

From *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*, Spring 2017 No. 44  
<https://democracyjournal.org/magazine/44/a-sense-of-belonging/>

A Sense of Belonging  
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The wild success of the upbeat musical *Hamilton* and the wide interest in a downbeat book by Sebastian Junger, entitled *Tribe*, are two facets of a current America longing for a more perfect union. Our sense of loss and disunity cuts across geography, age, and party. *Hamilton* offers a promising path forward, while *Tribe* explains the nature of our alienation and discontent.

In one of its chapters, *Tribe* interprets the psychology of veterans who falsely claim post-traumatic stress disorder. Men and women who served in the military with patriotism and loyalty, and who would never cheat the fellow members of their military units, are willing to cheat their fellow citizens in civilian life by lying about their medical conditions. Veterans are feeling alienated and isolated in contemporary America. They prefer their anxiety-filled wartime experiences among close-connected comrades to their current meaning-deprived existences.

This paradox is explained, Junger argues, by the loss in modern America of a basic psychological fulfillment—a feeling of group solidarity and a sense of belonging. He cites scientific experts who propose an evolutionary explanation for such a need—a tribal instinct that has ensured human survival over eons by endowing us with emotions that value the survival of the group over that of the individual, including even one’s individual self. Our Darwinian past has left a psychological mark on us whereby the lack of a strong group attachment leaves us with a sense of emptiness and disorientation.

The alienating character of life in the modern era is not a new theme. It has been a subject of sociology since the nineteenth century, when Émile Durkheim identified it with the term “anomie” (roughly, “rootlessness”). Durkheim focused on a correlation between anomie and suicide. The current and ever-rising suicide rate among returning war veterans has gained our horrified attention, and lends support to Junger’s thesis. That same sense of rootlessness and disorientation is also on the rise in America among members of the white lower middle class, who are also committing suicide in larger percentages. As Durkheim explained, an increased suicide rate correlates with economic decline and the absence of a supportive community. Many whites in the United States no longer consider themselves to be a key part of a unified nation. They feel overtaken not just by economic insecurity but also by immigrant hordes who, as they see it, steal their jobs and dismantle their sense of a national community. The same sense of alienation is no doubt felt by many non-whites, but who, never having been near the top, feel less resentment.

In contrast to this gloomy backdrop, *Hamilton* tells the upbeat story of a poor immigrant boy who makes good in a big way and helps to found a nation. It is the archetypal American story captured in the phrase “the American Dream.” Blacks and Latinos—cast members whose identities have been conceived as non-mainstream subcultures—play the roles of Anglo Founding Fathers and Mothers. The multiethnic cast of *Hamilton* exhibits the potential of the United States to form a union from diverse cultures and races, underlining the hope that America, despite its ethnic diversity, can become one unified society—a special, new kind of big-tented tribe. The idiom of *Hamilton* is modern rap and hip-hop in Standard American English with a salty vocabulary. The play has been praised on the left and the right. It is hard to

buy a ticket for Hamilton at a reasonable price. Arrangements are being made for showings in various American cities, with separate productions and casts being prepared in the Midwest and Far West.

The image of America as a melting pot is now almost universally rejected as an outdated conception. It's said that a better metaphor is that of a mosaic. That's indeed a more fitting image than melting pot for our variegated nation. But mosaics are highly unified works of art, put together with glue and grout. In the United States, those binding elements are our national language and its public culture, including laws, loyalties, and shared sentiments, that make the language intelligible. If the sense of national unity now seems to be threatened, it is not just because of globalization, economic change, and new technologies—the usual explanations. Another causal factor needs to be adduced.

Over the past six decades, changes in the early grades of schooling have contributed to the decline of communal sentiment. Under the banner of "Teach the child not the subject!" and with a stress on skills rather than content, the decline in shared, school-imparted knowledge has caused reading comprehension scores of high school students to decline. Between the 1960s and 1980s, scores dropped half a standard deviation and have never come back. In addition, school neglect of factual knowledge, including American history and its civic principles, joined with a general de-emphasis of "rote learning" and "mere fact," induced a decline in widely shared factual knowledge among Americans. This not only weakened their ability to read and communicate; it has left them with weaker patriotic sentiments, and with a diminished feeling that they are in the same boat with Americans of other races, ethnicities, and political outlooks.

