

The American Nation in the Late Work of Samuel Huntington: The Cultural Paradigm and the Denial of Race and Ethnicity in the Building of the Contemporary American Nation-State

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Introduction

This article is concerned with analyzing the concept of the American nation in the late work of American political scientist Samuel Phillips Huntington with emphasis on his latest book *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (1981). Huntington was a renowned professor of Political Science at Eaton College and director of the John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University (1978-1989). From 1996 to 2004, he served as president of the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies and became one of the institution's leading academic authorities. He published books and materials on a variety of topics including, among others, national security strategy, defence policymaking, American political ideology, governance of democracies and American national identity. Besides his career as an academic, he was also politically active. Between 1969 and 1970, he was a member of the Presidential Task Force on International Development and was, during the Jimmy Carter presidency (1977-1981), coordinator of Security Planning for the National Security Council of the White House. He rose to international fame in 1996 with the publication of his most prestigious book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, in which he argued that the political and economic conflicts of the Cold War would give way to a new international order structured around cultural and civilizational clashes.

In *Who Are We?*, there is a particular obsession with the origins of the American nation and the supposed consolidation of the Protestant Anglo-Saxon culture as the heart of national identity. He argues that the United States has since left behind the weight of race and ethnicity in the definition of the nation. The author relies on a cohesive and linear historical perspective in which the efficacy of the American melting pot, which he later terms the "American Transmutting

pot”[sic] (184), has never ceased to fulfill its homogenizing and overwhelming function: to swallow and assimilate the “foreign” and “immigrant” components of the nation. The only immigrants allowed to take part in the American melting pot would therefore only be those capable of disappearing and diluting themselves in the values of the Anglo-Saxon Protestant hegemonic culture.¹

This book brought much attention and controversy to the topic of Latino and Mexican immigration to the United States. Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans were portrayed as cultural groups which were incompatible with the core values of the “American way of life.” They were also represented as a dangerous community that posed a new threat to the United States because, according to Huntington, they retained their Mexican culture and, unlike other immigrant groups, did not want to assimilate into American society. This could fracture the unity of the American nation into two antagonistic languages and cultures. A “Continuing flood of Mexicans,” says Huntington (16), “will split the U.S.A. into two languages: Spanish and English, and between two cultures: Hispanic and Anglo-Protestant.”

Although there were many controversies surrounding Huntington’s latest book, its ideas were not restricted to the academic world. We argue that the American nation project developed in *Who Are We?* has a political function that goes beyond the academic sphere and manages to consolidate itself within the political and social life of the contemporary United States. One example of this was the election of Donald Trump in 2016. The victory of the former Republican president, whose campaign was largely centered around immigration control, confirms the power and prominence of Samuel Phillips Huntington’s ideas about what he conceives as the defining elements of the American society.

As we will argue throughout the text, the Trump administration is part of a new hegemonic political process that, in response to the 2008 global crisis of capitalism, sought to restore the credibility of the modern nation-state through the conservative notion that conceives of it as a culturally homogeneous and politically unified entity. To do that, it was necessary to exclude narratives that promoted ethnic diversity and multiculturalism through the argument that U.S. national identity was restricted and exclusive to one group only—the (white) Anglo-Saxons—exactly what Huntington claims in *Who Are We?* Nonetheless, as stated above, since the idea was that the Anglo-Saxon prevailed as a culture and not as a race, everybody was supposedly invited to be part of the American experiment. Even so, as we will see later in the text, a certain notion of race will continue to guide the ways

in which the so-called Anglo-Saxon culture will function in practice and in everyday life. The difference will be that race will no longer be explicitly present in the discursive field, but will operate from silence and its own denial; thus a new form of racism will emerge.

Likewise, it is necessary to understand how the handling of a certain discourse on the American nation, in this case that of Huntington's, produces concrete and peculiar political effects that negatively impact the lives of the ethnic minority communities that inhabit the United States. Because these groups did not come from the Anglo-Saxon trajectory, which means that their historical background deviated from the "American norm," they were targeted as "illegitimate Americans" and were framed as groups that could not benefit from the political prerogatives granted to American citizens by the Constitution. This new narrative about American national identity not only gave birth to a new era of xenophobia, travel bans, incarcerations and deportations, which took place in Trump's administration, but increased the withdrawal of political and constitutional rights to groups considered *aliens* and antagonists to American principles and interests. This also encouraged considerable segments of the American population to feel comfortable in spreading violence against ethnic minorities and brutally claiming what they believed to be the Anglo-Saxon American (race) culture; after all, with Trump in power, they had the political support of the U.S. nation-state and of the right-wing Republican president elected in 2016.

