been rightly stated that "the Revolution made colonists Americans, but it did not make

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<sup>58</sup> Norton, *A People and a Nation*, 261.

<sup>59</sup> Norton, *A People and a Nation*, 260-261.

<sup>60</sup> Penne L. Restad, *Christmas in America: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 29.

them a nation.” Additionally, “E Pluribus Unum,” being one while being a variety, “is an ideal; it is not a description of American life in any period.”<sup>61</sup> Indeed, there were firm prejudices between America’s various social groups, allowing for racism to thrive among both northerners and southerners both before and after the Civil War.

Nineteenth century racial beliefs caused the American population to be unofficially divided into a hierarchical order of races and ethnicities, but there were distinctions within each group as well. Likewise, the Euro-American group can be divided in multiple subgroups. The English population formed the largest subgroup, constituting about twenty-six percent of the total American population in 1860.<sup>62</sup> The second and third most numerous nationalities represented in this group were the Germans and Irish. A majority of them was Catholic, but Germans adapted well enough to the English-American standard to integrate into this group whereas Irish did not due to the inability of many to rise above poverty. They were followed by immigrants from Italy, Eastern-Europe (many of whom Jews), and, far less, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and other European countries. Some white groups, like Jews, Catholics, and the poor, were treated as inferior whites by Euro-Americans. These groups were often associated with poverty and intemperance. Thus, there was a hierarchy in the European American groups ranging from the old immigrants, of them first Protestants, then Catholics, and then other religions. Second came more recent immigrant groups from Europe in the same religious order because they were newcomers and often very poor.<sup>63</sup> Inequality between the sexes further divided the nation and complicated this racial and ethnic hierarchy. Women found themselves in between their male

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<sup>61</sup> Joyce Appleby, “Recovering America’s Historic Diversity: Beyond Exceptionalism,” *Journey of American History* 79 (September 1992): 431 and Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 113.

<sup>62</sup> Spickard, *Almost All Aliens*, 95.

<sup>63</sup> Spickard, *Almost All Aliens*, 246-247.

counterparts and the men of the 'next' group, with African-American women at the far bottom of social hierarchy. It will be discussed in sections two and three how Euro-Americans imagined their nation as a unity, despite it being severely divided in reality.

So far, we have discussed America's internal political, economical, and cultural divisions. This reality will be compared to the extent to which Euro-Americans in the northwestern states imagined an American unity in section two.

### **Literacy, the Book Market, and National Unity**

Before we turn to a discussion of national unity as expressed in autobiographies, an understanding of links between the American book market and unity is important to put the research of autobiographies in the correct context. This book market had effect on American cultural unity as it encouraged it among the Euro-American population, but enlarged disunity between this and other groups in society.<sup>64</sup>

America's book market was highly developed in the nineteenth century. It was characterized by a large and greedy public since the United States had the highest literacy rates of the western world during the nineteenth century.<sup>65</sup> Ninety percent of the Euro-Americans could read and write by 1850 and the differences between men and women were minor. It is estimated that this group constituted about eighty-two percent of America's population in that year.<sup>66</sup> At least seventy-four percent of the American population was literate excluding others than the African Americans and Euro-Americans.

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<sup>64</sup> Sarah Robbins, *Managing Literacy, Mothering America: Women's Narratives on Reading and Writing in the Nineteenth Century* (Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburg Press, 2004), 26.

<sup>65</sup> Gilmore, *American Romanticism and the Marketplace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 5.

<sup>66</sup> Spickard, *Almost all Aliens*, 128; Gilmore, *American Romanticism and the Marketplace*, 5.

However, literacy was unequally divided over the nation in the nineteenth century. Although most Euro-Americans were literate, African Americans formed the largest illiterate group. They constituted about fifteen percent of the American population in 1850.<sup>67</sup> It has been estimated that fifty-seven percent of them were still illiterate by 1890.<sup>68</sup> A large majority lived in the southern states until the end of the century. However, immigrant groups that swarmed the North and West in the second half of the country were also largely illiterate or they did not know the English language. Furthermore, the northeastern states held the highest rates as the political and cultural center, but the South and the West housed far less literate people.<sup>69</sup>

These literacy rates show that Euro-Americans had access to information spread through books. This way, this group had the largest opportunity of gathering knowledge. This effect was further enhanced by a great enthusiasm for reading among literate Americans.<sup>70</sup> Partially, this was the result of decreasing book prices in the second half of the nineteenth century. They became so low that even working-class Americans had access to books. This was due to technological improvements in the production of paper and book bindings and to the invention of mechanical printing presses. These developments began to influence the book market as early as the late eighteenth century, but they accelerated during the nineteenth century. The production of books also began to become easier and faster, which stimulated the printing houses to publish more books and spread their products over the continent. The book market further expanded due to transportation improvements, initiated in the early nineteenth century due to dug canals. Newly constructed roads increasingly connected large cities with each other and the interior and

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<sup>67</sup> Spickard, *Almost All Aliens*, 95.

<sup>68</sup> Harvey J. Graff, *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 281.

<sup>69</sup> Bertens and D'Haen, *Geschiedenis van de Amerikaanse Literatuur*, 52.

<sup>70</sup> Wadsworth, *In the Company of Books*, 3.

existing roads were improved. Book distribution became even faster after the Civil War, when railroads connected the East and West, both through the North and the South. These developments made it easier and cheaper for printers to distribute their books throughout the entire continent. Moreover, the number of published books increased during the century.

Euro-Americans had access to an increasing supply of information and the means of spreading books throughout the nation enabled Americans to read the same information nationwide. However, the increasing availability of information did not necessarily unify the Euro-American population as the supply of literature, newspapers, and other readings might have diversified to an extent that Americans had to make selections. They became specified in selected sources, literary genres, and topics, diversifying knowledge in the nation.<sup>71</sup> However, there were always top-selling products that reached large portions of the Euro-American readers. African-Americans, Asians, Latinos, and, to a lesser extent, other immigrant groups generally lacked access to this information, enlarging the differences between these groups and the Euro-American group. These differences will be further explored in sections two and three.

They will also be used as a context to the autobiographical genre that will be discussed in this section. Based on our knowledge of American literacy rates, it can be concluded that American autobiographies were chiefly written and read by Euro-Americans living in the northwestern states, both male and female.<sup>72</sup> They found fewer readerships in immigrant groups and African Americans, and in the southern, western, and Midwestern states. These groups and areas also produced fewer autobiographies. African-American autobiographies constituted about 4.5 percent of the autobiographies written between 1850 and 1859. Autobiographies written at the frontier in the West constituted eleven percent in this period, but less than six percent in the

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<sup>71</sup> Wadsworth, *In the Company of Books*, 8.

<sup>72</sup> As also argued in Bertens and D'Haen, *Geschiedenis van de Amerikaanse Literatuur*, 51-53.

period 1870-1879.<sup>73</sup> The high Euro-American literacy rates allowed for a potentially large readership of autobiographies, but unity between those who did and did not have access to these autobiographies increased. Simultaneously, the ideas of national unity among Euro-Americans were largely based on imagination as almost none of the books and articles they read were written by minority groups. Consequently, their knowledge and awareness of ‘others’ might have been limited and made many of them blind for minority exclusion. Therefore, their imagination of the country focused on their own group, ignoring the roles minorities played in society.

The American book market also negatively influenced national unity as well the imagination of unity because the majority of literature derived from Europe until the late nineteenth century. American book stores sold large numbers of English books.<sup>74</sup> It was caused by the absence of international copyright laws, which allowed American publishers to copy European books without having to share the profits with their European authors.<sup>75</sup> For the same reason, American printers had been reluctant to publish novels written by American authors before the 1840s because laws forced them to share all profits with them. Therefore it was more profitable to print foreign books and the European import continued and outnumbered the American publications until about 1894.<sup>76</sup> By that time, printing and distributing books had become so cheap that printers started to profit from American books to an extent unknown before. Thus, the American public was confronted with large amounts of European literature that dealt with European topics and situations, inspiring them to imagine foreign nations, but not their own.

Likewise, a large selection of autobiographies came from Europe and limited national imagination of America. The first popular American autobiography was written in French and

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<sup>73</sup> These numbers derive from my own calculations based on the autobiographical bibliography of Kaplan.

<sup>74</sup> Bertens and D’Haen, *Geschiedenis van de Amerikaanse Literatuur*, 60, 112; Wadsworth, 12.

<sup>75</sup> Bertens and D’Haen, *Geschiedenis van de Amerikaanse Literatuur*, 61.

<sup>76</sup> Peter Hunt, *Children’s Literature: an Illustrated History* (Oxford: University of Oxford press, 1995), 226.

published in France before it came to the United States. Benjamin Franklin's life-writing was not translated into English until two years after its publication in 1791, finally making the document readable to the majority of the American public. Although English autobiographies constituted a large part of the selection available in America, exact numbers are not yet known, Americans increasingly commenced life-writing throughout the nineteenth century. There were about 1441 American autobiographies published in America between 1850 and 1890.<sup>77</sup> The mere presence of these autobiographies in America might have had effects on national unity, although these effects are difficult to pinpoint. On the one hand they might have enhanced cultural unity among Euro-Americans because autobiographies were mostly written and read by this group and specifically dealt with American topics, such as Indians or Wall Street, and experiences. They described morality, habits, and behavior of fellow-Americans. Moreover, a relatively large part of American autobiographies have been written by famous Americans like Presidents, politicians, and entertainers who enjoyed admiration among the population and great examples in society.<sup>78</sup> On the other hand, minorities had less access to these autobiographies and were excluded from its possible unifying effects, reducing national unity on a national scale.

### **Disunity in Autobiographies**

Now it is clear to what extent the United States was disunited in the second half of the nineteenth century and what links existed between the American book market and national unity, it will be discussed to what extent autobiographers were aware of the scope of their nation and the disunity of it. Unfortunately, they did not explicitly state to what extent they viewed America as a whole,

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<sup>77</sup> Bjorklund, *Interpreting the Self*, 181.

<sup>78</sup> Jan Pilditch, "United States: 19th Century American Auto/Biography", in *Encyclopedia of Life Writing*, Ed. Mark Hawkins-Dady, London, Fitzroy Dearborn (2001), 902.

including all parts and regions, or whether they were aware of American disunity. Nevertheless, they gave away their views by mentioning terms like ‘America,’ ‘United States,’ ‘Union,’ and by referring to other parts of the nation. Additionally, their ideas were tested by exploring how often and how they wrote of westward expansion, political opposition, federal influences, racial differences, the North/South dichotomy, and the Civil War. This will lead to a conclusion regarding to what degree autobiographers’ views of the nation were coherent with reality or to what degree they lacked awareness of the scope of their nation.

First of all, autobiographers who published their memoirs between 1850 and 1860 all used the words ‘America’ and ‘United States’ frequently. Of the autobiographies published between 1870 and 1890, only three used the term ‘America,’ of which two did so sparingly, and all used ‘United States’ once or twice. It is striking that those autobiographers used the names of their nation much less. In their autobiographies, they did not show a smaller awareness of the nation beyond their villages, counties, and states than autobiographers who wrote their life-writings before the war, but they did not use the specific names for this nation. The language they used was more nuanced than autobiographers of the first timeframe. They were less specific on their opinions and the exact description of the nation, but this does not necessarily prove that they knew less of their nation.

Nevertheless, the use of names for the nation did not explain the autobiographers’ exact views on this nation as they never specified what ‘America’ or ‘United States’ referred to. Did they consider all areas of its territory part of their nation? First of all, four autobiographers of the first timeframe referred to the western regions or states of their nation and only one of the second timeframe did so. Autobiographers of both timeframes referred to the South, although sparingly. Moreover, none of the twelve autobiographers referred to America’s westward expansion. Not



one author reported that new states and territories had been added to the Union, or mentioned that their country was expanded. Andrew Jackson Davis was the only one who listed the four states that were added to the Union since 1850.<sup>79</sup> In 1857, he wrote about those who were ‘bound for California, Oregon, Minnesota, Kansas, or Perdition,’ indicating that he did not have a positive opinion of these western states. Nevertheless, listing them as states, he showed his recognition for them being part of the Union, although he did not link this information with national expansion. Davis was also the only one who used the word ‘pioneer’ four times, using it in reference to Americans in the West. However, both he and all other autobiographers did not mention the frontier at all, even though this frontier had marked the contours of their nation during most of their lives. Thus, it remains speculation to what extent autobiographers viewed the West part of their ‘America’ and ‘United States.’ It is the question what exactly they thought of when referring to the nation using these names.

However, it is unlikely that autobiographers of both timeframes were unaware of the scope of their nation. Ten of all twelve autobiographers wrote that they were fond of reading. Six showed a great interest in and knowledge of America’s history and four showed political interest. Additionally, three of them were newspaper editors whose job it was to inform their readers of events in the nation. Moreover, the nation’s territory had been complete since 1853, which was at least twenty years before autobiographers of the second timeframe wrote their memoirs. Secondly, during the war and in its aftermath maps of the United States were printed in newspapers and atlases were sold extensively.<sup>80</sup> Therefore it may be assumed that all autobiographers were at least slightly informed of their nation’s territories and its political

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<sup>79</sup> Davis, *The Magic Staff*, 313.

<sup>80</sup> Susan Schulten, *The Geographical Imagination in America, 1880-1950* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 17.

organization. Nevertheless, Grant Thorburn was the only autobiographer of both timeframes showing awareness of how large the nation was. He quoted a letter that included the sentence: ‘We put one hand on the eastern, and at the same time the other on the western ocean.’<sup>81</sup> These words were copied from a letter that an acquaintance once sent to an Indian chief, but the fact that Thorburn copied it to his autobiography shows that he was interested in and agreed with its contents. Possibly, autobiographers felt that the scope of their nation was common knowledge and that it was therefore unnecessary to explain it in their autobiographies. Another explanation could be that they were not daily confronted with their nation at large and that they did not daily consider the vastness of their country. Only one of the twelve autobiographers discussed in this thesis had travelled in the West and none of them had been to the South. Despite their knowledge of what regions constituted the United States outside of the northwest it might have been difficult to autobiographers to imagine the vastness of their country.

Another term that was used as a reference to the nation was ‘Union.’ It was mentioned by four autobiographers of the first timeframe and by one of the second timeframe. This term referred to the federate nature of the United States and by using it, autobiographers showed that they realized that their nation constituted of states. It is surprising that the autobiographers of the second timeframe barely used it since ‘Union’ had been a term often used in the North during the Civil War. This Union was fought for by the *Union* Army. A possible explanation could be that they did not want to remind the reader of the war, or their publishers did not want any reference to the war to ensure southern readership. This will remain speculation and deserves a separate study. Nevertheless, we can assume that most autobiographers were aware of their nation being a federation.