My calling attention to these educational outcomes is something one might expect from a political conservative who is complaining about political correctness and a decline of patriotism. But my intended primary target audience is my fellow liberals. Ever since the war protests of the Vietnam era, in which I joined, the left has been leery of overt patriotism and boosterism. But as Richard Rorty presciently observed in a New York Times op-ed in 1997, a high-minded, unpatriotic left will not manage to get much done, and will be despised by other Americans for its lack of simple civic sentiment. Rorty distinguished between the old union-led left that he and I shared, and that achieved practical improvements, with the new, academic left that tries to "stay as angry as possible."

I seek to address those whose main political and social objectives include greater equality of education and income, and higher status for previously neglected or despised groups. I'm not chiefly addressing readers who equate American patriotism with flag waving and competitive forms of tribalism, but rather with those who subscribe to the best of our Enlightenment ideals that have made us in fact the greatest country in the world—as judged by, for instance, our effective assimilation of widely diverse persons, which Hamilton exemplifies.

My thesis is that our young people's low opinion of their own country has been intensified by the current disrepute of nationalism in any form in our schools and universities. This anti-nationalism has been a big mistake, a self-inflicted wound on our individual and collective state of mind, as documented in Tribe. The political and psychological stakes are high. In an ambitious series on the disintegrating Middle East published by The New York Times, a major reason offered for the disintegration of the countries in that region is the "lack of an intrinsic sense of national identity." Such lack of national identity in a modern nation leaves the field open to narrow ethnic enmities and political polarizations.

Anti-nationalism, far from being an advanced view that prefigures a new global era, leads to the kinds of tribalism that are the worst blights on human history—in sharp contrast to the post-Enlightenment kind of nationalism that the American experiment attempted to achieve. Group adherence to the right kind of nationalism is not only a great tonic for the human psyche; it is also an inherent necessity of the modern era. Nationhood is not going to be dissolved into some fanciful brave new globalized world. That point is well worth expanding upon, since, without accepting the inherent necessity of nationalism in the modern world, a new American sense of community cannot, in the present atmosphere, be achieved.

### **The Right Kind of Nationalism Is a Very Good Thing**

That a big republic like ours requires the common school to keep it unified was a theme of the American founders including George Washington and Alexander Hamilton, the male heroes of Hamilton. It was also a big theme of the common-school movement of the nineteenth century. Our earlier common school, for all of its shortcomings, was a necessary agent in making the United States a success. That was a subject of my 2010 book, *The Making of Americans*. As scholars of modernity have shown, the common school continues to be a necessary feature of successful nations—helping to combine the economic and political necessities of industrial-age society with the psychological necessities of the tribal instinct.

The schoolmasters of early America and their intellectual leaders, like Noah Webster, understood this. Webster composed, in addition to his *Dictionary*, hugely popular schoolbooks. The early schoolmasters and mistresses saw themselves as nation-builders devoted to instilling common values and loyalties in the citizens of the new nation, and a sense of solidarity with fellow Americans. True, this aim did not fully apply to blacks and American Indians in every part of the country. But that too would come to change. It was a system that in the early twentieth century produced some of the highest national reading scores in the world.

Why so? And why the subsequent decline? The reading scores of high school students are well correlated with their general academic achievement and competence, including an ability to communicate well with others, and gain knowledge from the writing and speech of others. Reading comprehension scores are good indicators of a citizen's general knowledge and ability to learn—the most accurate single indicator of a citizen's competence. Since speech and writing require huge amounts of silently shared knowledge that is implicitly present but unspoken and unwritten, the students who will read best are those who have most fully mastered the unspoken knowledge that is taken for granted by other members of the speech community. The breadth of knowledge that can be taken for granted in a nation determines its literacy level. But under the new, child-centered education, widely introduced in the United States after 1945, our dominance in reading scores evaporated.