For this reason, although Huntington's late work is presented from a scientific and disinterested perspective, detached from history, politics, and worldly passions, there exists an ideological facet to his thinking that creates negative political reverberations for American ethnic minority groups. It is necessary to capture, therefore, the representational and discursive dimension of the nation, in the sense of denaturing it as something inevitable and imminent, coming from a divine and superior force, to reveal the networks of power that are hidden through language and that allow the construction of a supposed correspondence/transparency between discourse and reality itself (Hall; Foucault).

With the election of Donald Trump in 2016, American society has faced the rebirth of a peculiar combination of nativism, hatred, racism, fear, populism, and patriotism. Due to the large waves of immigration from Asia and Latin America that were reconfiguring American demographics, there was a sentiment that American national identity was under attack and that "legitimate (white) Americans" were becoming "strangers in their own land." This perception was predicated upon the notion that, before being a nation of immigrants

that celebrated multiculturalism and ethnic diversity, the United States was the result of the “founding fathers” political ideas and the English settler culture that grew out of the thirteen British colonies forged in the 17th and 18th centuries. This is precisely the focal point of Huntington’s thesis. For him, American national identity was already fixed and determined by the first English colonists, so it was to be found neither in the present nor in the future, but rather in the past and in what was believed to be the origins of the nation; hence, the power found within Trump’s campaign slogan “Make America Great Again.” Behind this idea, likewise, was the traditional premise which claims that there is no room for internal heterogeneity inside the nation-state because it is composed of only one people, one culture, and one history.

Due to this, the old models of national identity, when it was thought of as a homogeneous and fixed entity, appear once again to be inhabiting the present. This does not mean, however, a simple return to the past, but rather a novel articulation of times that produce fissures and historical otherness, challenging the Eurocentric, progressive, and the traditional linearity of Western history (Bhabha). In this sense, although traditional notions of the nation-state have been claimed throughout American history, there is a peculiarity that is related to the new ways of doing politics established by the Trump era marked by e.g. the role of social media, the appeal to a strong, politically incorrect and charismatic leadership, the force of conspiracy theories, fake news, and anti-establishment narratives. Since history does not produce repetition but difference (Foucault), the big challenge of our time in relation to the nature of the modern nation-state is to understand its novelty even when it claims the authority of the past over the openness of the present. The newness of the US modern nation-state is also connected to this perception that the current racial landscape of the United States is passing through a dramatic shift provoked by new waves of immigration that are no longer predominantly European. These demographic changes have created a new type of hate that is constituted by the fear of losing a *whiteness* that, contrary to Huntington’s assumptions, has never ceased to characterize the American nation.

Concerning this, the Argentinian anthropologist Rita Segato, in her classical book *La Nación y sus Otros* (The Nation and its Otherness), has claimed that there is a permanent tension and ambiguity in the construction of the modern nation-state around the world. At the same time that nations have recognized and exposed their internal heterogeneity, in order to assimilate and control it better, they have also feared their Others because they represent an obstacle to the

creation of the national homogeneity order claimed by the very concept of the nation-state.

Segato uses the term “alterofilia” to describe the nation-state when it identifies itself as possessing a diverse national community, which means that the nation is formed by a variety of ethnic and cultural groups. On the other hand, she argues that the fear of the nation-state for its others, and its subsequent denial, was a form of “alterofobia,” a model that is anchored in the idea of a national homogeneity that is composed of a single ethnic/cultural group. The novelty of Segato’s argument was that both characters can coexist, in a conflictual way, within the paradigm of the modern nation-state. This insuperable contradiction, according to the author, was the central axis that made possible the very constitution of the nation-state itself.

As we have been arguing, however, the coexistence of both dimensions of the nation has been undermined by a return to the classical canons of national identity. The particularity of this return has created a singular effect that provoked the model based on the “alterofobia” character to prevail over that of “alterofilia,” and thus the intermingling of both aspects of the nation has ceased to exist. As we have seen, it is in this new theoretical perspective that Huntington will define the very concept of the American nation. Although he claims that the Anglo-Saxon term refers to a culture rather than a people, a certain notion of the Anglo-Saxon as a race is present when claimed as a culture, even when the author asserts that race no longer has a place in the contemporary political life of the United States.