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<sup>81</sup> Grant Thorburn, *Life and Writings of Grant Thorburn*, 123.

Furthermore, none of the autobiographers showed that they were directly influenced by political decisions on the federal level. On the other hand, state governments were only mentioned once by Benjamin Bowen whereas most autobiographers referred to the nation at large. Additionally, autobiographers did not mention any local politicians whereas most of them referred to national politicians. This proved that autobiographers were not merely focused on local issues and that nationality played a role in their lives.

Moreover, four autobiographers mentioned national political parties. Joseph Buckingham was most explicit about his political ideas and lamented that party affiliation tore the nation in two. He was the only one showing awareness of political disunity. He was affiliated with the federalists and his newspaper strongly opposed Republican ideas and ridiculed its leaders, but at the same time he hoped that both parties would disappear in time in favor of national coherence. He felt that American citizens should first consider the interests of the nation at large before they affiliate themselves with parties, favoring ‘national unity, impartial justice, and universal benevolence’ over local interests and ‘party jealousy.’<sup>82</sup> On the other hand, William Winans was clearly affiliated with the Whig Party, the Democratic-Republicans. He was proud that his newspaper helped this party in advertising its visions. He actively engaged in political polarization by attempting to influence the public into supporting this party. Winans was aware of the differences between the two political parties, but he did not show that he realized that this had any implications for national political unity. It seems that the autobiographers who did not mention political parties at all were not specifically interested in it and did not have professions that connected them with political processes. It is therefore likely that they were unaware of political disunity.

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<sup>82</sup> Buckingham, *Personal Memoirs and Recollections of Editorial Life*, 74.

Furthermore, economical unity or disunity was not referred to by any of the autobiographers. None of them had commercial or merchant jobs that connected them with national economical processes. Therefore it is not surprising that they did not mention economical relations within the nation. They also did not show awareness of the differences between northern and southern economies. The National Bank that was founded during the Civil War or the national currency it provided was not mentioned. It is unlikely that they connected their currency or the National Bank with national economical unity.

Disunity of the American population was not explicitly referred to in autobiographies except by Davis, who wrote that “[t]he various nations and savage tribes of the earth dwell, through certain self-appointed representatives of more or less accuracy and distinction, within the city limits.”<sup>83</sup> He was the only one stating that the nation housed various nationalities. Asians, Hispanics, and Jewish Americans were not mentioned at all in the autobiographies studied. It is possible that they were not often confronted with some social groups as Asians were predominantly present in the West and Hispanics in the South. Considering that Americans were also not informed of other social groups through literature, autobiographers might not have been specifically aware of America’s diversity. On the other hand, most autobiographers studied lived in northwestern cities where large numbers of immigrants lived.

Moreover, autobiographers used the words “American,” “citizen,” and “men” without specifying which people they referred to. They did not explicitly state whether only white people were considered Americans or whether other races could be citizens. Only two autobiographers, Andrew Davis and James Jarves, expressed their racial views. They viewed the white race as superior of all races and as the last racial stage of human development. Moreover, Davis believed

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<sup>83</sup> Davis, *The Magic Staff*, 313.

that inferior races could not compete with superior races and that they could only survive in servitude when living in the same country. He believed that Native Indians therefore perished. However, despite their ideas about the backwardness and inferiority of colored races, they were not unfriendly towards African Americans in their daily lives. Jarves claimed that he was not prejudiced, but that he merely described reality. He admired Native Americans for their freedom and as an adult he lived in Polynesia for five years where he lived among aboriginal Polynesians, writing with respect of the native people. Davis described the “Indians” as an unlearned people, but “pure in its intelligence and faith in God.”<sup>84</sup> Thus, these autobiographers viewed the population living in the United States as heterogeneous. Nevertheless, it is the question whether it can be determined to what extent Euro-Americans considered this population disunited. Davis believed that races could live together when the ‘inferior’ race was controlled by the ‘superior’ race. In this view, the population was a coherent system, rather than a variety of groups living apart from each other. It is not clear from the other autobiographies whether the ten other authors had similar racial views. They did not express racial opinions and always wrote with respect of colored people. Nevertheless, we can assume that at least these two autobiographers did not believe that other races than the white one could be Americans or citizens based on the racist ideas expressed both in autobiographies as in immigration laws, the existence of slavery and segregation, and the Constitution.

Moreover, it is remarkable that all autobiographers who wrote about colored people mentioned that they were colored, whereas they never mentioned that white people were white.

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<sup>84</sup> Davis, *The Magic Staff*, 309.

This is called the ‘transparency of whiteness.’<sup>85</sup> This theory argues that white people were unaware of their whiteness because they took their own whiteness for granted. They did not realize that their worldviews were ‘colored’ by their unconscious assumptions on whiteness. This might explain why Euro-American autobiographers were not explicit on who they considered Americans, citizens, or fellow-countrymen, since they considered it self-evident who deserved these characterizations. Considering that autobiographers only mentioned the skin colors of non-whites and that racism became more intense in American society after the Civil War, it is likely that the racial views of all autobiographers were similar to those of Davis and Jarves.<sup>86</sup> It is likely, but not proven based on the autobiographies, that autobiographers did not consider other races as Americans.

Autobiographers also referred to gender distinctions among the American population. Thorburn wrote that ‘Domestic economy in America is comprehended in two words – the man provides, and his wife takes care of whatever he provides.’ Prime thought women should be able to vote if they wanted to, but wondered whether it was necessary. He did not view women as fundamentally different from men. Davis expressed pride of the advanced position women had in American society compared to all other societies in the world. Additionally, without exception, all autobiographers expressed great admiration and love towards their mothers. They respected her hard work and unconditional support. Although women clearly had a domestic role in America, they enjoyed relative freedom and respect in society. The autobiographies show that in nineteenth-century American, men and women were not united in equality, but that they were united in cooperation. In this sense, autobiographers did not view American society as disrupted

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<sup>85</sup> Barbara J. Flagg, “‘Was Blind, but Now I See’: White Race Consciousness and the Requirement of Discriminatory Intent’ in Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 629-631.

<sup>86</sup> Spickard, *Almost All Aliens*, 247.

by gender differences, but rather as a balance between the sexes. It remains speculation whether autobiographers considered women as American citizens.

In conclusion to this section, it has been discussed how the United States was largely disunited politically, economically, and culturally. First of all, the nation's borders moved during most of the lives of all autobiographers, but not one mentioned this. They did not make explicit what they believed its contours were and which parts they considered part of their nation. We can assume, however, that they were aware of the contours of the nation by the time they wrote their autobiographies.

Although government became slightly more influential after the Civil War, autobiographies gave no evidence of this development. Some autobiographers showed awareness of political partisanship, but most did not seem to have realized that this divided its population. Likewise, they did not show detailed awareness of how divided the population was. It seems that autobiographers believed that the American population lived in harmony and, thus, they did not view the American society as disunited. It can be concluded that autobiographers had knowledge of the scope of their nation and of the dividing processes in the nation, but they were not fully aware of that their nation was disunited in the ways that were discussed. The differences between the two timeframes are small. Thus, being aware of the nation's reality, including dividing forces, Euro-Americans had to use imagination in order to be able to view the nation as a unity. They ignored or were ignoring of the details of political and cultural divisions, though. Without it being their specific purpose, this allowed for the imagination of their nation without contradicting reality too obviously.

## 2. National Imagination

Former President Woodrow Wilson emphasized the existence of national imagination after the Civil War by stating on Memorial Day in 1915 that “[t]he Civil War created in this country what had never existed before – a national consciousness.”<sup>87</sup> This section will argue that Wilson was correct to the extent that the Euro-American population imagined their nation as a unity despite it being politically, economically, and culturally incoherent in reality. However, it will also claim that national consciousness, or imagination, was already present in the prewar period and that it was therefore not a product of the Civil War. Whereas national unity focuses on factual reality and determines the physical scope of the United States in the nineteenth century, national imagination deals with feelings and opinions towards the scope and of that nation. In order to provide answers to this thesis’ question to what extent Euro-Americans perceived themselves as Americans, this section will explore in what ways they viewed their nation as a unity by imagination. Representations for the nation, like symbols and celebrations, will be explored as indications of this national imagination. They show what possible experience of coherence existed among America’s population. Additionally we will explore feelings of national affiliation and patriotism in this country, as an indication of how strongly Euro-Americans felt connected to their nation.

### America: An Imagination?

In section one, it has been discussed how the United States was a disunity. Nevertheless, scholars like Smith have proven that a portion of the American population viewed the nation as a

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<sup>87</sup> Huntington, *Who Are We?* 119.



unity.<sup>88</sup> Americans had ideas and beliefs about the scope of their country and its significance in their lives without having knowledge of all areas in the United States and without knowing all America's inhabitants.<sup>89</sup> It was Benedict Anderson's idea that it takes imagination to view a nation as a unity. It shows how national feelings can be highly unrealistic and subjective, but that they were experienced as real by Americans.<sup>90</sup>

In order to determine to what extent the Americans imagined their nation, we will first discuss the effects of improvements of communication and transportation. Canals and railroads increasingly connected all regions, especially after the Civil War, increasing the speed of travelling of individuals and information throughout the nation. This decreased the psychological distances between American states and individuals as information was spread faster than before. Additionally, inhabitants were enabled to inform themselves of events shortly after they took place in any part of the nation. They also gained a growing access to knowledge of activities and ideas of fellow-Americans. These developments increased the experience of national imagination among Euro-Americans, since this group had best access to this information due to their literacy and their control of the information sources.

Major improvements did not only spread information throughout the nation, they also enhanced national imagination among its population through the attention they received. For instance, federal government speakers presented the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 as a major accomplishment of the American nation, encouraging pride and belief in America's greatness.<sup>91</sup> These views were printed in newspapers, spread throughout the country, and read by the public. Although readers did not mindlessly adopt these views of American

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<sup>88</sup> Higham, "The Problem of Assimilation in the United States," 19.

<sup>89</sup> Bertens and D'Haen, *Geschiedenis van de Amerikaanse Literatuur*, 52.

<sup>90</sup> Benedict Anderson, *The Imagined Community*, 6-7.

<sup>91</sup> Keller, *America's Three Regimes*, 130.

greatness, they were made familiar with them. Thus, technological innovations could have inspired imagination of the nation as both a unity and as a country of progress and modernity.

National imagination was also stimulated by the existence of symbols, traditions, and celebrations representing the nation. A few national symbols existed before the Civil War, including the American flag. Its design had varied over the years and it was almost exclusively used on federal buildings and in the army.<sup>92</sup> However, popular demands of the flag increased in the North during the Civil War. In the decades after the war, the flag waved on all public buildings as well as in northern homes.<sup>93</sup> The Confederate flag remained in use in the South until the late 1880s as a symbol for southern localism. However, both North and South started to increase the use of their flags on celebrations such as Memorial Day and the Fourth of July. Thus, the flag represented national unity and was increasingly visible in the American society, reminding the people of this unity. Other symbols that existed before the war were the Eagle, which was officially chosen as the national bird in 1782, and the Goddess of Columbia. This goddess had been a symbol for America since colonial times, but a famous painting of her was created in 1872 by John Gast. In this painting she was depicted as a Roman goddess, pointing the way westward to pioneers, floating above the land. She symbolized Manifest Destiny, the conviction that the American westward expansion was desired by God.<sup>94</sup>

Symbols and national traditions increased in number after the Civil War and became more widely used.<sup>95</sup> Additionally they became more widely admired. Under the influence of literature,

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<sup>92</sup> Testi, *Capture the Flag*, 26; Michael Welch and Jennifer L. Bryan, "Flag Desecration in American Culture: Offenses Against Civil Religion and a Consecrated Symbol of Nationalism," *Crime, Law & Social Change* 26 (1997): 78.

<sup>93</sup> Testi, *Capture the Flag*, 29

<sup>94</sup> Spickard, *Almost All Aliens*, 131.

<sup>95</sup> Bertens and d'Haen, *Geschiedenis van de Amerikaanse Literatuur*, 53; Huntington, *Who Are We?* 124.

the American West was presented as a symbol for freedom, possibility, and democracy.<sup>96</sup> The White House was a symbol for the federal and republican government and was joined by the Statue of Liberty that was given to America by France in 1886. This became an iconic symbol for American liberty. The Pledge of Allegiance was written in 1892 and introduced as a daily exercise in some schools.<sup>97</sup> This citing of the Pledge spread through the country in the decennia hereafter and was combined with honoring the American flag. Furthermore, the Americans had sung various anthems representing their nation or a region hereof since the Republic was founded. The official national anthem was finally adopted by federal government in 1913, when the poem ‘Star-Spangled Banner,’ which was written as early as in 1814, was put to music.<sup>98</sup> These traditions and symbols increasingly reminded Americans of their nation, but most of them became widespread and more noticeable throughout society after the timeframes discussed in this thesis. Thus, the imagination of the nation was not intensively stimulated during these timeframes, although minor effects might have been possible.

The celebration of holidays also inspired national imagination. Americans had celebrated Thanksgiving, Christmas, Halloween, and the Fourth of July throughout the existence of the Republic, although they were not standardized until after the Civil War. The Fourth of July specifically celebrated the founding of the nation and was therefore a reminder of political unity. Additionally, Christmas, Halloween, and Thanksgiving did not specifically remind the people of the nation, although Americans might have thought that these were similarly celebrated in the whole nation. Moreover, the traditions accompanying these celebrations varied greatly on a local

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<sup>96</sup> Ray Allen Billington, “Frontier Democracy” in *Major Problems in American History: Volume 1: To 1877*, ed. Elizabeth Cobbs-Hoffman and Jon Gjerde (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006), 51-56;

<sup>97</sup> Testi, *Capture the Flag*, 33.

<sup>98</sup> Norton, *A People and a Nation*, 152.

basis.<sup>99</sup> Federal government introduced Memorial Day as a national holiday in 1868, emphasizing the Civil War and the preservation of the Union. However, this holiday, as well as all other holidays, was not celebrated similarly throughout the nation until the last two decades of the century, after the timeframes discussed in this thesis. Since holidays were barely nationally organized until after the timeframe discussed in this thesis, it was unlikely that they inspired more national imagination after the war than before.