Our schools now exhibit a diminished sense, once widely held, that a central goal of American schooling is to foster national cohesion—"out of many, one." The loss of that sense of mission in the early grades has occurred because of two intellectual changes that have gained ascendancy during the past 80 or so years. The first and most important change was a shift, starting in the 1920s and '30s, from an emphasis on initiating children into the mores of the national tribe to an emphasis on developing the nature of the individual child.

That change is reflected in the changing architecture of our elementary schools. Early twentieth-century school buildings in America are imposing civic structures. They have high flights of steps surmounted by grand columns that fairly shout: "The school is important to the local and national community." Each morning, in the old massive schools, you can still see the small figures of the children climbing the high steps, the whole scene symbolizing a focus on the important place of schooling in the community. And not just in the local community: The design always includes a tall-standing American flag, to which the children pledge allegiance every morning.

After World War II, under the influence of child-centered education, American school architecture changed. The design of the elementary school came to be centered on the child. There were no longer high steps to climb, but direct, child-level paths into bright, low-slung, welcoming buildings, often with gaily colored architectural elements. The new architecture signaled that although the school was devoted to the larger community, and although the Pledge of Allegiance was still recited, the main emphasis was on the children's world, on encouraging their imaginations and developing their individual interests and personalities.

This hyperindividualism of "teach the child, not the subject" came into American schooling only gradually in the early twentieth century, taking over completely only in the 1950s and '60s. It was a fundamental shift. Current political correctness in education is an updated variation on the theme of individualism. The social version of "teach the child, not the subject" became "respect the home ethnicity of the child; don't impose an Anglo culture that is alien to his or her background and personality." And the psychological version of individualism became: "Adjust the subject matters to the child's interests and abilities." Both multiculturalism and multiple-intelligence theory caught on like wildfire in recent decades. More recently, one's individuality has become conceived through "intersectionality." A child is to be understood as an intersection of multiple essential groups and tribes—"Hispanic and gay," for example—not as an "American," which is assumed to be a nonessential trait.

After individualism, the second most important intellectual change in our early schools after World War II, and especially during and after the Vietnam war, was an explicit anti-nationalism. This was not anti-patriotism. It was conceived as a higher patriotism, as an effort to make our nation fairer and better. Nationalism came into disrepute for various reasons. It was associated with militarism and exclusionary racism—as exemplified in Nazi Germany, and in wars of ethnic cleansing. It was decried as a device to keep the moneyed class on top. It became associated with the flag-draped military adventures of Western imperialism. This anti-nationalist attitude reached a climax in our universities and teacher-training institutions during the deadly Vietnam adventure of the 1960s and '70s.

As a result, the sentiments of "Our country right or wrong," and "Our country is the greatest in the world" (not very admirable sorts of jingoistic nationalism) got replaced by a recitation of the ways that our country failed to treat everyone as an equal, and how it mistreated whole classes of its people: American Indians, blacks, women, Japanese. "Our country is pretty bad."

Let me be clear: This self-criticism was overdue, and it remains a necessary prelude to the country's self-improvement, which will depend on all our communities looking like the multiracial, multiethnic yet altogether Americanized young people I see every week on the lawn of Jefferson's University. One characteristic these diverse young people share is that their English reading comprehension scores are pretty good. Otherwise they would not be admitted and could not pass their courses. Such mastery of

formal and informal American English is a prerequisite to equal opportunity, and all other equalities in the nation.

The right kind of modern nationalism is communal, intent on including everyone. The wrong, exclusivist kind, exemplified by the racism of the Nazis, gave all nationalism a bad name and helped turn the post-Vietnam left away from nationalism of any sort. The sentiment was that most countries are pretty bad, especially big ones that prey on little ones.