The historical references to ethnic and racial identity, which marked the history of the country, now fade in *Who Are We?* into a new narrative that “Uncle Sam’s nation” has been transformed into a non-ethnic society, in which the ethnic-racial component has ceased to operate collectively and has started to function on a subjective and individual level. “The Melting pot is working,” proclaims Huntington, “but it is working at the individual, not the societal, level” (299). Furthermore, talking about the increase in the number of mixed marriages, the author argues:

A slow process of racial blurring is occurring both biologically from intermarriage and symbolically and attitudinally, with individual multiracialism becoming a more widely accepted norm. (...) Americans approve of their country moving from a multiracial society of racial groups to a non-racial society of multiracial individuals. To a small but growing extent, intermarriage is blurring the lines between races. Much more importantly, race distinctions are losing significance in people’s thinking. (304-305)

Huntington is assertive about the need to forge an external enemy, a foreign threat to the nation, in order to form an image of the “we,” the “real Americans,” against those who then became “the others of the nation.” In *The Clash of Civilizations*, this enemy was constructed in terms of an external component to the American border lines, being identified with the Middle and the Far East, as well as the rest of the Islamic world. In his 1996 book *Who Are We?*, however, this enemy penetrates within the national borders and begins to be associated with the strong Hispanic presence in the country, especially that coming from the southern neighbor, the United Mexican States. This narrative was pushed by the Trump campaign when on 16 June 2015, during the announcement of his candidacy in the Trump Tower, the former president referred to Mexican immigrants as rapists who bring drugs and crime to the United States. This also justified the “need” for the famous wall Trump wanted to construct along the U.S.-Mexico border, since Mexican immigrants, from the same perspective as Huntington’s, represented a new danger to the country’s national security that needed to be stopped with the full force of the law.

This new enemy also became a great threat insofar as it is seen as what hinders and destabilizes the march of the American nation towards a new stage of “racial democracy.” According to Huntington, ethnic minorities who decide to mobilize and participate in the political life of the country, asserting their status as “American citizens,” are to blame for “bringing back” the problem of racism and inequalities marked by the racial factor. In this narrative, Latinos and Mexican-Americans are considered “guilty” of creating ethnic-racial enclaves that prevent the consummation of the unifying development of the nation and its entry into a post-racial stage (Huntington).

Nonetheless, this is a strategy that camouflages racism by dislocating its responsibility towards the oppressed and not the oppressors. As stated by Chicana feminist Alejandra Elenes, for Chicanos, and Mexican-Americans, as well as other non-white populations, race is used as a way to demand political rights and to defend themselves in a society marked by the racial component. People who are privileged by the racial *status quo*, on the contrary, can benefit from it without having to use or claim the category of race because racism is already part of the social norm so that they can live pretending race does not matter due to the fact that racism works now from a structure that became invisible, and stronger, within the discourses about the American nation (Elenes).

The Huntingtonian nation project, as it does with race and culture, also sits under a new regime of history and temporality that is structured around the idea of the peaceful progress (Bell) and the

consensual paradigm. These two theories uphold that the different ethnic/cultural groups that have migrated to the US have peacefully entered the American melting pot and that “Uncle Sam’s nation” has thus evolved in a cohesive and harmonious way (García y García). According to this model, the ethnic minorities consensually have opted to lose their own references of identity, culture, language, and nationality in order to merge and submit themselves to the homogenizing effect of the “American Transmutting pot,” [sic] this devourer and swallower of non-WASP cultures.

The supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon culture is presented, in this way, as a natural action of the history and as a pacified locus, which has abolished from the nation its unresolved conflicts and has nullified the notion of culture as a social framework that produces inequality and power. In addition to eliminating its internal alterities to assert itself in an empty and homogeneous notion of time (Anderson), Huntington’s sense of history petrifies its origins and transforms it into an immutable substance that resists historical changing, conditioning it to a sense of time which does nothing more than to reify the previous premises contained in the Anglo-Saxon myth of American national origin.

More than the Creed: the “Founding Settlers” and the Cultural Paradigm

Argentinian anthropologist Claudia Briones, citing historian Charles Hale and anthropologist Guillaume Boccara, talks about the formation of discursive hegemonies of wide global reach that promoted the creation of policies based on a new regime of ethno-governmentality and neoliberal multiculturalism. According to Briones, this has created a new transnational regulatory framework that has come to delimit the social boundaries of the national collective. Briones is concerned with understanding, among other things, how the nation-state interferes and translates these interstate discursive formations into internal policies of creating and managing ethnic diversification.