The nationalization of symbols, traditions, and holidays was often initiated by private organizations after the Civil War, but they were often encouraged or enforced by federal government.<sup>100</sup> Eager to join the nation back together after the Civil War and to enhance national affiliation, governmental buildings in Washington D.C. were renovated or built anew in the 1870s, displaying ‘the civilization of our country.’<sup>101</sup> Additionally, knowing that children were impressionable, government also spent more money on education than ever before.<sup>102</sup> This way, federal government supported a possible increase of national imagination among the population.

Symbols, traditions, and celebrations often encompassed historical legends, traditions that felt like they were historical, or symbolic references to antiquity.<sup>103</sup> These traditions and references gave people the feeling that those representations of the nation had always been there.<sup>104</sup> However, most of them had been invented relatively recent. These ‘invented traditions,’ discovered by Eric Hobsbawm, are based on the assumption that historical significance increases

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<sup>99</sup> Restad, *Christmas in America*, viii.

<sup>100</sup> Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 73.

<sup>101</sup> Keller, *America's Three Regimes*, 130.

<sup>102</sup> Keller, *America's Three Regimes*, 130.

<sup>103</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 25.

<sup>104</sup> O'Leary, *To Die For*, 3.

the legitimacy of symbols, traditions, and celebrations.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, the experience of a shared history increases feelings of national coherence.<sup>106</sup> It gives people the feeling that they belong together because they share experiences and witnessed important processes of their nation. Therefore national symbols and holidays enhanced a sense of nationality in the United States.

A last development that stimulated national imagination after the Civil War was that maps and atlases of the nation became increasingly available to the population. Before the war, they had been too expensive for most Americans to be able to obtain them, but Americans were exposed to maps of their nation during the Civil War more than ever before.<sup>107</sup> They were copied into newspapers on a daily basis in order to follow the progress of the war. Maps and atlases were mass produced by the 1880s and became cheaper to obtain. Thus, it became easier for Americans to imagine their nation with physical evidence increasingly available. In combination with the increasing connections between areas, symbols, celebrations, organizations encouraging those, and maps and atlases, it is expected that national imagination became more intense among the Euro-American population after the Civil War.

In order to understand how well-developed national imagination was among the Euro-American population based on the autobiographies, national affiliation and patriotism will be discussed. This affiliation is the extent of which individuals felt a connection and a sense of belonging to their nation. Strong affiliation can turn into patriotism, a love and pride for one's country. These two phenomena require national imagination because an individual cannot feel connected to a nation if he does not believe it exists. Therefore studying them contributes to an

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<sup>105</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>106</sup> Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 9; David Miller, *Citizenship and National Identity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 28.

<sup>107</sup> Schulten, *The Geographical Imagination in America*, 17, 21.

understanding of the extent Americans viewed themselves as Americans and their nation as their own.

Scholars of American patriotism have argued that it spread through America in the 1840s, but that it waned in the 1850s, the prewar timeframe discussed in this thesis. The scholars Hixson and Huntington argued that the Civil War itself and the remembrance hereof encouraged national imagination and affiliation.<sup>108</sup> First of all, a great number of southerners had not been specifically in favor of secession and both common northerners and southerners did not desire a war to be fought over national unity.<sup>109</sup> This shows that many southerners approved of belonging to the Union and that many Americans did not understand why this unity was threatened. After 1865, both sides shared mourning over the loss of great numbers of men and both gave their dead a symbolic purpose in the national imagination of unity.<sup>110</sup> Even southerners created national myths that legitimized their dead as the symbols of national unity, and projected their regional symbols and traditions that had existed before the war on the whole of the nation.<sup>111</sup> The view that common nationality of North and South should be emphasized was reflected and encouraged by Frederick Douglass in 1871, who said that “We are sometimes asked, in the name of patriotism, to forget the merits of this fearful struggle, and to remember, with equal admiration, those who struck at the nation’s life, and those who struck to save it – those who fought for slavery, and those who fought for liberty and justice.”<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 50; Huntington, *Who Are We?* 108, 120.

<sup>109</sup> Norton, *A Nation and a People*, 267-268.

<sup>110</sup> Susan Mary-Grant, “Patriot Graves: American National Identity and the Civil War Dead,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 5: 3 (2004): 76.

<sup>111</sup> Bertens and D’Haen, *Geschiedenis van de Amerikaanse Literatuur*, 53.

<sup>112</sup> Jonathan M. Hansen, *The Lost Promise of Patriotism: Debating American Identity 1890-1920* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), ix.

Additionally, active attempts to create feelings of patriotism among the population were initiated by the Grand Army of the Republic, founded in 1866. Most of its members were Civil War veterans and relatives and focused on national traditions and the standardization of saluting the national flag. It does not become clear from scholarly research to what extent they succeeded in encouraging patriotism among fellow-Americans. Huntington argued that the intensity of patriotism decreased during the 1870s, the start of the second timeframe discussed in this thesis.<sup>113</sup> This might be due to distractions offered by the economic crisis of 1873 and the War with Mexico of 1870-1871. However, this war led to a new surge of patriotic feelings at the end of the decade as Americans shared a common enemy.<sup>114</sup> Therefore it is likely, but not convincingly proven, that patriotism became more prevalent in the postwar timeframe of 1870-1890 compared to the prewar timeframe of 1850-1860.

Arguing against all the arguments for increasing national imagination, it is important to note that the American population lived scattered in small towns and local regions, limiting national coherence even in the decades after the Civil War.<sup>115</sup> Until the end of the century, Americans were strongly rooted in their communities and their immediate surroundings.<sup>116</sup> Nevertheless, Americans imagined the nation beyond their nation to some extent, as was argued in section one. National imagination therefore existed, but it is important to keep in mind that it was limited by the importance of local surroundings. Nevertheless, autobiographers did not show much local affiliation at the expense of national affiliation, as discussed in section one.

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<sup>113</sup> Huntington, *Who Are We?* 119.

<sup>114</sup> Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 50, 60; Huntington, *Who Are We?* 108, 120.

<sup>115</sup> Higham, "The Problem of Assimilation in the United States," 19.

<sup>116</sup> Huntington, *Who Are We?* 108.

Summarizing, Americans were encouraged to imagine the nation as a unity by various processes in the nineteenth century and there are indications that this national imagination became slightly stronger after the Civil War.

### **National Imagination and American Literature**

National imagination among the American population was further encouraged by the increasing presence of autobiographies within the expanding book market in the nineteenth century. The autobiographical genre was one of the most popular literary genres on the American book market, along with fiction, popular literature, and religious documents.<sup>117</sup> Autobiographies were therefore increasingly read throughout the nation. Readers of autobiographies were informed on the lives of fellow-countrymen. They had the opportunity to identify with those living in other areas of the nation. Autobiographies also created intimate connections between readers and authors because they contained personal information. This made the imagination of the nation as a unity easier among the Euro-Americans, especially as most autobiographies were written and read by this group. Autobiographies written by members of other social groups often focused on different topics than Euro-Americans such as slavery, discrimination, or other topics that Euro-Americans could not easily identify with. The social distances between Euro-Americans were smaller than those between them and other groups. Above all, politicians, presidents, and other famous Americans started publishing their autobiographies in the nineteenth century. Benjamin Franklin was one of the first American public figures whose memoir was widely available in America. His autobiography was first translated from French

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<sup>117</sup> Norton, *A People and a nation*, 204.



into English and published in London in 1893.<sup>118</sup> Autobiographies like *Personal Memoirs by Ulysses S. Grant* formed a new and exciting way of getting informed on the elites of America. It gave the readers the opportunity to identify with the powerful and symbolic individuals in their nation and it brought politics and national phenomena closer to even the smallest settlements. Moreover, these public figures often had strong national imagination and romanticized their ideas of America in their writings. Therefore it is plausible that these autobiographies increased national imagination and affiliation among readers.

National imagination was also encouraged by the literature that circulated in the nation. American authors produced the first literary genre that was different from European genres in the 1830s, called Transcendentalism.<sup>119</sup> It was inspired by European Romanticism and it carried largely the same dreamy, nostalgic character as it had in Europe, but the Movement was adapted to the American context.<sup>120</sup> Indeed, scholars argue that ‘in philosophical intensity and moral idealism, their [American authors’] work was both distinctively American and an outgrowth of the European romantic movement.’<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless, transcendentalist authors admired European literature and poems and looked to Europe for artistic and stylistic inspiration.<sup>122</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the leading American authors before the Civil War, had met some of his European literary ‘heroes,’ William Wordsworth (1770-1850), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-

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<sup>118</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *The Private Life of the Late Benjamin Franklin, LL.D. Originally Written By Himself, And Now Translated From The French* (London: J. Parsons, 1893).

<sup>119</sup> Bertens and D’Haen, *Geschiedenis van de Amerikaanse Literatuur*, 59.

<sup>120</sup> Ann Matthews Woodlief, “Definitions from A Handbook to Literature,” <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/eng372/intro-h4.htm>.

<sup>121</sup> As described in Leon Chai, *The Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

<sup>122</sup> Gillian Avery, *Behold the Child: American Children and Their Books, 1621-1922* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 65.

1834), and Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), during his trip to England early in the century.<sup>123</sup> He was acquainted with other transcendentalist authors in the United States and might have inspired them with his experiences in Europe. However, Emerson and other American writers combined European Romantic influences with their own ideas. Emerson believed that he and his colleagues had created the first authentically American literary genre because it had not copied the European literature.<sup>124</sup> For the first time there was a large selection of novels that had their stories take place in America, covering American topics such as slavery, politics, and places. It has been said that “[a]t the dawn of the antebellum era, a romantic literature had evolved, an American Renaissance,” although the term *renaissance* unjustly implied that an American literary genre re-emerged.<sup>125</sup> Nevertheless, the American public had access to a literary genre that was more American than any American literature before the 1820s. This might have slightly stimulated national imagination, though European books would be dominant on the American book market until late in the nineteenth century.<sup>126</sup>

Another relation between American literature and national affiliation that might have the imagination of the nation was that the European Romantic Movement carried nationalistic elements. The romantic emphasis on passions and emotions was also directed at the fatherland.<sup>127</sup> Nationalism was not adopted in America the way it existed in Europe, but elements of European nationalism found its way to American literature.<sup>128</sup> Romantic nationalism was characterized by

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<sup>123</sup> Russell B. Goodman, *American Philosophy and the Romantic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 34.

<sup>124</sup> F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 69.

<sup>125</sup> Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 69.

<sup>126</sup> Some of the most well-known American Transcendentalist works were *Representative Men* by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1850), Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), and Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855).

<sup>127</sup> Bert Altena and Dick van Lente, *Vrijheid en Rede: Geschiedenis van Westerse Samenlevingen, 1750-1989* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2003), 116-117.

<sup>128</sup> Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 73; Higham, *localism and community*, 19.

an idealization of nature, exoticism, and individual freedom as Romantic literature functioned as an escape from the present reality and to other places, past and future.<sup>129</sup> These elements were compatible with the United States because of its vast country, abundant nature, savage lands beyond the frontier, and its exotic Native American cultures. These circumstances were uniquely American because they did not exist in Europe. The European nationalistic love for the country appealed to the sentiment of love for the newly conquered lands beyond the American frontier. Poe, Cooper, Melville, Whitman and other authors let American ‘uniqueness, greatness, and providential destiny drench the stories.’<sup>130</sup> Most American authors sought to explore their expanding country and the ‘possibilities of the ideal, utopian community, which America could be or already was.’<sup>131</sup> Therefore, transcendentalist literature might have inspired the American readers with affiliation for their country.

American literature became truly independent from European influences after the Civil War. First of all, the American Romantic Movement and transcendentalism ended during the Civil War because their dreamy, nostalgic character did not correspond with the reality of a war disrupting the American nation. Literature became more raw and realistic and was therefore called Realism.<sup>132</sup> Americans started to doubt the idea that the individual could determine his own destiny, which had been emphasized in the Romantic Movement.<sup>133</sup> English literature was characterized by harmony, whereas American stories were characterized by unresolved conflicts. Also, English literature was focused more clearly upon social anchors like family, class, marriage, and local harmony, whereas the characters in Realistic stories were often isolated or

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<sup>129</sup> Bertens and d’Haen, *Geschiedenis van de Amerikaanse Literatuur*, 38-39.

<sup>130</sup> Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 73.

<sup>131</sup> Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 73.

<sup>132</sup> Woodlief, “Definitions from A Handbook to Literature”; Bertens and D’Haen, *Geschiedenis van de Amerikaanse Literatuur*, 61.

<sup>133</sup> Bertens and D’Haen, *Geschiedenis van de Amerikaanse Literatuur*, 110.

outcast from society. Another difference was that American realistic storylines were melodramatic and often incredible, while English stories were more detailed in their description of reality. The only European influence to be traced in post-Civil War literature in America was the obsession for the irrational and supranational. The inexplicable was used as an ominous element.<sup>134</sup> American realistic authors like Mark Twain, Henry James, and Dean Howells were not inspired by European literature and European Realism was therefore very different from its American derivative. American Realism was truly America's first fictive genre that was inspired by America society and situations whereas transcendentalism had still been inspired by the European Romantic movement.<sup>135</sup> The West was mentioned in literature for the first time after the Civil War by Mark Twain.<sup>136</sup> Cowboy and Indian stories, pioneers and heroes, became incredibly popular, especially in the eastern states. They symbolized pioneer courage and Manifest Destiny.<sup>137</sup> Therefore it is likely that these topics became more familiar among the American population than before the Civil War. It is also an indication that the West became embedded in the imagination of the nation as a whole. Thus, it is possible that American literature stimulated national imagination more strongly after the Civil War than before. However, it is the question whether its authors were more intensely influenced by society or whether their literature influenced society. Lastly, Eakin argued that American autobiographies followed the style of the literary genres that were popular at the time that they were written.<sup>138</sup> Therefore it is likely that autobiographers who wrote their memoirs between 1850 and 1860 were influenced by the transcendentalist nationalistic aspects and those who wrote memoirs between

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<sup>134</sup> Bertens and D'Haen, *Geschiedenis van de Amerikaanse Literatuur*, 64.

<sup>135</sup> St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*, 374.

<sup>136</sup> Bertens and D'Haen, *Geschiedenis van de Amerikaanse Literatuur*, 52.

<sup>137</sup> Bertens and D'Haen, *Geschiedenis van de Amerikaanse Literatuur*, 52.

<sup>138</sup> John Paul Eakin, *American autobiography: Retrospect and prospect* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 50.

1870 and 1890 by the Realistic emphasis on American topics such as the West and Native Americans.

### **The Nation Imagined in Autobiographies**

Now it has been discussed how national imagination was possible in American society and how this imagination might have become stronger after the Civil War, it will follow to test the extent of national imagination among Euro-Americans in the autobiographies that they wrote before and after the Civil War.

