

The role of nationalism in education in American society has been heavily debated for centuries. When building an educational system, it is important to determine the desired accomplishment of the system itself. Many thoughts arise, such as preparing children for professional lives in adulthood, or creating innovative and creative minds for the future. Both ideas are often suggested in such a conversation, and frequently so in collection with the goal of creating a united and nationalized character between citizens through schooling. As it is an idea that dates back to the founding fathers of the United States, the concept has been debated and reformed countless times, however it has ultimately been put into place in American society. While the promotion of American Nationalism in the American educational system has certainly had its positive outcomes, there are many negative impacts of the tradition as well—to begin, the very words of many of the individuals who promoted the idea reveal substantial malignity in their intentions. Consequently, in analyzing the ways in which the concept has been enforced in the past, there are various noticeable ways in which it has caused harm to individuals of various cultures and backgrounds outside of the United States. Finally, the correlation can be further confirmed by observing the ways in which nationalism and xenophobic ideas correlate in other national educational systems outside of the US, and connecting it back to the educational system in the United States. The application of nationalism and national identity in the American education system has ultimately been harmful for American society by promoting hurtful cultural norms and sentiments while suppressing opposing ones.

Through observing how nationalism has become so valued in the American education system in the first place, one can understand how the sentiments which brought it to be that way were rooted in xenophobic and American Exceptionalist values. However, before addressing how these values were enforced in the American Education system along with nationalism, it is necessary to understand their contextual definitions in this discussion. Xenophobia can be defined as “a negative attitude towards, or fear of, individuals or groups of individuals who are in some sense different (real or imagined) from oneself, or the group(s) one belongs to.” (Hjerm

43). Similarly, American Exceptionalism, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica, refers to the “idea that the United States of America is a unique and even morally superior country for historical, ideological, or religious reasons” (Volle) Now that both of these terms have been defined, the words of sources of two important figures involved with enforcing nationalism in schools, namely Noah Webster and Horace Mann, can be examined for these sentiments. Firstly, Noah Webster, a forthright speaker for the growth of education, was a strong supporter of applying nationalism into education, encouraging that Americans ““have an empire to raise...and a national character to establish.”” (Hattem 181). As the republic grew more and more powerful, there became a growing need to unify the nation’s citizens. Although one can begin to see how promoting a national identity can lead to suppression of other identities, there is not necessarily any noticeable sentiments of xenophobia or American exceptionalism in this quote. However, via connecting it to the following statement from Horace Mann, the sentiments become quite apparent: “A new phrase, —the people, —is becoming incorporated into all languages and laws; and the correlative idea of human rights is evolving, and casting off old institutions and customs...” (Mann 213) Mann’s sentiments represent a similar perspective for why nationalism has become such a common practice in classrooms. Although it is clear that Mann intends well in establishing an American Identity, it is apparent that in doing so, he promotes the suppression of other cultures and identities when he advocates for “casting off old institutions and customs...” . As much as nationalism was promoted in schools as an intention to unite Americans with a national identity, it was just as rooted in the suppression of other cultures, opinions, and customs.

Consequently, as education in America, along with the nation itself, have developed, further movements for encouraging patriotism and nationalism in schools have led to negative impacts, such as enforcing a domestic role of women as well as suppressing the cultures of immigrants. Firstly, in order to further promote nationalism in children both inside and outside of school, it became a more common practice to educate women as well as men, because

“women were expected to provide the civic education at home that would produce virtuous, patriotic republican citizens.” (Hattam 182) Women were encouraged to go to school entirely due to nationalist ideas, for the sole reason of further educating and nationalizing their children. This focus had various negative impacts on women by enforcing gender roles through ideas like “republican motherhood”, which is described as the practice of women’s role in society as a domestic one, nursing and further instructing children. When further observing how the historical role of women has developed over the course of American history, such as with movements pushing back against gender roles such as the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 and the Women’s Rights Movement, it becomes quite apparent how educating women to further educate and nationalize their children has been harmful for women. For another example, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many individuals were immigrating to the United States, a significant portion of which being from Southern and Eastern areas of Europe. Many Americans were intimidated by the “growing presence of foreigners” and fearful that the new cultures and beliefs, “particularly those inclined toward socialism—would dilute the appreciation of the ideals of “Americanism” and patriotism among the native-born population.” (Hattam 182) One may easily make the argument that this initial anti-immigrant sentiment likely contributed in great part to (and, to an extent, was caused by) the early nationalism encouraged for citizens in schools during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. As nationalism would continue to grow, there would become more and more xenophobic sentiment in the nation, ultimately resulting in promoting more nationalism in schools, thus creating a building cycle. Similarly to the role of women in American society, the way which other cultures have been repressed in American society can be tied back to how they were previously restricted and discouraged in schools. For instance, schools built entirely for the assimilation of indigenous Americans reflect the assimilation of them in society as well. Finally, the overall anti-immigrant sentiments, parties, and policies in America over the course of its entire history such as the Know-Nothing Party, the

Chinese Exclusion Act, and even the Republican Party of the 21st century, can all be connected back to how children were taught to take pride in their country over others in the first place.