This critical attitude to nationhood was intensified by a lack of basic knowledge among many of us antiwar protestors. Their schooling, according to surveys, had left them with a blank ignorance of the facts of American history and governance. “Teach the child, not the subject” had discouraged traditional recitations and the shared knowledge of basic facts of American history and its institutions of self-government. “Rote-learned” facts weren’t really important, said progressive education, compared to critical thinking and the natural development of the individual child. The new trend was well-described in 1987 as “tot sociology” by the educational historian, Diane Ravitch:

In 1982 I began to research the condition of history instruction in the public schools. The more closely I examined the social studies curriculum, the more my attention was drawn to the curious nature of the early grades, which is virtually content-free. The social studies curriculum for the K-3 grades is organized around the study of the relationships within the home, school, neighborhood, and local community. This curriculum of “me, my family, my school, my community” now dominates the early grades in American public education. It contains no mythology, legends, biographies, hero tales, or great events in the life of this nation or any other.

Unsurprisingly, the National Assessment of Educational Progress reports that Americans’ factual knowledge about this nation’s history, its ideals, and the details of its form of government has declined sharply since the 1970s. We who are to govern the nation know little about its history and workings. That is not the fault of present-day citizens, but of their education under the pedagogical ideas that continue to animate our early classrooms.

Americans’ sense of community has thus experienced a double whammy in the early grades: declining national pride is coupled with declining knowledge of national history and ideals. Ignorance of the historical ideals that have animated our imperfect realization of them has thus been accompanied by a strong suspicion of any form of nationalism, including our own. According to the Pew Foundation, our citizens now inhabit a vaguely delineated geographical and political homeland that is not as good to all its citizens as it should be. They believe their country exists within a new global order in which every person has a right to his or her home culture and personal identity. Moreover, children’s good opinion of their own country has been declining. A Pew survey showed that today just 15 percent of young people say that the United States is the greatest country in the world—down from 27 percent in 2011.

This summer, Judith Kogan of NPR produced a report for the Fourth of July featuring interviews with Massachusetts schoolchildren who had not the slightest acquaintance with, indeed had never heard of, “My Country ‘Tis of Thee,” or “America the Beautiful” or “God Bless America.” Kogan interviewed teachers who explained that songs like “The Star-Spangled Banner” were too militaristic, and that “God Bless America” mentioned God. Other patriotic songs, they said, were too narrowly nationalistic, and might offend children from other nations and cultures.

## **The Necessity of Nationalism**

Nationalism is essential to effective human existence in the modern world. Those who have come to grips with Ernest Gellner's pathbreaking work *Nations and Nationalism* will agree with that assertion. Even his critics concede the truth of this major point. Gellner, a professor of philosophy and, later, professor of anthropology in various prestigious universities, was unconstrained by language barriers or conventional thought. He wrote about Islam as easily as about France. His book on nationalism came out in 1983, when most people regarded it as an unnecessary evil that breeds colonialism and war.

Over several decades and many subsequent books, Gellner explained why the rise of the post-agrarian age that we now inhabit requires a new sort of economic arrangement in which the chief economic unit is a nation state that offers universal education on the use of the standard written and spoken national language. A post-agrarian economy, as Adam Smith had explained, is specialized and spread out. Nails are made in one place, timbers are cut and planed in another. The nail-makers and timber-planers have to communicate over time and space. Before universal literacy and language standardization, this widely spread communication had not been possible. This explains why independent efforts at language standardization and universal literacy arose autonomously in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The United States was formed just after this language-normalizing effort had been completed. We were the first major nation to be created with an already well-standardized print language and the principle of universal schooling.

Critics of Gellner have complained that his functional account of the necessity of shared language and shared laws fails to consider the emotional power of nationalism in modern times—the need for a sense of belonging. But that correction simply amplifies and strengthens Gellner's main argument. The modern nation serves a necessary function not just for the modern economy and its political system, as Gellner has argued, but it also fulfills an emotional need for community in the large, modern, anonymous, specialized economy.