Autobiographers did not explicitly refer to national imagination and affiliation. Since national imagination seems real to people, they are mostly not aware of that their ideas of a nation are founded on imagination.<sup>139</sup> Moreover, the phenomenon that is now called national imagination had not been invented in nineteenth-century America. This explains why none of the autobiographers expressed awareness of or mentioned that they did not know the whole of their nation and its population, and that their ideas were therefore based on ideas rather than facts.

However, all autobiographers showed that they had ideas about of the scope of their nation. Therefore they all presided over national imagination, regardless of how limited the degree hereof. Almost all autobiographers who published their writings both before and after the war viewed their nation as a unity. They indicated this by writing “our civilization,” “[t]he immense commercial depot of the United States, known as New York,” “the first roof covered with slates in America,” and “the most amiable and highly cultivated professor of natural philosophy the

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<sup>139</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6-7.

country ever produced.”<sup>140</sup> Thus, they had not visited all parts of the nation to verify their claims, but they imagined the nation as a whole and put their claims in a large context.

Local affiliation was rarely shown in autobiographies. Thorburn showed affiliation with his state and the city he lived in, but his national affiliation seemed greater. Furthermore, Davis used the nickname for the State of New York, Empire State, while he used no nickname for the nation at large, but this is insufficient prove for the intensity of his local affiliation at the expense of national affiliation. Winans was the only one who briefly told of the history of his town, Albany, in the state of New York, and Prime gave a very detailed report of the celebration of the centennial celebration of his town Rowley. He also showed the strongest local affiliation with his region, exclaiming “my native place. Oh! Glorious New England.”<sup>141</sup> The remainder of the autobiographies did not reveal any local affiliation, indicating that national imagination was not hindered by local focus.

Autobiographies showed few signs of national imagination referring to symbols. The unofficial anthems, the White House, and the flag existed before the war, but were not mentioned in any of the autobiographies published in both timeframes. The Statue of Liberty came to the United States in 1886 and was not mentioned by the only autobiography studied in this thesis that was published after this year. Half of the twelve autobiographers referred to the eagle, but Winans was the only one explicitly stating that this bird was a national symbol. It is not strange that five other autobiographers mentioned the eagle, since the bird lived in most parts of the nation. Therefore it remains speculation whether they mentioned it because of its symbolic status. The Goddess of Columbia was mentioned by Benjamin Bowen, who called her Goddess

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<sup>140</sup> Jarves, *Why and What Am I?*, 102; Davis, *The Magic Staff*, 298; Thorburn, *Life and Writings of Grant Thorburn*, 17; Cozzens, “Autobiographic Sketch,” 2.

<sup>141</sup> Prime, *The Autobiography of an Octogenarian*, 178.

of Liberty, and Thorburn. Both men published their autobiographies in the 1850s. Buckingham, who also wrote his memoir in this decade, once used ‘Columbia’ as a synonym for the United States. After the Civil War, none of the autobiographers referred to the Goddess in any context, which is striking for she was depicted in a famous painting of 1872. Thus, the use of symbols seemed more developed before the Civil War than in its aftermath, suggesting that national imagination might have been stronger before the war. This is surprising because there were as many symbols referring to the nation after the Civil War than before and they were slightly stimulated in their use compared to the pre-war period. Nevertheless, most authors did not often refer to national symbols or traditions.

Autobiographies that were published before the Civil War referred slightly more often to national celebrations than postwar autobiographies. The Fourth of July was only mentioned twice, once before and once after the war. Both descriptions of this celebration bore witness of national imagination and even patriotism. Winans called it both the Anniversary of the country and Fourth of July and Davis called it the Anniversary of American Independence, showing national imagination. Additionally, Davis was elaborate on the significance of this celebration. He remembered that he had experienced “patriotic enjoyment” on this day and called it a glorious Fourth, although he wondered whether “patriotic celebrations of American liberty” were nothing but enthusiasm and “thoughtless joy.” Winans’ description of the celebration included his recalling that “the Eagle, our national bird, was being brought to light and happy remembrance, upon the occasion of each recurring National Anniversary, [...], and as a yearly reminder to Great Britain, and the rest of mankind, that we are, and of a right ought to be, free, sovereign and independent.”<sup>142</sup> Both autobiographers specifically linked the Fourth of July with

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<sup>142</sup> Winans, *Reminiscences and Experiences in the Life of an Editor*, 101.

the founding of their nation. Nonetheless, the birth of Washington, another celebration that reminded of the nation's early history, was only briefly mentioned by Thorburn in the first timeframe. Memorial Day was not mentioned by any of the autobiographers. Celebrations that did not specifically remind of the nation were also seldom mentioned in autobiographies. Thanksgiving as an annual celebration was mentioned by two autobiographers before the war, but by none after the war. Christmas was once addressed by Griscom before and by Hubert after the Civil War. Halloween has not been referred to by any of the autobiographers. Thus there were no remarkable differences between the mentioning of holidays in both timeframes. The prewar autobiographies mentioned them slightly more often, but they did not elaborate on them.

It is possible that these small differences between the timeframes could be explained by the fact that two of the autobiographies of the timeframe 1870-1890 were relatively brief. Cozzen's autobiography counted ten pages and Smith's forty-three, while most other autobiographies constituted of more than a hundred pages. It could be argued that these two short memoirs would have expressed national imagination and affiliation if this had only been important enough in the authors' lives, but their relative small selection of topics did not prove that they did not have national imagination. Instead, any references to national imagination in these short autobiographies might be stronger than those in long autobiographies because they made it to the authors' limited selection of topics. Cozzen's and Smith's memoirs both showed national imagination. Based on the standardization of holidays after the Civil War, we can assume that holidays were increasingly celebrated nationwide and might have influenced national imagination. However, this cannot be proven using the autobiographies.

Autobiographers' ideas on the American population were another measure of national imagination in autobiographies. Racial relations in nineteenth-century America were briefly



discussed in section one and it was concluded that it remained unclear whether Americans had visions of who were the American people. Nevertheless, all autobiographers used terms like ‘Americans,’ ‘citizens,’ and ‘fellow-countrymen,’ which showed that they imagined a certain population among these terms that extended beyond their immediate surroundings. Autobiographers’ ideas about the nation’s population strongly cohere with their ideas of the character of these people and will therefore be further discussed in section three.

Having discussed markers of national imagination, it will follow to explore expressions of national affiliation and patriotism as indications of national imagination. The term ‘patriotism’ was mentioned by five autobiographers of the first timeframe and by three authors of the second timeframe. Buckingham showed his affiliation with the nation by arguing that Americans by birth should not support a party at the expense of “affection for the land which gave us birth.” He also called this “patriotic integrity” and, if maintained, this integrity would secure ‘the name, honor, and privilege of the American citizen.’<sup>143</sup> Thorburn’s relation with the nation was slightly different because his affections lied greatly in Scotland, having been born there. He claimed: “a Scotchman I am, and I glory in the name.”<sup>144</sup> Nevertheless, he also expressed great affiliation to the United States, admiring a letter that one of his acquaintances had send from the United States to the French Revolutionaries and that he copied into his autobiography. Part of this letter boasted of the great American warriors, boats, and the President. He did not write the letter himself, but he chose to include it in his autobiography, showing that he desired its contents to be known by the reader.<sup>145</sup> Moreover, he emphasized his patriotism by writing “I was landed in America; thus placing me in the best country in the world, the best State in that country, the best

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<sup>143</sup> Buckingham, *Personal Memoirs and Recollections of Editorial Life*, 74.

<sup>144</sup> Thorburn, *Life and Writings of Grant Thorburn*, 172.

<sup>145</sup> All autobiographers showed awareness of the reader in their life-writings, directly speaking or referring to the reader.

city in that state.”<sup>146</sup> He found that “America is more desirable to live in than perhaps any other country under the sun.”<sup>147</sup> Davis and Jarves expressed strong patriotism in their autobiographies since it was their idea that America was the country where one could find white superiority as the final stage in human development. Lastly, Bowen showed only hints of national affiliations in his autobiography.

It is remarkable that autobiographers of the second timeframe showed less affiliation or patriotism in their memoirs. Winans was the most patriotic of all, considering his passionate report of a Fourth of July celebration and that one of his most pleasant memories was the visit Henry Clay visited to Newark in 1833. He also believed that the American statesmen he admired were remembered in the rest of the world, indicating that he viewed the United States as a central entity in this world.<sup>148</sup> The other autobiographers published in the postwar timeframe only gave hints of affiliation, but refrained from the expression of explicit patriotic opinions. Hubert showed great concern for the well-being of the nation. He worried that the significance of money was too central to American society, that “all the monkeys in America” mindlessly copied the European fashion of “the head monkey in Paris,” and that public schools turned out their children “so they all know the same things, think the same way, intellectually fashioned upon a poor model.”<sup>149</sup> Cozzens commenced a magazine on native wines and introduced these wines in society, showing his national affiliation, but he did not further elaborate on the significance of native products for the nation. Therefore he did not clearly present himself as patriotic. Lastly, Prime only referred to patriotism in relation with the Revolutionary struggle, but he did not give awareness of patriotism at the time of writing. It is surprising that autobiographers of the second

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<sup>146</sup> Thorburn, *Life and Writings of Grant Thorburn*, 134.

<sup>147</sup> Thornburn, *Life and Writings of Grant Thorburn*, 194.

<sup>148</sup> Winans, *Reminiscences and Experiences in the Life of an Editor*, 101, 163, 170.

<sup>149</sup> Hubert, *Liberty and a Living*, 212, 24.

timeframe showed less patriotism than those in the first timeframe since scholars perceived a patriotic increase after the Civil War, rather than a decline. It is unlikely that this can be explained by Romantic influences as autobiographies give no indications hereof. A possible explanation could be that the War with Mexico and the economic depression of the 1870s subdued patriotism. However, both this war and the depression were not referred to in any autobiography, indicating that concerns were not focused on these topics. Additionally, there is no increase noticeable in patriotic expressions in the autobiographies studied of this timeframe. However, the selection is too small to draw sensible conclusions on patriotism.

The degree of interest that autobiographers showed for national history and their knowledge hereof was a marker for national imagination and affiliation, as history has been said to encourage these national feelings.<sup>150</sup> Thorburn and Buckingham both showed great interest for reading historical books on American history. Winans mentioned the original thirteen states of America and the “upcoming centennial” celebration of the United States.<sup>151</sup> Famous early settlers of the American colonies, the Pilgrim Fathers, were symbols for America’s history and were mentioned by five autobiographers. Jarves referred to his “Pilgrim ancestry” often.<sup>152</sup> He said that the Americans owed their “moral health” to them. Buckingham wrote that he descended from one of the Mayflower’s Pilgrims and Thorburn referred to the Pilgrims numerous throughout his autobiography. Of the second timeframe Smith referred to these forefathers, showing pride that his deceased wife was a “direct descendant, on the maternal side, of the Mayflower Pilgrims.”<sup>153</sup> Lastly, Prime only briefly remembered these Pilgrims. Thus, only half of all

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<sup>150</sup> Huntington, *Who are We?* 43.

<sup>151</sup> Winans, *Reminiscences and Experiences in the Life of an Editor*, 146.

<sup>152</sup> Jarves, *Why and What Am I?*, 109.

<sup>153</sup> Smith, *Memorials of Peter Smith*, 38.

autobiographers showed interest for the nation's general history or mentioned the Pilgrim Fathers.

However, history was mentioned far more often in relation to the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 against Britain. As discussed before, the experiences of war can function as national binders, and therefore references to these wars in autobiographies could be markers of feelings of belonging to the nation among Euro-Americans.<sup>154</sup> Moreover, both these wars were important events in America's existence as the first one created independence from Britain and the second one ensured it. Seven autobiographers mentioned the war with Britain frequently, yet briefly. Six autobiographers wrote about the Revolutionary War, and almost all of them mentioned this war multiple times. Buckingham tells of his father, who was a captain in the Revolutionary War and who spent all his money and property on the patriotic army. He did not show pride or judgment in his autobiography, but he did start his memoirs with this information indicating that he found it important to mention. Thorburn mentioned Bunker Hill, where a monument was erected to remember the battle fought here during the Revolutionary War. He also referred to The Boston Elm, another of these monuments. He wrote that seeing these monuments made him recall the past vividly. Griscom and Thorburn referred to the "destruction of the tea at Boston," which was one of the signs that the Americans resisted British policies before they claimed their independence.<sup>155</sup> Winans claimed that "[a]nything connected with our Revolutionary Struggle, how sacred."<sup>156</sup> Prime remembered how he re-enacted Bunker's Hill as a child.<sup>157</sup> Lastly, one of the first things that Cozzens wrote in his memoir was that his grandfather had fought in the Revolutionary War. In this context he mentioned that Bunker's Hill was a "never-to-be-

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<sup>154</sup> Huntington, *Who Are We?* 43.

<sup>155</sup> Griscom, *Memoir of John Griscom*, 11.

<sup>156</sup> Winans, *Reminiscences and Experiences in the Life of an Editor*, 170.

<sup>157</sup> Prime, *The Autobiography of an Octogenarian*, 62.

forgotten-morning.”<sup>158</sup> Almost all autobiographers found one or both of these wars relevant to mention in their life-writings, indicating that most of them were aware of these important markers for the nation’s independence.

Moreover, both wars were mentioned almost as many times in the second timeframe as they had been in the first timeframe. This is remarkable because authors of the second timeframe wrote their memoirs ten to forty years longer after the war with Britain had ended than authors of the first timeframe. Moreover, the Civil War had been taking place only five to twenty-five years before autobiographers of the second timeframe wrote their memoirs. Most likely, this war was carved fresher in their minds, even though they did not mention the Civil War in their life-writings. Therefore, it is plausible that both the Revolution and the War of 1812 were used as symbols for the nation’s unity and independence in the second timeframe. This symbolic value, in turn, indicated national affiliation after the Civil War.

It is striking that none of the autobiographers of the second timeframe discussed or mentioned the Civil War. It was not proudly mentioned that the North had saved the Union or that the war had cost many lives. William Winans was the only one including a negative comment about southerners in his autobiography. He also argued that the nation that was fought for in the Revolutionary War would continue to exist, which might have been an indirect reference to northern victory in the Civil War. Furthermore Frederick Cozzens remembered that his monthly magazine on native wines ceased to exist due to insufficient membership during the war, but both he and Winans refrained from further remarks on that war. It is unthinkable that autobiographers had been unaware of this war as American newspapers reported on the events of

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<sup>158</sup> Cozzens, “Autobiographic Sketch,” 2.

the war extensively.<sup>159</sup> Perhaps the traumatic events of the war might explain why they did not mention it. The ignorance of the Civil War in autobiographies is not necessarily an indication that Euro-Americans became more or less affiliated with their nation, especially because the war itself confronted them with the imagination of this nation.