It is in this way that the United States became the model country that started to export the procedures to manage and deal with the racial internal differences of other countries around the world, since this political and cultural hegemony belongs to an imperialist and colonial order that goes beyond its internal borders and deeply touches the interior of the world economy (Said). Segato, then, – citing the work of American anthropologist Brackette Williams when she affirms that in the countries of Anglo-Saxon colonization “the nation-building process is a race-building process” (qtd. in Segato 164) – states that it will be

the category of race, in its American meaning, that will form the most relevant way of producing national heterogeneity, especially in the case of Brazil and in the United States itself.

In that sense, according to these authors, the United States, by producing itself as a nation, has also produced a *sui generis* way of manufacturing, exposing, and processing race and ethnicity.

As Colombian anthropologist Christian Gros pointed out, the state can “take advantage of managing ethnicity (instead) of working for its disappearance” (qtd. in Segato 164). In this way, both ethnicity and race were transformed into symbolic, tradable goods in the transnational markets created by global capitalism, and these markets began to aspire to consume these new fetishized and emblematic objects of the neoliberal multicultural capitalist modernity. To be more competitive in the global economy in the passage from the twentieth to twenty-first century, cultural theorist George Yúdice, in the same argumentative direction, contends that American corporations diversified their own production in an appeal to the cultural diversity existing in the country. Private companies and transnational markets thus appropriated the identity policies and ethnic demands, which were born within the civil rights movement, with the promise of being more inclusive and fostering the country's ethnic-cultural diversity (Yúdice).

As argued throughout this article, however, the Trump administration inaugurated an era that promised to place the interests of the American nation above the so-called globalist policies, which were condemned for prioritizing the private profits of large corporations at the expense of the American people. This ideal was appropriately translated into the motto which guided Trump's foreign policy doctrine: “America first!” In this sense, contrary to Christian Gros's statement, instead of promoting race and ethnicity to increase benefits at the international level, it was now necessary to eliminate them because their exposure revealed the existence of an internal heterogeneity that represented a risk to the new homogenizing desires of the nation. That was literally what Huntington advocated in *Who Are We?* when he argued that national elites and corporations have become denationalized by adhering to transnational identities which promoted multiculturalism, globalism, and neoliberalism. According to him, this has provoked a huge divorce between American elites and the American people, the true representative of the American spirit in both Trump's and Huntington's narratives because, unlike the elites, they have remained faithful to the monocultural project of their “Anglo-Saxon ancestors.”

Race and ethnicity were also conceived as obsolete categories in the definition of contemporary American national identity because, for

Huntington, they lost significance in people's minds. To the author, this was one of the great achievements of the American people because it reaffirmed the immanent character of the Anglo-Protestant Culture created by the English settlers. Although they were vital concepts in the formation of the American national identity during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, the American political scientist argues that they vanished from the national political scene after the struggles and the approval of the civil rights laws in 1964. In this regard, in the foreword of *Who Are We?*, Huntington states;

I believe that one of the greatest achievements, perhaps the greatest achievement, of America is the extent to which it has eliminated the racial and ethnic components that historically were central to its identity and has become a multiethnic, multiracial society in which individuals are to be judged on their merits. That happened, I believe, because of the commitment successive generations of Americans have had to the Anglo-Protestant Culture and the Creed of the founding settlers. If that commitment is sustained, America will still be America long after WASPish descendants of its founders have become a small and uninfluential minority. That is the America I know and love. It is also, as the evidence in these pages demonstrates, the America most Americans love and want.
(xvii)

As American political scientist Theiss-Morse explains, the intellectuals who analyse the discourse of national identity, throughout the country's history, developed different conceptual schemes to try to explain and define it. In that sense, the author highlights four theoretical paradigms: "American identity as historically ethnocultural," "American identity as a set of principles," "American identity as community," and "American identity as Patriotism." Nonetheless, the model that gained political and conceptual predominance in the twentieth century, adhered to by various American intellectuals, was the one that identified the American nation as a set of political values, that is, the "American identity as a set of principles" model. It was also this model that had the greatest impact on Huntington's work, and whose influence is especially prominent in *Who Are We?* (Theiss-Morse).