Finally, viewing the correlation between nationalism and xenophobia in other countries confirms the existence of the relationship in the United States. As noted previously, Xenophobia can be referred to as “the assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world” (Hjerm 43) One can begin to see the correlation between nationalism and xenophobia by simply viewing their definitions alone. As Nationalism can be used to describe the feeling of pride in one’s nation as positive and joyful, xenophobia does not take it very much further to be the thought of one’s nation’s culture and customs being superior to all other nations such that it is the norm. This connection is further confirmed when viewing the statistical relationship, as shown in a study which assessed the levels of xenophobia and nationalism in individuals in various levels of schooling. (See Appendix) Interestingly, this study showed that nationalism and xenophobia both went down over the course of one’s education in the majority. What is undoubtable is that they are related in the fact that they followed this same trend. Clearly, because of this, there is an undoubtable correlation between nationalist sentiment and xenophobia. Interestingly, the relationship between the two is particularly noticeable in countries where nationalist sentiments are strongest, such as Germany and Austria. Logically, considering that the United States is a country with a rather high rate of nationalist sentiment in comparison to other countries, it is simple to deduce based on this relationship that there is a similarly high rate of xenophobia in the United States as well, thus further confirming how nationalism in American education leads to the harming of individuals.

Despite the evidence of the harm caused by having American Nationalism promoted in schools, one may still propose the argument that there are benefits of nationalism and pride in one’s country which outweigh the negatives. However, while it is true that there have been some positive results of the practice, it is evident when weighing the two that the negative impacts of it have been much more severe than the positive ones. While one may argue that

having nationalized Americans creates a society which is united behind its government in times of war and in political policies, on another hand, the existence of a united group of citizens behind its nation exhibits a negative effect itself. Citizens in full support of their nation during times of war leads to a country going to war more frequently, leading to more violence and more spending on military supplies. Similarly, citizens in full support of their governmental representatives leads to a lack of checking from the citizens, as they will support their government no matter what. The positive impacts of Nationalizing Americans one may argue for are not necessarily fully positive themselves, while the negative impacts are fully negative. Assimilation of immigrants, instillation of gender roles, and xenophobic values have led to notable harm to many individuals. Therefore, the negative impacts of having nationalism in schools clearly outweigh the positive ones, so Nationalism in American education has caused more harm than good for American society.

Appendix

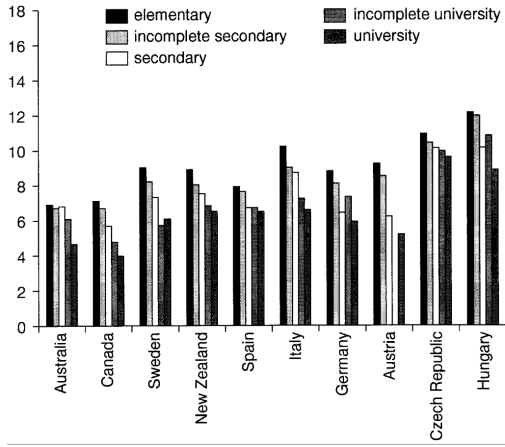


Figure 1. Average xenophobia index value dependent on education levels

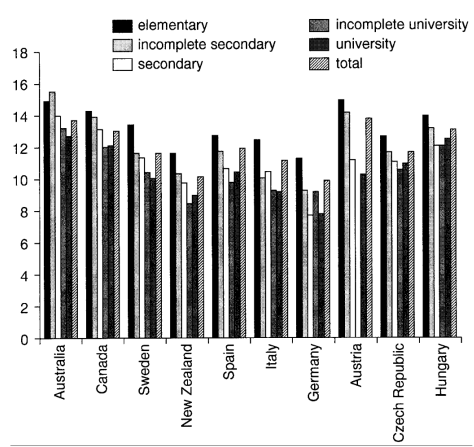


Figure 2. Average nationalist sentiment index values dependent on education levels