Furthermore, both national imagination and affiliation were revealed by the number of references of American politicians or celebrities in autobiographies. Washington (1732-1799), the first President of the United States, was mentioned by Davis, Bowen, Buckingham, and Thorburn in the pre-war timeframe and only by Prime and Mitchell in autobiographies published after the war. Winans argued that he admired Henry Clay (1777-1852) for his “life-long devotion to what I deemed our country’s unity, prosperity, and renown.”<sup>160</sup> Clay’s visit to Newark in 1833 was one of Winans’ dearest memories. However, Clay was not mentioned by any other autobiographer. Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) was referred to by Griscom, Buckingham, and Thorburn, but briefly. Prime was the only one referring to this former President of all postwar autobiographers. Griscom and Thorburn referred to Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), whom was only mentioned by Winans after the war. Politicians James Madison (1751-1836), Alexander Hamilton (1755-1804), and John Quincy Adams (1767-1848) were barely mentioned in both timeframes. It is striking that Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), the President during the Civil War who was officially responsible for the abolition of slavery and whose murder ended his second presidential term, was only mentioned once by Cozzens. Furthermore, Winans added several politicians that were not mentioned by any other autobiographer, stating that “Then there are the great men, whose eloquence and patriotism won the admiration of the whole civilized world – such men as Clay, Webster, Calhoun, Benton and their compeers – names of worldwide fame

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<sup>159</sup> Norton, *A People and a Nation*, 204.

<sup>160</sup> Winans, *Reminiscences and Experiences in the Life of an Editor*, 118.

and renown – names that will live as the nation endures, and memories of whom will never die.”<sup>161</sup> Furthermore, Smith was in the military for over seventeen years and the self-proclaimed summit of this career was the escort of President Monroe (1758-1831) and General laFayette (1757-1834). The latter was French, but had fought in the Revolutionary War. Smith remembered that many people were waiting outside their doors “in tormenting rain” when they passed, cheering for “our country’s friend.” He recalled that he joined them in exclaiming ‘Welcome laFayette!’<sup>162</sup> Both President Monroe and laFayette have not been mentioned in the remaining autobiographies. Finally, Thorburn was acquainted with American philosopher Thomas Paine (1737-1809) and he remembered that he once told him “you, who were once in the companion of Washington, Jay, and Hamilton, are now deserted by any good man.”<sup>163</sup> Thus, an equal amount of politicians and famous Americans was mentioned by ten autobiographers in total of both timeframes. This showed that both prewar and postwar autobiographers were aware of which politicians were influential in their country and that both expressed national affiliation by admiring these politicians.

As another marker of national imagination and affiliation, modern innovations were not mentioned by most autobiographers. The autobiographers that wrote about the railroad or other developments did not show specific pride that their nation had produced these. Thorburn only used the modern Printing Press while praising a deceased friend. He claimed that “Hoe's Printing Press is probably the most useful discovery that has blessed the world, since the first sheet was struck from the press.” Griscom referred to the increasing railroad mileage, writing that “[I]t may be doubted, whether, in any part of the globe, so rapid an advance has been made in less than a

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<sup>161</sup> Winans, *Reminiscences and Experiences in the Life of an Editor*, 170.

<sup>162</sup> Prime, *The Autobiography of an Octogenarian*, 117.

<sup>163</sup> Thorburn, *Life and Writings of Grant Thorburn*, 102.

quarter of a century, throughout a distance of 350 miles. The railroad, however, was not at this time complete, through the entire distance, as it has since been made.”<sup>164</sup> He did show the expectation that the United States was the only country in the world with such advanced railroads. Hubert showed less imagination of American leadership, but he explained how “no matter how far you are from the centers of civilization, the mails bring you all the thought of the great world worth recording.”<sup>165</sup> He expected that “In the future, thanks to electricity, that great power of coming ages by which the forces of nature are to be harnessed, food and clothing and everything that machinery can make will be inconceivably cheap.”<sup>166</sup> Prime was slightly more praising of the progress of the railroad, writing that “This house is still standing, about the same as then, but the surroundings, oh ! how changed ! There was then no railroad there ; no gigantic iron horse with its ponderous trains, ringing, screeching and thundering by several times a day.”<sup>167</sup> Instead, he mentioned that he first heard of “railroads and locomotives in England, and of their immense speed and power.” He wished they would be introduced in the United States. Moreover, he focused on the changes the railroad had brought about in his village, not in the nation at large. Thus, modern innovations were exclusively referred to by autobiographers of the second timeframe, but they were not specifically connected with a feeling of pride of the nation. It is, however, possible that these railroads and innovations of printing presses reduced the psychological differences within the nation because other parts of the nation and the possible readership of newspapers in those parts were now feasible. These effects were not specifically reflected in the autobiographies.

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<sup>164</sup> Griscom, *Memoir of John Griscom*, 267.

<sup>165</sup> Hubert, *Liberty and a Living*, 24.

<sup>166</sup> Hubert, *Liberty and a Living*, 235.

<sup>167</sup> Prime, *The Autobiography of an Octogenarian*, 45-46.



American affiliation is also shown by the literature that autobiographers read and mentioned in their stories. Most of them read eagerly and considered reading a sign of intellectual development. Eight of the twelve autobiographers mentioned the literature they had read. Only three of them mentioned more English than American literature and only one of those explicitly favored English novels. Prime only wrote about Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and the English poet Cowper. He did not mention American literature, although this does not necessarily prove that he did not read and appreciate this. Jarves preferred Greek legends over American poets and authors as a child and never refuted this in favor of American literature. This did not convincingly prove that he did not appreciate American literature, but it is likely that he would have mentioned American novels if they had significant impressions on his mind. Thirdly, Griscom referred to both American and British writers and poets, but he showed that his favorite literature was British by recalling that "[o]ne of the first sets of books with which I supplied my first book-case was the British Classics, in a neat edition of more than thirty volumes. These have furnished a fund of profitable reading, as well as the finest examples of style and composition, and the richest display of learning, taste and talent."<sup>168</sup> He did not write similar remarks about American literature.

Of the remaining five autobiographers mentioning literature, four referred to both British and American authors. Three of these autobiographers mentioned American authors living at the time the autobiographies were published. Hubert began his autobiography by quoting American writer and philosopher Henry David Thoreau and he quoted Emerson. He also referred to the American writer Henry James (1843-1916) and American explorer George Kennan (1845-1924), who published his adventures in several books. Davis proudly announced that Edgar Allen Poe had

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<sup>168</sup> Griscom, *Memoir of John Griscom*, 47.

visited him for a clairvoyant consultation, although he did not mention whether he had read his work. Winans also mentioned Poe and was the only one not mentioning English literature at all. Thus, most autobiographers mentioned American literature, but only one ignored British literature. This reflects the availability of both native and European literature in the United States. The studied autobiographers were not exclusively influenced by American literature as they were also reminded of Britain. However, almost all autobiographers who read American literature might have been stimulated in their national imagination, considering that American transcendentalist literature carried nationalistic elements in the period before the Civil War.

American authors of Realistic novels wrote extensively about Native Americans compared to prewar transcendentalists, but this was not reflected in autobiographies. However, the term ‘Indian’ was mentioned twice as often by prewar autobiographers than their postwar equivalents. Moreover, all autobiographers who published their memoirs before the war wrote about “Native Americans,” sixty-six times in total.<sup>169</sup> Cozzens, Prime, and Hubert were the only ones to write of Native Americans in the second timeframe, mentioning them only four times in total. Therefore it is not plausible that autobiographers were influenced by the Realistic emphasis on Native American culture in the timeframe discussed. Perhaps Native Americans had received more attention by prewar autobiographers because of the Romanticized exoticism of their cultures. It is possible that the attention of postwar autobiographers were drawn to more ‘realistic’ issues, such as mourning over the Civil War dead, economic depression, and Since romantic influences ceased to be reflected in literature during the Civil War, this might explain why the Indian almost disappeared from the autobiographies. On the other hand, it remains a question to what extent

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<sup>169</sup> The term ‘Native American’ was only used twice in the autobiographies before the Civil War and not at all after the Civil War.

autobiographers were influenced by their American literature and, thus, by the attention that the West and Native Americans received in this literature.

In addition, romantic and realistic influences in style were barely noticeable in autobiographies. The language and vocabulary used by prewar and postwar autobiographers were largely similar. Thorburn was the only one who showed nostalgic feelings regarding monuments of the Revolutionary War. There are no signs that autobiographers who published their memoirs after the war were more pessimistic about their societies or personal lives than those who did so before the war. Thus, it remains speculation to what extent autobiographers' national imagination and affiliation had been influenced by American literary genres.

Finally, other autobiographies have not been mentioned in the autobiographies studied in this thesis. There were no signs that the autobiographers read them, but the contrary can also not be proven. Thus, it remains unclear to what extent autobiographers were inspired and influenced by the contents of other memoirs that had been written. It will therefore also need more extensive research to determine to what degree autobiographies had stimulated national imagination among Euro-Americans in general.

In conclusion, this study of autobiographies confirmed the expectations based on existing academic researches that Euro-Americans imagined their nation as an entity. All autobiographers had ideas about its scope to a greater or lesser extent. However, many markers of national identity discussed were not reflected in the autobiographies as much as was expected.

The existence of symbols, traditions, and celebrations stimulated national imagination slightly and this effect should have been noticeable in society after the Civil War. However, autobiographers did not often refer to national symbols, traditions, and celebrations that existed in society and the frequency of doing so did not increase in the autobiographies that were

published after the Civil War. The Fourth of July was barely mentioned as a reminder of national independence, but, when mentioned, the celebrations were described thoroughly and with patriotism. It is therefore likely that the Fourth had been also celebrated by the other autobiographies even though they did not refer to it. Possibly, they also attached patriotic feelings to these celebrations, but this will remain unverified based on this research.

It is remarkable that autobiographies of the postwar timeframe show slightly less patriotic feelings than those of the prewar timeframe. Autobiographers of the years 1870-1890 mentioned 'patriotism' less often and barely connected this term with reflections of passion for the nation. They showed an equal amount of historical knowledge and interest, referred to the Revolution and the War of 1812 as often as those of the first timeframe, and showed an equal admiration for American politicians. They were the only ones referring to modern innovations, but they did not connect this with the specific progress of their nation. Lastly, they read as many British books as their predecessors before the war and they referred to Native Americans fewer times. There is no explanation found in autobiographies why those of the second timeframe showed less feelings of patriotism, but it is striking because scholars claimed that patriotism had increased in post-Civil War America. This might be interesting for further research.

Thus, against the expectations formulated by Wilson, the Civil War did not repair a unity or create one and it also did not create national consciousness. This consciousness, or imagination of the nation, was already present when the war broke out. Moreover, the explored autobiographies give no specific and convincing indications of an increasing national imagination, suggesting that national imagination and affiliation did not increase in intensity after the war. The degree and exact significance of these imaginations will be elaborated on in section three.

### 3. National Identity

In this section it will be discussed to what extent it was possible to identify an American national identity in the nineteenth century. The previous section helps us understand the extent to which American autobiographers imagined their nation, now we will take it one step further and discuss what they saw when they imagined it and what characteristics they ascribed to it. This section will argue that it is impossible to ascribe a set of features to a country that could encompass the whole of its territory and its entire population. However, Euro-Americans were the dominant group in society and their ideas influenced the imagination of unity and identity among other social groups.<sup>170</sup> Therefore, we will research further into this group's theories and opinions about national identity. Their views will be tested using the twelve autobiographies. Additionally, in order to understand the relationship between American autobiographers and their nation, the sense of individuality among the population in the nineteenth century will be discussed. Finally, an attempt will be made to conclude to what extent Euro-Americans viewed themselves as Americans and what they considered American characteristics.

#### The American Idea

America's identity cannot be caught in numbers or facts.<sup>171</sup> These fail to detect correlations between each other and ignore relations between developments and events in society. Moreover, America's population is built up of various social groups who held varying ideas about

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<sup>170</sup> Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 84.

<sup>171</sup> Neil Campbell and Alisdair Kean, *American Cultural Studies: An Introduction to American Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 20.

‘America.’ These ideas were not static, but developed over time.<sup>172</sup> It would do injustice to the complicated reality to argue that the ideas of some groups were closer to the truth than those of others; especially because these different versions of ‘America’ partly challenged and even contradicted each other.<sup>173</sup> Thus, objective descriptions are incapable of encompassing the complex reality. This thesis therefore supports the view that a national identity could not exist in a vast country like America in the nineteenth century.<sup>174</sup>

Instead, it is more interesting and fruitful to discuss national identity from a subjective perspective. We will see that Euro-American ideas on America’s identity were more influential in society than those of other groups. Their ideas have shaped American society as if they encompassed the objective truth. In that context, American identity was based on ideas rather than facts.<sup>175</sup> It is the objective of this section to explore the range of possible ideas on national identity in the nineteenth-century. This range will be used the theoretical background and as a reference when we discuss national identity as expressed in autobiographies.

Our exploration of national identity will begin by studying the nation’s population. After all, subjective versions of national identity are shaped by people. Moreover, people make identity matter because they devise who is American, who is an outsider, what is American, and what not. They feel the need to define themselves and the groups they belong to.<sup>176</sup> The identification of ‘the self’ would not be relevant to people without the presence of ‘the other,’ which explains

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<sup>172</sup> Campbell and Kean, *American Cultural Studies*, 15.

<sup>173</sup> Campbell and Kean, *American Cultural Studies*, 20.

<sup>174</sup> As argued by Smith, Hixson, Huntington, and others.

<sup>175</sup> Wald, “The Idea of America,” 82.

<sup>176</sup> Thomas Hylland Erikson, *Small Places, Large Issues: An Introduction into Social and Cultural Anthropology* (London and Sterling: Pluto Press, 2001, second edition), 76.

why various social groups did not mix in America.<sup>177</sup> Therefore, group-association, discrimination, and racism helped shape American society.