In 1944, the Carnegie Corporation of New York Foundation hired the Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal to begin an investigation on racial relations in the United States, especially in relation to Afro-descendant communities and their "poor social performance" and adherence to the American mainstream culture. In the same year, as a product of this research, Myrdal published his famous book *An American Dilemma: The Black Problem and Modern Democracy*. Despite Myrdal's optimism regarding the future of racial relations in the country, the economist pointed out that the "black problem" and

the lack of participation of the Afro-descendent population in American democracy were due to the fact that American society had created, throughout its history, vicious cycles of white racial oppression that denied Afro-Americans the right to take full participation in the political life of the country.

Therefore, within an extremely racially divided society, the author concluded that there was only one thread that united Americans, and that was what he called “the American Creed.” Unknowingly, Myrdal coined the term that went on to define, for most American intellectuals, the very meaning of the American nation.

This concept from the Swedish author became the central tenant of the conceptual model which defines the American nation as a set of political principles. As noted earlier, Huntington clung to that model, and in 1981, in his book *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony*, the author argued that there is a set of elements and political values that are common to all Americans and that it is precisely this base that distinguishes them from other nations around the world. Huntington writes:

In contrast to most European societies, a broad consensus exists and has existed in the United States on basic political values and beliefs. These values and beliefs, which constitutes what is often referred to as “the American Creed”, have historically served as a distinctive source of American national identity. Second is the substance of those ideals. In contrast to the values of most other societies, the values of this Creed are liberal, individualistic, democratic, egalitarian, and hence basically anti-government and antiauthority in character. Whereas other ideologies legitimate established authority and institutions, the American Creed serves to delegitimize any hierarchical, coercive, authoritarian structures, including American ones. (4)

As we have seen, for Huntington, culture plays a decisive role in the definition of the American nation, serving as a theoretical paradigm that turns the category of race into an obsolete one. In this sense, we argue that the Huntingtonian notion of culture functions as a metonymic substitution of race, causing it to disappear from the national political vocabulary of the nation. Just as occurs in metonymic discourses, where the signifier takes the place of the object and the part is replaced by the whole (Aroch), the idea of culture in Huntington replaces its racial aspect by naturalizing an implicit association between the Anglo-Saxon culture and the Anglo-Saxon people (race).

In this regard, under the idea of culture, at the same time that race is obliterated and expelled from national discourse, the white man reappears as the one who truly embodies the “essence” of the Anglo-Saxon identity and culture, that is, the national American identity. Consequently, because the American nation is now (re)presented as a

category that has no color, those who possess it, i.e. American ethnic minority groups, are seen as peoples who are on its borderlines, as they lack the element (whiteness) that constitutes the “authentic American.”

Therefore, the privileges of Anglo-Americans are thus naturalized as the inherent premises of the nation, reifying racism as a legitimate practice that, although hidden, justifies the unequal treatment given by the nation-state to racialized populations (non-whites) and those who supposedly lack color (whites). In this regard, Alejandra Elenes is right when she affirms that “the normativity of their (whites’) unmarked identity camouflaged their privilege. As a result, the privileges that came with whiteness ... were experienced as ‘normal’, not advantages” (247). Consequently, by ignoring the race factor in the building of the American national identity, the prevailing ethnic/racial segregation *status quo* is reaffirmed and racism is not recognized as a structuring reality of American society. White privilege, thus, cannot be understood because its white component is consistently portrayed as something that no longer exists within the nation (Elenes).

At this point, it is worth bringing to the debate the argument made by Haitian anthropologist Michel Rolph Trouillot in his classical book *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World* (2002). According to the author, there is a difference between the word, the concept, and the category of race; when erased as a word from the discursive field of culture, it is not eliminated as a concept, since it continues to operate outside academic thought and within American society. The concept operates within a broader field of action that is not reducible to the word and over which we have no control. As a result, culture begins to function in complicity with racism itself and with the mechanisms of power involved in its original means of conception. The denial of race and the perverse effects of its consequent racism, as well as other forms of inequality and exercises of power, causes that culture, as an academic concept, to lose its strength as an explanatory scheme of social reality (Trouillot).

As Puerto Rican sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva argues persuasively, in his book *Racism Without Racists*, the new American version of racial hatred, what he called “Color-Blind racism,” began to operate in the interstices of the discourse, in an implicit and unspoken way. Unlike the racism of the Jim Crow era that explicitly advocated for the superiority of the white race, and worked through an open system of racial oppression, the new American racism functions as a social structure that naturalizes itself in the collective unconscious, making that people, regardless its color, become incapable of recognizing the very existence of the racial factor in their society. Its ideological effectiveness thus increases as it lies precisely in its ability

to go unnoticed, in the impossibility of being named and recognized as part of a racist power structure.²

The blindness of this new kind of racism is based on a liberal and culturalist notion to explain and justify the racial inequalities in the United States. Categories such as meritocracy, individualism, work ethic, or equal opportunities are claimed as the primary characteristics to explain socioeconomic discrepancies among different ethnic and racial groups. Similarly, a certain notion of culture is claimed to explain social ascension and economic success. If ethnic minorities have lower educational levels and earn about 40% less than whites, or are three times more likely to live in poverty, that is because they are “lazy,” or because they do not like “hard work” and prefer to live in a “culture of poverty” with no ambitions for enrichment (Bonilla-Silva 2).

Similarly, Puerto Rican sociologist Ramón Grosfoguel, in his article “Latin@s and the Decolonization of the US empire in the 21st Century,” argues that American racism – with the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 which prohibited overt manifestations of racist practices – ceased to be linked to a biological prerogative and took the form of cultural racism. In a direct critique of Huntington, Grosfoguel argues that its derogatory construction of Mexicans reveals, in reality; the great American fear that the United States will cease to be a white-majority country. Furthermore, he points out that while *The Clash of Civilizations* served as a strategy to preserve the American empire in the international arena, *Who Are We?* functioned as an ideological tactic to maintain white supremacy within the new molds of cultural racism inside the United States.

By essentializing and naturalizing certain cultural characteristics to certain ethnic groups, however, cultural racism indirectly reproduces a form of biological racism. Therefore, the fact that racialized/colonized subjects always get the “dirty works,” experience higher rates of unemployment, and have lower wages than a white worker in the execution of the same work is because they have “bad habits and attitudes” and are “unassimilated” and “uneducated” (Grosfoguel 614).

In the same manner, Huntington claims that the explanation of the socioeconomic inequality in relation to the “first” and the “third world” should be centered on a cultural paradigm. In this sense, theories about colonialism, dependence, and racism, as well as some Marxist-Leninist theories, should be abandoned because they do not capture the “real reasons” that explicate the phenomenon of poverty in developing countries. These ideas were defended in a book called *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress* that, together with a former USAID official named Lawrence Harrison, Huntington

had published in 2000. Through a compilation of different articles, the book aimed to justify the reason for underdevelopment in Latin America, Africa, and Asia through the argument that a culture conducive to development, material progress, and capitalist modernity was not generated in these continents.

In the first article of the book, entitled “Why Culture Matters,” Harrison harshly criticized the anti-racist theories that denounce racial barriers in the United States as the social frameworks that impede the achievement of socioeconomic success in this country. For him, in the last fifty years, a racial revolution had taken place in the U.S., the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the legalization and subsequent increase in mixed marriages, and a supposed change of mentality in the perception of race by the white population served to undo the historical gap between blacks and whites:

In many respects, a racial revolution has occurred in the past fifty years, not only in terms of breaking down barriers to opportunity but also in sweeping changes in attitudes about race on the part of whites. The revolution has brought a mass movement of blacks into the middle class, the substantial closing of the black-white education gap, major inroads in politics, and increasingly frequent intermarriage. (xxi)

It is not irrelevant to note that four years after the publication of *Culture Matters*, Huntington then uses the same cultural and anti-racial presuppositions as Harrison’s in *Who Are We?*. He does not abandon the “American Creed” dear to Mrydal, which he embraced in *American Politics*, but the author affirms now that its culmination was only possible because there was, before the American Creed, a Protestant Anglo-Saxon culture. This then made it possible for Americans to adhere to the political principles and values that would characterize them later (Huntington). Specifically, the gist of the idea is that before the American political identity, there was the American cultural identity, and that it was the second which built the necessary conditions for the advent of the first. In other words, culture precedes and comes to define politics (Huntington).

Although dependent on the paradigms surrounding the American Creed and the American nation as understood as a set of political principles (Theiss-Morse), Huntington concludes his thinking with the assertion that these two conceptual schemes are not enough to understand and define American national identity. Instead, he brings to the American political scene an argument that attacks the theories, which became popular in the twentieth century, that consider the United States as a large conglomerate of immigrants who glorify multiculturalism and ethnic-racial diversity.