Euro-Americans were the first colonists to settle in America and have therefore controlled politics since colonial times. Their hegemonic position in society enabled them to ensure the interests of their own social group and consequently they have determined American society based on their racial ideas and convictions.<sup>178</sup> They founded the United States and wrote a Constitution for it that determined the political organization and basic ideologies for the nation. This Constitution also decided that African American slaves and untaxed Native Americans would be out of power until 1868.<sup>179</sup> It also granted Congress, dominated by Euro-Americans, the power to determine the naturalization process. Legislative doubts and problems among the population were tried before the judicial branch of government, which was also dominated by this group. They were almost impervious to other groups' possible objections. Moreover, Euro-American prevalence in the printing business ensured their views being printed in books and newspapers, spreading those throughout the nation.<sup>180</sup> Their economical dominance forced other groups into dependent positions within companies and organizations, as well as financially. Of course, ideas and imagination of other social groups have been able to leave imprints on American society, but since minorities were divided among themselves they failed to become a united front against Euro-American power.<sup>181</sup> Moreover, Euro-Americans were not conscious of their being a group. They also did not consciously organize themselves to ensure their

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<sup>177</sup> Huntington, *Who Are We?* 23.

<sup>178</sup> Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 90. Gramsci is the pioneer of the idea of hegemony. Hegemony refers to "economic, cultural, political, civil, intellectual, and moral dominance."

<sup>179</sup> U.S. Constitution, 1776, Art, 1.

<sup>180</sup> Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 1.

<sup>181</sup> Higham, 'The Problem of Assimilation in the United States,' 20.

domination. Their hegemony was a process sustained by its own power over time.<sup>182</sup> Euro-Americans have opposed challenges to their dominance during the nineteenth century and unfavorable changes did not happen from goodwill but out of necessity.<sup>183</sup> For these reasons American society remained Euro-American playground during the nineteenth and into the twentieth century.

However, Euro-Americans did not form a homogeneous group either, despite their sharing a similar ethnic heritage.<sup>184</sup> Farmers and laborers were often looked down upon by more prosperous Americans and section one discussed how Euro-Americans were politically and economically incoherent in society.<sup>185</sup> Their division enabled opposing ideas of political in- and exclusion among these subgroups and there was variation in emphases made on different aspects of national identity.<sup>186</sup> Nevertheless, Euro-American “myths,” subjective versions of national identity, remained similar among these subgroups.<sup>187</sup> These myths refer to prevalent ideas about the nation that were initiated by Euro-Americans. The ideals that Euro-Americans presented as fundamental to the American identity were convincing and universally desirable, such as the promise of liberty, equality, and democracy.<sup>188</sup> These myths helped to keep Euro-American visions on national identity indestructible because they were equally desirable to those who were excluded from the privileges of these ideals.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Campbell and Kean, *American Cultural Studies*, 15.

<sup>183</sup> Smith, *Civic Ideals*, 9.

<sup>184</sup> Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 84.

<sup>185</sup> Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 84.

<sup>186</sup> All of the foregoing, and Higham, ‘The Problem of Assimilation in the United States,’ 20.

<sup>187</sup> Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*. 56.

<sup>188</sup> Smith, *Civic Ideals*, 6. Hixson argued that American national identity is a myth because of the same reasons that Benedict Anderson called it an ‘imagination’ and Priscilla Wald called it an ‘idea;’ because it was not an objective truth.

<sup>189</sup> Madriaga, “Why American Nationalism Should Never Be Considered Postnationalist,” 81.



The most straightforward way of studying ideas on national identity is by exploring citizenship laws. The hegemonic group determined, through the Constitution and decisions in Congress, who was eligible to American citizenship and, thus, who were to be perceived as true Americans. Indeed, citizenship laws carried Euro-American characteristics; the white and prosperous were assured of citizenship while most non-whites and the poor found themselves banned from it throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>190</sup> After the abolition of slavery in 1863 and with the Naturalization Act of 1870, all African Americans born in the United States received citizenship. However, problems arose for those who had not been born in the United States or could not prove it.<sup>191</sup> Moreover, being white still made it easier to become naturalized, making it harder for Asians, Mexicans, Native Americans, and others to becoming American citizens after the Civil War. Moreover, Asians were banned from citizenship altogether in 1882.<sup>192</sup> Euro-American women also did not possess full citizenship until 1920, when they received the right to vote.

The actual situation regarding racial relations in nineteenth century-America was even grimmer than citizenship laws reflect.<sup>193</sup> Although the Fourteenth Amendment of 1868 stated that all persons born in the US would become citizens and the Naturalization Act of 1870 enforced this, the contents of these laws were limited as well as ambiguous. They were interpretable in many ways, but Euro-Americans used them as was most suitable to their own interests when carrying out these laws. Also, ‘whiteness’ was a prerogative for citizenship, but it remained unspecified in the law where the line would be drawn between ‘white’ and ‘colored.’ It led to situations in which people with white skins were rejected for naturalization because one of their

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<sup>190</sup> Smith, *Civic Ideals*, 3.

<sup>191</sup> Smith, *Civic Ideals*, 310.

<sup>192</sup> Chinese Exclusion Act, 1882.

<sup>193</sup> Smith, *Civic Ideals*, 2.

ancestors had been black. Moreover, groups like Jewish-Americans and Hispanics usually had light complexions but were not viewed as white people in society.<sup>194</sup> Euro-Americans were racially discriminative and did not consider colored people similar to themselves, even when those people had been born in America. They excluded minorities from Americanness, both consciously and unconsciously. This led to political and economic subordination of minorities in society and made it more difficult for these groups to become prosperous and successful in life. Thus, in Euro-American visions, ‘Americans’ were born within the nation and white, and preferably but not necessarily prosperous.

Immigration laws also reflected Euro-American racism and, with it, Euro-American ideas on Americanness. Countless numbers of immigrants entered the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century, among whom large number of Catholics from Ireland, Germany, and Italy and Chinese laborers, many of whom were extremely poor and sought a better life in America. American citizens began to fear that their culture and economic positions were threatened by these newcomers. This translated in a few restrictions on immigration before the Civil War.<sup>195</sup> An early sign that this fear was increasing was the founding of a new political party in 1854, popularly called the Know Nothings. It advocated strongly against Catholicism, but disintegrated before it could successfully influence political decisions. The most effective anti-immigration laws stem from after the war. The first one, the Immigration Act, was established in 1875 and raised limits for immigrants to enter the country. It specifically attempted to ban Chinese contract laborers from admission to the nation. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1880 prevented Chinese from coming to the United States to work in mines. In 1882, a new

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<sup>194</sup> Biale, “The Melting Pot and Beyond,” 19; Geroge A. Martinez, “Mexican-Americans and Whiteness” in *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*, Richard Delgado and Jean Sefancic, eds. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 210-213.

<sup>195</sup> Smith, *Civic Ideals*, 357-359; Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 80.

Immigration Act required all new immigrants to pay fees to enter the country, which most could not afford. Also, it banned “convicts (except those convicted of political offenses), lunatics, idiots and persons likely to become public charges” from entering the nation.<sup>196</sup> These laws make clear that the Euro-American community increasingly felt there was no place for large influences of other cultures, religions, worldviews, and mindsets than their own. Additionally, Euro-Americans feared that their nation would pauperize by the influx of an unlimited number of poor immigrants. Therefore it seems plausible that they accepted small numbers of different people into their country, as long as they did not influence their culture, insofar one existed. Thus, we can conclude that Euro-Americans viewed America as a white, protestant, sane, law-abiding, and prosperous country. Possibly, they did so more than before, but it is likely that they already had these views before the Civil War. However, these views of the nation became more emphasized by perceived threats upon the ideal version of their nation.

Objectively speaking, racial-, class-, and gender discrimination was part of the American identity because it was part of the dominant Euro-American worldview.<sup>197</sup> It has been argued that social groups were classified in a social hierarchy based on these variables. Euro-Americans viewed themselves at the top of this classification. They were followed by immigrant groups who had settled in America during colonial times or in the decades after independence.<sup>198</sup> These immigrants derived from West-European countries and were white. The third position was held by more recent white immigrant groups, among whom Catholics. Jewish East-Europeans found themselves on the edge between ‘colored’ and ‘white’ because their religion was not Christian and their culture distinctively different from West-European cultures. Even less appreciated were

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<sup>196</sup> Immigration Act, 1882.

<sup>197</sup> Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 77.

<sup>198</sup> Spickard, *Almost All Aliens*, 246-247.

Hispanics, who were colored and predominantly Catholic. The next in the hierarchy were Asians because their cultures differed greatly from western cultures, they were colored, and had non-Christian beliefs. African Americans were considered to hold the lowest rank in social hierarchy. The Native American found itself completely outside of American society until the late nineteenth century since a majority lived either beyond the frontier or on reservations. The further a social group or ethnicity was considered to be removed from the Euro-American group, the lower its degree of ‘Americanness.’

Now it has been argued who Euro-Americans perceived as Americans, it follows to discuss what characteristics they prescribed to those who they considered Americans. The American Creed arguably described the heart of American identity in the nineteenth century, with its five ingredients of liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and laissez-faire.<sup>199</sup> Elements of these characteristics were found in the Constitution and therefore the Creed was a product of the Euro-American community.<sup>200</sup> Scholars like Smith have argued that the ideals of the Creed were inherent in the American nature by lack of a monarchy and aristocracy although they noted that these ideals excluded minorities from the execution of their privileges.<sup>201</sup> The significance of these ideals in the Euro-American version of America will be tested later in this section based on the autobiographies studied in this thesis.

Smith, Bertens, d’Haen, and Huntington suggested that to be an American, “a person did not have to be of any particular national, linguistic, religious, or ethnic background.”<sup>202</sup> As an individual adopted the five elements of the Creed and possibly other ideals as well, this person would be considered American. Smith argued that “the universalist ideological character of

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<sup>199</sup> Huntington, *Who Are We?* 46, 67; Smith, *Civic Ideals*, 2.

<sup>200</sup> U.S. Constitution, Preamble.

<sup>201</sup> Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 58.

<sup>202</sup> Smith, *Civic Ideals*, 14, 15, and Bertens and D’Haen, *Geschiedenis van de Amerikaanse Literatuur*, 52.

American nationality meant that it was open to anyone who willed to become an American.”<sup>203</sup> They acknowledge that minorities were excluded from this possibility. This idea about Americanization among Euro-Americans will be further discussed later in this section, based on the twelve autobiographies.

Another ideal that has been characterized as uniquely American by scholars like Bjorklund was that of the self-made man.<sup>204</sup> This doctrine promises profit and success to those who commit themselves to a goal, work hard to realize it, and are perseverant. The promise of success through hard work mesmerized those not yet successful or wealthy and encouraged them to persist. This ‘American Dream’ justified the Euro-American hegemonic social position, while keeping poor and powerless Americans fixated on the big promise of climbing up to well-earned success.<sup>205</sup> Therefore, it has been argued that the self-made man ideal was used by politicians to organize people for their plans and ideas.<sup>206</sup> Thus, the ideals of working hard and being perseverant were likely to be seen as American traits by Euro-Americans.

As another indication of Euro-American versions of national identity, historian Frederick Jackson Turner observed in 1893 that the western frontier was closed because it had reached the western shores. He argued that this frontier would nevertheless remain at the heart of the American character.<sup>207</sup> Possibly he influenced the significance of the West in American identity and ideas about national identity at large, which would contribute to this thesis’ quest. Frontier life, he argued, had brought about “that coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and acquisitiveness; that practical inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful

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<sup>203</sup> Idem.

<sup>204</sup> Bjorklund, *Interpreting the Self*, 66-67; Hixson, *Civic Ideals*, 56.

<sup>205</sup> Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 56.

<sup>206</sup> Smith, *Civic Ideals*, 6.

<sup>207</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1921). The contents of this book were first presented by Mr. Turner in 1893.

grasp of material things... that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism.” Also, he argued that the frontier was the ‘point between savagery and civilization’ indicating the idea the Americans were civilized people as discussed before based on Davis’ and Jarves’ racial expressions in their autobiographies.<sup>208</sup> Ideals like democracy and egalitarianism seemed emphasized in the West, where “a poor man could walk into a rich man’s home without feeling uneasy.”<sup>209</sup> Additionally, the discovery of gold in the mountains of present-day California in the years before and after the Gold rush of 1849 lured large numbers of adventurers over the Great Plains. The promising pieces of news from the West symbolized hope, opportunity, and adventure in the rest of the nation.<sup>210</sup> These promising expectations and romantic images of the West were also pictured in literature written chiefly in the northwest.<sup>211</sup> Reality at the frontier was less rose-colored than often sketched, as discrimination based on ethnicity and class was as fierce as it was anywhere in the United States. The journey westward was dangerous and life in the territories was insecure. After the Civil War, the western myth was further emphasized and spread through literature and entertainment like Buffalo Bill’s Wild West.<sup>212</sup> These representations fed the imagination of the West in the northeastern states and even became projected upon the whole of the United States.<sup>213</sup>

Lastly, sections one and two have indicated how national imagination existed in the nation and argued that it was unlikely that this imagination increased in intensity after the Civil War. However, the circumstances in American society started to change during the war. Slavery was

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<sup>208</sup> Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*, 8.

<sup>209</sup> Billington, “Frontier Democracy,” 55.

<sup>210</sup> Bertens and D’Haen, *Geschiedenis van de Amerikaanse Literatuur*, 51.

<sup>211</sup> Bertens and d’Haen, *Geschiedenis van de Amerikaanse Literatuur*, 54-56.

<sup>212</sup> Robert W. Rydell and Rob Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869-1922* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 29.

<sup>213</sup> Bertens and D’Haen, *Geschiedenis van de Amerikaanse Literatuur*, 53.

abolished, launching large numbers of former slaves into society as free men, many of whom emigrated to the North to seek work in the industries. Immigration numbers reached new records in the postwar period, as has been discussed. These changes forced Euro-Americans to rethink and emphasize their ideas on Americanness, which could be an indication of increasing intensity of national identity after the war.

### **The Individual and the Nation**

A final context in which to place the twelve autobiographies analyzed for this thesis is the relation between the individual and the national identity in order to understand the individuals' relationships with the nation. This relation was determined by a modern notion of individuality. It has been argued by several scholars like Karl Weintraub, Stephen Arch, and Eakin that autobiographies are set apart from anecdotes, daily journals or diaries, summaries of events, personal portraits, and memoirs because nineteenth-century autobiographers were aware of their unique individualities and showed this in their memoirs.<sup>214</sup> They pursued to make their individualism known to the readers.<sup>215</sup> This awareness, that the individual is autonomous and unique, is what Arch argued to be the 'modern Self.'<sup>216</sup> In the absence of this notion until the nineteenth century and outside of the western world, human beings tended to believe they were part of a large social structure in which they had their fixed places. They accepted that they were born with a set of characteristics, talents, and interests that would remain unchanged during their lives. They assumed that they could improve their characters and skills, but that they could not obtain new talents or interests. With the emerging awareness of individuality people believed

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<sup>214</sup> Stone, *The American autobiography*, 2.