As previously argued, these theories do not work for Huntington because they do not understand that the U.S., for him, is the product of a settler society founded by the thirteen English colonies in the seventeenth century. The author also argues that the term “immigrant” only first appears in the American political vocabulary in the eighteenth century, when the “essence” of American nationality was already settled and shaped by the Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture, and when the country began receiving the first waves of immigration from outside its cultural sphere. Those who came before (the seventeenth century) in this way were not immigrants but settlers; they did not come to immigrate from one society to an existing one but to found a new society on a distant turf. Thus, before the “founding fathers,” there were the “founding settlers” (Huntington 40).

Consequently, based on the need to separate politically from England and become a new nation-state in the second half of the eighteenth century, the American Creed was forged. American history would be based in this way not only on its political foundations but, above all, on the culture formed by the “founding settlers.” This would explain, according to the author, its resistance to the destructive action of time and its character of immutability throughout American history. Huntington states:

America’s core culture has been and, at the moment, is still primarily the culture of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century settlers who founded American society. The central elements of that culture can be defined in a variety of ways but include the Christian religion, Protestant values and moralism, a work ethic, the English language, British traditions of law, justice, and the limits of government power, and a legacy of European art, literature, philosophy, and music. Out of this culture the settlers developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the American Creed with its principles of liberty, equality, individualism, representative government, and private property. Subsequent generations of immigrants were assimilated into the culture of the founding settlers and contributed to and modified it. *But they did not change it fundamentally.* This is because, at least until the late twentieth century, it was Anglo-Protestant culture and the political liberties and economic opportunities it produced that attracted them to America. (40-41, our italics)

Even so, writes Huntington, the waves of immigration that began to occur since the eighteenth century were part of an immigration movement that was in political and cultural harmony with the values of the American identity. The first immigrants arrived in the U.S. because they wanted to flee from the tyranny and political oppression of their countries of origin and join the American emancipatory political project, based on freedom, democracy, and equal rights and opportunities for all.

These immigration waves, in this way, and unlike the immigration movements after the implementation of the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965, did not constitute obstacles and challenges to the American national identity and were easily absorbed and assimilated by both Anglo-Saxon culture and the American Creed. The integration of the old immigration currents into American society could only be achieved because there was, according to Huntington, an area of confluence and political/cultural affinity between those who arrived and those who were already there. As Huntington argues, “[i]mmigrants came later because they wanted to become part of the society the settlers have created. Before immigrants could come to America, settlers have to found America” (2004, 40).

To the author, the United States of America can only be understood if this foundational dimension of the origins of the nation, that is, its character as a *settler society*, is captured. Hence, the legacy of the British culture remains the most powerful and determining force in comprehending contemporary American society. This makes the English colonists the effective possessors of the territory that would give rise to the United States of America in the Declaration of Independence of 1776.

Huntington bases his theory on the doctrine of the first effective settlement from American cultural geographer Wilbur Zelinsky to legitimize the colonists as those who own the nation. According to Zelinsky, in his book *The Cultural Geography of the United States* (1992), it does not matter if the first settlers arrived in small groups and the future waves of immigration surpassed them by tens of thousands. The society founded by the first settlers built the structural means that made their self-perpetuation viable throughout history. The participation of future immigrants in the development of that society was minimal, and they had no other option but to adapt to a cultural and social geography already defined and consolidated. The author himself indicates:

The specific characteristics of the first group able to effect a viable, self-perpetuating society are of crucial significance for the later social and cultural geography of the area, no matter how tiny the initial band of settlers may have been In terms of lasting impact, the activities of a few hundred, or even a few score, initial colonizers can mean much more for the cultural geography of a place than the contributions of tens of thousands of new immigrants a few generations later. (13-14)

This capacity for self-perpetuation and survival over time is also due to the fact that, according to Huntington, settler societies do not enjoy the same characteristics and do not have the same transformational dynamics as their original societies. While a process of change takes shape in the metropolitan societies, settler societies preserve the cultural characteristics the settlers brought with them. “A new nation is not new in all respects”,

says New Zealand historian Ronald Syme, “it is an observable phenomenon in other ages that colonists preserve habits of life or speech no longer current at home” (qtd. in Huntington 42).

Consequently, according to Huntington’s theory, with the end of the *settler society* and the beginning of the national society, the future thousands of immigrants who would move to the United States would be characterized by their totally passive and submissive attitude towards the political and cultural structure built by the “founding settlers” in the seventeenth century. They would have no choice but to adapt themselves to the patterns of an already consolidated and essentially defined society. They were not part of American history, much less contributed to its formation. They were “apathetic” and “inactive spectators” who only watched, from afar, the “natural march” of the American nation towards its future of “glory and splendor.”