<sup>215</sup> Weintraub, "De ontwikkeling van de Autobiografie als Vorm van Zelfbewustwording," 10.

<sup>216</sup> Stephen Carl Arch, *After Franklin: The Emergence of Autobiography in Post-Revolutionary America, 1780-1830* (Hanover and London: University of New Hampshire Press, 2001), 4-6.

they could influence their own personalities and the courses of their lives.<sup>217</sup> Likewise, they started to reflect on themselves and question their position in society more critically than before. Their visions upon themselves even started to switch in different phases of their lives.<sup>218</sup> Some scholars do not view most life-writings written before the nineteenth century, like that by Benjamin Franklin, as autobiographies because they did not reflect this notion of individuality. This might explain why the term ‘autobiography’ was not coined until the late eighteenth century.<sup>219</sup>

The relation between Euro-American individuals with their nation was defined by this modern notion of individuality. During the timeframes discussed in this thesis, they viewed themselves as autonomous individuals within this nation, capable of having opinions on its identity. Additionally, the new vision on individuality enabled Americans in the lowest classes of society to believe in their ability to improve their skills and hold a successful place in society. It made the imagination of national imagination possible because Americans did not perceive themselves as a fixed element within this nation, but as autonomous individuals who could contribute to the creation of this nation. Thus, this modern sense of individual identity had indirectly contributed to American national identity by enabling individuals to imagine their nation and to influence it with their ideas. It made the imagination of individualism, democracy, and the ideal of the self-made man possible, that were perceived as American characteristics by the Euro-American population. In turn, their imagination of these characteristics determined American society, as discussed before.

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<sup>217</sup> Weintraub, “De ontwikkeling van de Autobiografie als Vorm van Zelfbewustwording,” 10; Arch, *After Franklin*, 5.

<sup>218</sup> Bjorklund, *Interpreting the Self*, 6.

<sup>219</sup> Eakin, *American Autobiography, Retrospect and Prospect*, 1; Arianne Baggerman, “Autobiography and family memory” in *Egodocuments and history, developments in Europe 1400-1800*, Rudolf Dekker ed. (Hilversum, 2002), 161-173.



Another impulse on the perception of the individual was given by fundamental changes in the outlook on the past. For the first time in history, American lives started to alter severely from those of their ancestors due to technological innovations, immigration, urbanization, and other processes in society. The effects of these inventions came to America slowly and continued to influence society until the nineteenth century. Society started to change more thoroughly after the Civil War due to many influential inventions, such as the telephone in 1876 by Bell. All these processes gave history renewed significance because it described a fundamentally different society, characterized by backwardness and antiquity. This modern view of history put the individual in a new position in time.<sup>220</sup> He was required to be active in order to adapt to his changing surroundings. He was also unique in time because both his ancestors and his posterity lived in fundamentally different societies. This stimulated the feeling of individuality.

The changing society was also a reason for an increasing number of Americans to write autobiographies during the nineteenth century.<sup>221</sup> They wished to conserve their knowledge and experiences for posterity because they were aware that society would continue to change in the near future. Autobiographical writing functioned as an attempt to make sense of their lives. Recording it for posterity gave autobiographers the feeling that their lives were not forgotten after their deaths and that their lives had had purpose.<sup>222</sup> Romanticism reflected the changes in society and emphasized emotions like nostalgia and the awareness of the caducity of life based on it. When American landscapes became intersected by canals, railroads, and roads, nature became a nostalgic reflection of the past. The autobiographers discussed in this thesis lived at the

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<sup>220</sup> Arianne Baggerman, "Tijd en identiteit. De opkomst van de autobiografie in de lange negentiende eeuw," in *Levensverhalen*, ed. Gerben Westerhof (Houten: Bohn, Stafley en van Loghum, 2007), 165-166.

<sup>221</sup> Baggerman, "Autobiography and family memory," 167; Erikson, *Small Places, Large Issues*, 121.

<sup>222</sup> Baggerman, Arianne, and Rudolf Dekker. "'De gevaarlijkste van alle bronnen.'" *Egodocumenten: nieuwe wegen en perspectieven*, in *Egodocumenten. Nieuwe wegen en benaderingen*. A. Baggerman and Rudolf Dekker Eds., 3-22 (Amsterdam, 2004), 18.

time that these changes took place and were reflected in literature. Relations between the modern sense of individuality, autobiographies, and national unity will be discussed more thoroughly in the study of autobiographies later in this section.

Finally, it should be noted that the act of writing an autobiography requires a positioning of the ‘Self’ within the world.<sup>223</sup> This world was divided in multiple identities in relation to the family, the village, the community, the workplace, and also the nation.<sup>224</sup> Writing autobiographically therefore challenges the author to consider his own identity and his place within the country. The autobiographical genre was, and is, “an epistemology: a way of knowing what it was to be an American.”<sup>225</sup>

### **The American Idea in Autobiographies**

A study of autobiographies delivers results that support various theories and expectations discussed in this section regarding national identity and individual identity. Autobiographers have been more specific on topics related to national identity than on national unity and imagination. However, they did not purposefully attempt to describe the nation’s identity either before or after the Civil War. National identity might not have been a central subject during their lives. It is also possible that common Euro-Americans lacked a comprehensive imagination of America’s identity. It should also be noted that the imagination of national identity was an individual process. Therefore some specific statements by autobiographers cannot always be ascribed to the general Euro-American vision of nationality. An example is Winans’ description of the typical American gentleman, who was “an inflexible Whig.” Political affiliations varied

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<sup>223</sup> Karl Weintraub, ‘De ontwikkeling van de autobiografie als vorm van zelfbewustwording’; Margaret M. Culley, *American women’s autobiography: Fea(s)ts of memory* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 129.

<sup>224</sup> Erikson, *Small Places, Large Issues*, 272.

<sup>225</sup> Pilditch, "United States: 19th Century American Auto/Biography," 903.

among Euro-Americans and therefore none of the political parties were more American than the other.

First of all, America's Republican organization as a description for the nation's identity was straightforward, but only mentioned by three autobiographers. We can assume that they would mention it in case Republicanism was a relevant element in their lives. Several autobiographers expressed their ideas on the Republican Party, but Thorburn, Davis, and Griscom specifically characterized America as a republic. Thorburn repeated this four times throughout his autobiography. By admiring the Republican Thomas Paine and writing extensively on Republicanism and Democracy both positively and critically, he showed his preference for this political organization of America. Davis and Griscom also described and admired America as a Republic, and Davis added that he thought it the superior political organization of a nation.<sup>226</sup> However, these two autobiographers did not further explain their views. In the post-Civil War timeframe, only Hubert referred to the nation as a great Republic through an anecdote about an acquaintance.<sup>227</sup> It is remarkable that no other autobiographers of this period characterized their nation as a Republic. Perhaps the objectivity of the republican fundamentals of American political organization convinced autobiographers that it was common knowledge and that mentioning it would be unnecessary. It is very unlikely that Americans were unaware of the republican nature of their nation because they showed advanced political awareness in their autobiographies. It is possible that they were not reminded of their nation being a republic on a daily basis since federal government did not influence local matters extensively.

Liberty was also a characterization of the nation at large and was mentioned in the majority of autobiographies. Davis used the terms 'liberty' and 'freedom' most often in his autobiography,

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<sup>226</sup> Davis, *The Magic Staff*, 381.

<sup>227</sup> Hubert, *Liberty and a Living*, 199.

but mostly in one paragraph. Taking this into account, ‘liberty’ was used by all autobiographers of the first timeframe, 87 and 68 times in total. Only half of the autobiographers of the second timeframe used the term ‘liberty’ in their life-writings, twenty times in total, while ‘freedom’ was mentioned fourteen times by all autobiographers except Cozzens. Thorburn was the only one raising minor objections concerning liberty in the United States. For instance, he argued that Americans “have as much, and more, liberty to carry, than we can stagger under.”<sup>228</sup> His argument was that he valued liberty in economics, owning property, gender relations, and marital choices, but that his beloved “priestmancraft” had deteriorated in American society due to too much liberty of religion. It is striking that liberty and freedom were mentioned fewer times in postwar autobiographies. Perhaps this could be explained by the abolition of slavery and the increasing intensity of racism and racial segregation in society, causing ‘liberty’ to suddenly encompass negative feelings among Euro-Americans. Nevertheless, scholars claimed that liberty remained a strong element in Euro-American views on national identity, but the autobiographies did not provide further indications towards verification of this statement.

Another aspect of American national identity is the identification of the American population. First of all, all autobiographers call people who were born within the United States ‘Americans,’ while they identified persons who had been born abroad and who lived in America by their original nationalities. All autobiographers mentioned people who were born abroad, and they characterize them by that nationality, like the Italian that gave his foreign roots away by his accent to Griscom, the “fellow-Scotchman” that Thorburn shook hands with in America, or the Dutch farmer Bart Cropsey whom Davis wrote an anecdote of.<sup>229</sup> Autobiographies published

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<sup>228</sup> Thorburn, *Life and Writings of Grant Thorburn*, 106.

<sup>229</sup> Griscom, *Memoir of John Griscom*, 76; Thorburn, *Life and Writings of Grant Thorburn*, 162; Davis, *The Magic Staff*, 51.

between 1870 and 1890 show similar expressions of foreign descent, like the Scotchmen who was met by Smith in the Scottish “kirk,” the Irishman that Hubert hired, the English physician that Winans knew, and the little Dutchman mentioned by Prime.<sup>230</sup> Nevertheless, none of the autobiographers denied that persons born abroad could become legitimate American citizens. Davis was the only one describing himself as an American and he bases this on his birth within the nation and that of his ancestors.<sup>231</sup> Thorburn and Smith were born in Scotland, but amply showed that they felt they belonged in the United States. They considered themselves legitimate inhabitants of America, although they did not refer to themselves as Americans. Thorburn even denounced the ease with which other immigrants were naturalized, but did not doubt that he was legitimately naturalized because of his intellectual development and goodness towards the nation. Therefore it should be noted that Euro-Americans distinguished two ways of being American, one by naturalization, which was based on political status, and the other by birth, which was based on both natural and political identity.

In addition, Thorburn expressed that he thought not all immigrants deserved naturalization because they were ignorant and their patriotic expressions not sincere.<sup>232</sup> He viewed the opposite, intellectual development and sincere patriotism, as conditions for naturalization. Other autobiographers did not share their views on this issue so that it will remain speculation to what extent they excluded both white and colored immigrants from legitimate Americanness through naturalization.

There are signs that autobiographers did not view their country in an international perspective yet, and that they did not specifically think of America being unique in the world. Jarves was the

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<sup>230</sup> Smith, *Memorials of Peter Smith*, 1; Hubert, *Liberty and a Living*, 77; Winans, *Reminiscences and Experiences in the Life of an Editor*, 20; Prime, *The Autobiography of an Octogenarian*, 171.

<sup>231</sup> Davis, *The Magic Staff*, 52.

<sup>232</sup> Thorburn, *Life and Writings of Grant Thorburn*, 205-206.

only one calling American culture “Anglo-Saxon civilization,” although without further explanations of this term.<sup>233</sup> The strict significance of Anglo-Saxon refers to a German group of people that invaded England in the sixth century. It is also used as a term for Old English, which might explain Jarves’ remark. He might have referred to English-speaking cultures, but by this he would exclude other West-European cultures from being similar to the American identity. It is plausible that he had a view similar to De Tocqueville’s that the American society was a unique mix between different European cultures. Griscom mentioned that when he travelled through Europe, only England felt very similar to home.<sup>234</sup> Davis described the American stage of development as characterized by “general industry, female elevation, peace, light, security, unity.”<sup>235</sup> He argued that Americans were the combination of various Europeans in America and formed “the highest specimens of mankind.” Nevertheless, he called the American civilization the stage of the Anglo-American, referring to the English element in Americans.<sup>236</sup> Davis was the only autobiographer specifically mentioning the Melting Pot theory, although he was not convincing. Additionally, it was argued in section two that almost all autobiographers referred to British literature. They were reminded of Britain regularly and therefore it is plausible that they did not specifically view the American nation and population as exceptional.

The emphasis on America’s civilized status was mentioned by half of all the autobiographers. Mitchell suggested that only Americans by birth are civilized, writing that “To work and do something for yourself, to achieve a name or an honor by your own ingenuity, and honorably, are the noble and advancing strides of a civilized people ;and such a people are among those who

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<sup>233</sup> Jarves, *Why and What Am I?* 185.

<sup>234</sup> Griscom, *Memoir of John Griscom*, 124.

<sup>235</sup> Davis, *The Magic Staff*, 374.

<sup>236</sup> *Idem*.

boast of an American birth.<sup>237</sup> He did not only emphasize that Euro-Americans considered those born in America as natural Americans, but he also explained why, listing the characteristics of these “civilized people.” The belief that America was a civilized country was mentioned by three autobiographers of both timeframes and clearly belonged to the dominant views on national identity.

Euro-American racial views have been discussed and were specifically explained by autobiographers Davis and Jarves. They expressed the Darwinist belief that inferior races could not compete with what they considered to be the superior race: the white Americans. In their opinion, African Americans, Native Americans, and ‘Malay-Mongolians’ survived only in controlled circumstances, but they would perish if they attempted to live independently among the white race. Indirectly, this showed who they believed could be true Americans and who could not. Indicating that inferior races of color were selfish, superstitious, and arrogant, among a range of other negative characteristics, they showed that they thought Americans were not described by these terms.<sup>238</sup> Finally, Davis described the American as white, English-speaking, freedom-loving, just, democratic. The perception that speaking English belonged to American identity was mentioned by one other autobiographer, but the trait ‘just’ has not been mentioned in any other autobiography. Davis and Jarves were most explicit on racial ideas of all other autobiographers. They were not contradicted by other autobiographers, but also not explicitly supported. However, in all autobiographies except those by Davis and Jarves, members of minorities were barely mentioned. Euro-Americans either had no acquaintances within minority groups or they specifically refrained from admitting it in their autobiographies. This indicates

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<sup>237</sup> Mitchell, *Five Thousand Year*, 36.

<sup>238</sup> Davis, *The Magic Staff*, 372.

that racial ideas excluding colored people from Americanness were indeed prevalent among a large majority of Euro-Americans.

Lastly, both Davis and Jarves ignored the possibility that races could mix and how this would influence their racial development. However, they did consider distinctions between different nationalities among a race. For example, Jarves argued that Germans and Irish came to America in “a state of degradation and ignorance almost like an inferior race.”<sup>239</sup> However, he was sure these immigrants would excel quickly beyond the possibilities of inferior races. As a summary, only two autobiographers were explicit about their racial ideas. They mentioned characteristics or indications hereof that they believed described Americans, but these views were not supported by other autobiographies. However, they were also not challenged, suggesting that other autobiographers might have had similar ideas but chose not to express them in their autobiographies.

Autobiographers barely used the term ‘democracy’ in their memoir as it was only mentioned twice. Theories of democracy in America share characteristics with egalitarianism, an element of the Creed that emphasized that class distinctions were irrelevant in American society. The ideals of democracy and egalitarianism both advocate that American citizens rather than the government should be able to determine issues in their nation. Autobiographers barely mentioned these views, suggesting that democracy and egalitarianism had not been prevalent throughout their lives. However, the absence of references to democracy in autobiographies supports the theory that Euro-Americans did not view other races as Americans.

Autobiographers challenged the theories claiming that poverty banned persons from being considered Americans and from naturalization. Seven autobiographers claimed that they had

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<sup>239</sup> Jarves, *Why and What Am I?* 189.



been born in poverty or that they had experienced it later in life. They all viewed themselves as Americans despite their poverty. Therefore we can assume that being poor did not necessarily ban individuals from European versions of America, which is contrary to what citizenship and immigration laws indicated. This could possibly be explained by the class of autobiographers as common Americans, while these laws had been crafted by politicians at the higher levels in society. It could be that these laws and the contradicting results in autobiographies indicate heterogeneousness within the Euro-American social group. As politicians used wealth as a condition for citizenship, and thus for Americanness, common individuals disagreed with it.

In autobiographies written both before and after the war, a selection of characteristics was put forth that the authors admired and valued. They ascribed these values to who they perceived good American citizens. Bowen showed that this was true for him regarding the values usefulness and industriousness. He argued that in “our land, energy and enterprise reside in every nook and corner.”<sup>240</sup> All autobiographers mentioned usefulness or industriousness, showing that they found these values important. Thorburn exemplified his disapproval of idleness by mentioning repeatedly that it was a “terror to his mind.”<sup>241</sup> Other values that were mentioned by most autobiographers were perseverance and honesty. They were usually mentioned as brief descriptions of acquaintances and family and were not further explained or explicitly connected with national identity. Nevertheless, we may assume that they perceived these good values that belonged to any true American. This is supported by scholars’ references to the significance of the ideals of the self-made man in America. This doctrine also included the values perseverance, hard work, and commitment. On the other hand, it is the question to what extent they would

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<sup>240</sup> Bowen, *A Blind Man’s Offering*, 1.

<sup>241</sup> Thorburn, *Life and Writings of Grant Thorburn*, 16.

think ignorance of these values would lead to decreasing Americanness in individuals. Unfortunately, this cannot be distilled from the autobiographies.

The ethos of working hard and improving one's own life reflected in autobiographies. For Bowen, who was blind, progress depended entirely on his own actions, his "earnest and inquiring spirit."<sup>242</sup> Buckingham, Jarves, Davis, Winans, and Mitchell also believed in achieving success through hard work. However, they did not emphasize it. Thorburn was the only one believing that Providence determined the paths he took in life. He described this repeatedly, ascribing all the good in his life to God and minimizing his own actions and responsibilities in his success. This was not due to his religion, as all autobiographers showed great faith in a Christian God. It was also not due to postwar realism or awareness that success is never guaranteed as Thorburn wrote his autobiography before the war. Therefore we can assume that most Euro-Americans in America presided over this aspect of modern individuality, believing that they could improve themselves through hard work and good will instead of being led by external factors.

Euro-American disapproval of dishonesty was often connected to the phenomenon of "Yankuses," Americans that mirrored what was not accepted in society.<sup>243</sup> It seemed that Yankees were viewed as the outsiders within the ideal view of Americanness. They were Americans who had bad habits and they functioned as measures for being a good citizen. Yankees were in almost all instances connected to the desire of obtaining as much money as he could. For example, Jarves described the Yankee as a "graceless peddler," out to earn money at the expense of others, indicating that he felt a good citizen would only earn his money honestly.<sup>244</sup> Davis was once tricked by a man in Michigan who sneaked more money from him

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<sup>242</sup> Bowen, *A Blind Man's Offering*, 854.

<sup>243</sup> Winans, *Reminiscences and Experiences in the Life of an Editor*, 43.

<sup>244</sup> Jarves *Why and What Am I?* 155.

than had been necessary and he called him a Yankee. He was of the opinion that they were characterized by “speculatism and money-getting operations,” which he considered “the root of all evil.”<sup>245</sup> On the other hand, some autobiographers referred to the central position money played in American society as a whole. Jarves argued how the American society thrived upon trying to gather wealth and that this was generally considered the highest degree of usefulness, because it implied “enterprise, shrewdness, economy, and punctuality.”<sup>246</sup> Hubert described how his rich neighbor was typified as a “typical American businessman” in his funeral announcement in the newspapers, because he had worked extremely hard and during most of the time he was awake.<sup>247</sup>

Furthermore, autobiographies did not clearly show that the American West was projected on American nationality as a whole. Some of the characterizations that were listed by Turner were barely reflected in memoirs. Physical strength was mentioned as a value only twice, and the centrality of money matched that “masterful grasp of material things” in the West.<sup>248</sup> Restlessness and being energetic refer to working hard and the disapproval of idleness. The belief in America as a civilized country has also been discussed. It seems that a selection of Turner’s western traits applied to the northwestern Euro-Americans, but autobiographies did not reveal to what extent this was due to the influences of literature that was read or to the influence of western experiences on the rest of the nation. As discussed in previous sections, the West was barely referred to in autobiographies and the Frontier was not mentioned at all. It is therefore unlikely that autobiographers were inspired by the West or its depictions in literature. Turner’s claims did not describe the Euro-American identity according to the autobiographers.

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<sup>245</sup> Davis, *The Magic Staff*, 266.

<sup>246</sup> Jarves *Why and What Am I?* 145.

<sup>247</sup> Hubert, *Liberty and a Living*, 172.

<sup>248</sup> Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*.

Furthermore, Christianity was not specifically called American, but it was central to almost all autobiographies. America is sometimes described as one the most religious countries as most Euro-Americans were affiliated with a Christian denomination.<sup>249</sup> All autobiographers shared religious views or feelings with the reader. Based on the findings so far, it is safe to assume that they considered Christianity among them as a condition for being American. Autobiographers did not express this, but perhaps this was ‘religious transparency,’ the idea that Christianity was so self-evidently part of life that believers did not realize they viewed the world through a religious lens.

Summarizing, ample views have been provided by autobiographers regarding the identity of their nation. Euro-Americans imagined their nation and its identity, but their subjective descriptions of America had far-reaching effects on society for minorities and the organization of the nation. This was also the group that recorded their views in literature, making their views the dominant version of their nation until the twentieth century.

Euro-Americans described their nation as a Republic, marked by liberty and freedom. However, liberty and freedom were mentioned twice as often in the prewar timeframe. This indicated that they felt liberty was less central to their nation’s identity than it had been before. Their ideas regarding the identity of America’s population were limited to white, preferably protestant individuals. Other specific characterizations were mentioned by two autobiographers, but none of the other memoirs verified that these were widely viewed uniquely American. They considered persons with these qualifications Americans both by nature and political status and persons born outside the nation who qualified, Americans only by political status. Furthermore America was not specifically viewed as unique by the autobiographers. It was considered a

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<sup>249</sup> Hixson, *The Myth of Cultural Diplomacy*, 59.

civilization as opposed to savagery and almost all autobiographers confirmed that usefulness, industriousness, perseverance, and honesty described American identity. The earning of money was viewed as central to the nation, as was Christianity.

## Conclusion

In order to determine to what extent Euro-Americans viewed themselves as Americans in the period 1850-1890, and thus to verify whether ‘America’ and ‘the American’ existed, the relations between national unity, national imagination, and national identity have been discussed in this thesis using autobiographies. The twelve Euro-American autobiographers studied came from varying backgrounds and each had a unique outlook on life, which reflects in their selection of topics and the way of writing about their lifetimes. Since there is not space in this thesis for a more extensive quantitative approach of nationality in autobiographies, it should be noted that the results of autobiographical research were sometimes not sufficiently convincing in order to draw definite conclusions that could make a claim about the whole of the Euro-American group. Nevertheless, the autobiographies have shown a great deal of references to the authors’ ideas of American nationality. Firstly, the United States political organization constantly changed during this period as territories transformed into states within the Union. The individual states possessed autonomy on daily issues at the expense of federal influence, accounting for legislative variations between states. Debates regarding the extent of power that federal government should be allowed over these state legislations led to political partisanship. It politically divided the American population along racial and regional lines, but also cut through the Euro-American social group. These dividing processes barely declined in intensity after the Civil War. Furthermore, economic processes were only limitedly coherent on a national basis throughout the whole timeframe discussed. Additionally, economic interests diverged between the northern and southern sections. Culturally, the population was an accumulation of numerous social groups, severely divided

based on ethnical and racial grounds. Thus, strictly speaking, American unity would not exist if it was not imagined.

Indeed, Autobiographers have shown that they imagined their nation as a unity. This indicates that Euro-Americans had ideas about their nation as a whole, even though this nation could not be considered a unity. Autobiographers show that although they were generally aware of the issues in society that were indicated in this thesis as ‘disuniting,’ they were not aware that their imagination of the nation as a whole did not match reality. They were informed of national politics with its dividing issues and of the cultural variety that existed within the nation’s borders, but they largely ignored these disuniting elements while imagining their nation. This imagination of nationality was not uniform among the country’s various social groups precisely due to this disunity. The markers of national imagination that were discussed in this thesis reflected less in the autobiographies than was expected based on academic literature.

Based on scholarly research, it was expected that the intensity of Euro-American national imagination increased after the Civil War as national symbols, traditions, and celebrations increased in number and intensity and private organizations attempted to stimulate the use of symbols and traditions, limitedly encouraged by federal government. These symbols and traditions enhanced feelings of belonging among those who used them. Furthermore, the nation became increasingly connected by rail, which enabled Americans in all regions access to literature. A portion of this literature was authentically American and told of American events, nature, and people. Lastly, the United States was increasingly depicted on maps and in atlases and available to all Americans. However, autobiographers that published their life-writings between 1870 and 1890 did not show more developed national imagination than before. Their national imagination remained largely similar to that as expressed by autobiographers of the

timeframe 1850-1860. Thus, all autobiographers had similar ideas when referring to their nation, its territorial contours, and the American population.

Moreover, national affiliation was another marker of national imagination and did not increase in intensity after the Civil War timeframe, although the contrary was expected based on the historical context of that time. National affiliation was expressed by almost all autobiographers of both timeframes as they showed awareness of the nation's wars fought since its founding, other historical events, and influential politicians in their government throughout the nation's history. It is remarkable that autobiographers of the postwar timeframe made fewer references to patriotism. When they did mention it, they did not express passion or pride regarding their nation whereas the autobiographers of the first timeframe did. Possible explanations hereof did not derive from the autobiographies. Therefore it will be suggested that patriotism in post-Civil War America needs more thorough study in order to explain this discrepancy.

Euro-Americans did not only imagine their nation as a whole, they also had ideas about its identity. This thesis elaborated on the theory that America is an idea, not an objective truth. Its territory is too vast, its political organization too scattered, its economy too incoherent, and its population too divided among itself to be able to describe America's identity without contradictions. The Euro-American ideas on American identity was prevalent in society and therefore may be argued to come closest to reality as large portions of other social groups inherited these views as their own.

Euro-Americans were concerned with their nation's identity to a great extent both before and after the Civil War. Although autobiographers were not explicit on their views on Americanness, they had ideas on what it meant to be an American. First and foremost, they considered



themselves as Americans and other social groups as outsiders based on race, religion, and, to a lesser degree, to class. The Euro-American version of the American was white, preferably but not exclusively Protestant, and intellectually developed. Contrary to what citizenship laws suggest, common Euro-Americans did not view wealth as a condition for Americanness. This could be due to the differences between views of politicians in the higher levels of society and the common American with lower ranks in society. These clashing views on nationality could be further researched in a comparison between different classes in American society. They also showed that they believed individuals could become 'Americans' both by birth within the nation or by being naturalized. However, based on their racist ideologies, African Americans and Native Americans were not viewed as Americans even if they were born within the nation. The difference between 'citizen' and 'American' was not sufficiently explained by autobiographers to draw a sensible conclusion on Euro-American citizenship based on autobiographies. Ideals that they adhered to were perseverance, usefulness, industriousness, and honesty, but Republicanism and democracy were not central to common Euro-American imaginations of Americanness. Liberty was the only value that is often described as typically American that autobiographers expressed as having been an important value in their lives. As none of the autobiographers showed that they believed in the centrality of ideals to their nation, we can assume that Euro-Americans were not specifically concerned with the extent to which their morals and values were typically American. Therefore committing to ideals that were generally appreciated in society was not a necessary condition for being American.

It was expected based on scholarly research that ideas of national identity among Euro-Americans became slightly more intense in the postwar timeframe compared to the prewar timeframe. However, aspects of national identity that had been mentioned often by prewar

autobiographers were ignored in those published after the war. It is remarkable that liberty and freedom were referred to less in the postwar timeframe, while it had been central to American views before. It could be explained by an increase in racism as slavery was abolished and African American became more prevalent in society. Perceived as a threat, Euro-Americans might have attempted to ban African Americans from the version of the United States they knew simply by decreasing their emphasis on ideals such as liberty. For now, this is speculation, but it would be an interesting topic of further research.

It is equally striking that none of the postwar autobiographers mentioned the Civil War in their life-writings. This is especially surprising since the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 were mentioned frequently by postwar autobiographers. It could be due to the war being a sensitive topic in the decades following its close, but this neglect of the Civil War could also have been ordered by their publishers to ensure southern readership. The experience of the Civil War among the common American population would be an interesting subject for further research and would contribute to a better understanding of how the Civil War affected postwar national imagination.

In conclusion, 'the American,' as perceived by Euro-Americans, existed before the war and their understanding of American identity barely seemed to change after the Civil War. Since autobiographers were not explicit about their own Americanness, it could be said that they were 'American in between the lines.' Therefore the Civil War did not create the Euro-American version of America. Nevertheless, the idea that the war preserved America's unity was Euro-American imagination of reality.

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