Conclusions

The celebratory policies of the neoliberal multiculturalism, where different regulatory bodies – the State, the market, the mass media – were responsible for the proper administration of its “calming and threatening alterities” (Briones, 36), are giving way to new national formations which have another *modus operandi* to swallow, digest, and manage their inner diversity. The idea which attributed to the American nation a multicultural and “ethno-governmental” logic (Briones) has ceased to be a satisfactory theoretical paradigm in the explanation of the novel models of national identity which emerged in contemporary American society. With the election of Donald Trump in 2016, there was a political turnaround that put the various theories on American national identity in check; both the most canonical and traditional, as well as the most current and politically critical. The victory of the far-right Republican candidate inaugurated a new historical period that introduced unusual forms of hatred and fear towards those who have come to embody the status of “foreigners,” “immigrants,” or, more pejoratively, “illegal aliens.”

Nonetheless, the seeds of this new historical nativist and nationalistic movement were being cultivated since the post-civil rights era and it was a reaction to the multiculturalist policies that the Civil Rights movement helped to create. Its novelty lay in the fact that it managed to articulate old forms of race and coloniality with the new historical prerogatives of power and governance of the twenty-first century. As a result, in confluence with the new prerogatives on human rights that gained strength in the international arena, a new class of racism has been forged. In this new racial regime (Bonilla-Silva 16), it

is the very people who act against racism who are blamed for bringing back race and racism into social life. As Bonilla-Silva argues, most of those who identify as white today claim to be color blind, and they see only people and not races. Many even appropriate, in an uncritical and decontextualized way, the famous speech given by Martin Luther King Jr. "I have a dream," when he said that he aspired to live in a society where "people are judged by the content of their character, not by the color of their skin" (qtd. in Bonilla-Silva 1).

These are the arguments that Huntington uses to represent the ethnic minorities as groups that lack historical and cultural legitimacy to be part of "Uncle Sam's nation." The case of the discursive construction of Mexican-Americans in his work is a clear example of how the "Color-Blind Racism" model is currently applied to ethnic minorities in the United States. Just as in the case of African-Americans, Mexican-Americans are guilty of bringing to the country the problem of race, affirmative action policies, the formation of unassimilable ethnic-racial enclaves, the culture of poverty, and the lack of a Protestant work ethic. In doing so, they break and fracture the supposed American cultural homogeneity and its alleged absence of color.

Unlike what Segato and Briones proposed when they affirm that the American nation is constituted by what Briones called "the national formations of alterity" (22), the national discourse in the contemporary United States rebuilt a sense of national belonging that regained its homogenizing character, that is, its "alterophobic" dimension. Huntington's American national theory, which influenced Trump's government and the new age of making politics in the US, does not want to affirm its status as a diverse and multi-ethnic nation but wants to eliminate it. Instead of recognizing and exposing the ethnic minorities to better control and exploit them, in a game in which both the interests of the State and of the transnational markets were combined, these "strangers" of the nation should definitely be expelled from the American political and national scenario.

Therefore, Huntington excludes race from the political vocabulary of the nation and puts culture in its place, causing the latter to conceal and camouflage the changes and new dynamics assumed by the former in the twenty-first century. In this way, the author proposes that the immigrant who wants to come to the United States has now only a single possibility: to join the Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture and the American Creed, and, in doing so, get rid of all ties of race, culture, and ethnicity that characterized him/her previously.

Notes

1. The “American Transmuting pot” is a concept that Huntington borrows from American historian George Rippey Stewart and, according to the political scientist, best expresses the way in which the classic metaphor of the American melting pot should work in American society. As Stewart points out, “as the foreign elements, a little at time, were added to the pot, they were not merely melted but were largely transmuted, and so did not affect the original material as strikingly as might be expected” (qtd. in Huntington 184).

2. This new racial regime, however, does not eliminate the dimension of brute violence as an artifice used in the maintenance of the racial status quo. In this sense, Bonilla-Silva speaks that racial orders are never constituted by a pure and totalizing novelty, since the new racial regimes are always built from the foundations of the racist vestiges of past times. Thus, although the new US racial ideology is not marked by a pattern of extreme and overt violence, the latter is always available for action when hegemonic forms of racial control fail to maintain the normality of racist practices. This was the case when, in 2020, African Americans Ahmaud Marquez Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, to name just a few, were brutally killed by both civilians and the police.

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