To Gellner's analysis may be added a linguistic footnote: Once a standard national language and its associated national culture have become established in schools, by hundreds of thousands of writers and speakers, and in millions of books, pamphlets, and blogs, it becomes extremely difficult to change radically or expunge. Such language stability is a novelty in human history. Before universal literacy and the modern nation, languages changed as a matter of course and adjusted themselves to the tongue of the current conquerors. After the eighteenth century, that changed. National academies and dictionary-makers fixed the standardized print languages. Individual vocabulary items have since disappeared and new ones have come into being, but, once established, no widespread national print language has been extinguished, or even changed significantly.

This explains why the current anti-nationalistic orientation of our schools is emphatically not justified by ideas like "the new global economy" and "globalism." Individuals across the world are not happily communicating with one another in a unified global culture and a shared global language. The nation-state with its national standard language remains the dominant social, economic, and emotional entity of the present day, and is likely to remain so. The global economy is multinational, in which global corporations have to follow national laws, and communicate in national languages.

Shared language is a vehicle of emotional fulfillment across the world. People are attached to their nations by a sense of belonging to a language community and its accompanying set of values and traditions. The writer who has best captured this dimension of nationalism is Benedict Anderson, in his 1983 book, *Imagined Communities*. A shared linguistic culture enables people to imagine a community that extends far beyond one's locality. For all of these reasons—the economic imperative invoked by Gellner, the communitarian imperative described by Anderson and Junger, and the stable inertia of print languages—the nation-state remains the key unit of the contemporary world. Acculturation into a national culture (which may of course include plenty of international knowledge) is still the chief task and duty of national systems of schooling. Our schools believe that they are valiantly teaching the national language, but as I shall show in the next section, the current “word-study” and “strategy-study” approaches of schools needs to be abandoned in favor of “knowledge-study.”

National cultures, like national languages, have been deliberately invented. The American literate culture that is widely shared by successful citizens was consciously formed in the beginning by people like Noah Webster and Parson Weems, and by those schoolmasters who followed them in the early nineteenth century. The school innovators of the present day are in a somewhat different position from those early culture builders. They have to contend with the inertial mass of existing usages and assumptions. The early school leaders and teachers were national culture creators. Once that culture became established over time and space, it could not be changed rapidly, since it had already become the political and economic common language, known and used by millions of adults.

Millions of Americans now inhabit a well-established national culture and public sphere. Those who are proficient in that language and culture are on average the best communicators and the wealthiest citizens. A national culture is a club that rewards its most proficient members. Those who have not mastered it suffer loss of opportunity. The aims of social justice and equality of opportunity therefore require subtlety in attempting significant cultural change in our present-day schools. To be effective as citizens and workers, every schoolchild needs to gain access to the public sphere and its standardized language, as well as to share a sense of belonging to a country that is worthy of devotion. This public sphere can be changed and improved—but only gradually, and with tact. It is important to abolish evil elements of our past culture, but it's also important to offer every child access to the currently shared public culture.

The proof that our schools are not currently doing so is the low average literacy level of our school graduates, and the large reading-proficiency gaps that persist between social groups in the United States. These equity gaps show that current American schools have not fully grasped their acculturative responsibilities. The usual reason given—poverty—cannot be a fully adequate explanation, because some national school systems, for instance Japan's, educate children of poverty very well. I believe that our current schools have not understood how great a quantity of specific knowledge is needed to gain mastery of the written and spoken national language. This insight has been fully understood only since the 1960s. It is an insight of paramount importance for understanding how to narrow our literacy gaps, as well as for overcoming our extreme polarizations and gaps in communal sentiment.

### **Nations Are Sustained by Shared Language and Culture**

To read the text of *Hamilton* is to be bowled over by the genius of Lin-Manuel Miranda in forming the structure of the play and its language. Its mode is rap and hip-hop, but its language is Standard American English, which makes *Hamilton* an incarnation of the multicultural American society foreseen by Herman

Melville in 1849: “On this Western Hemisphere all tribes and people are forming into one federated whole; and there is a future which shall see the estranged children of Adam restored as to the old hearthstone in Eden. . . . Then shall the curse of Babel be revoked, a new Pentecost come, and the language they shall speak shall be the language of Britain.” Melville imagined the “federated” unity of the future American mosaic as a unity that would be consolidated by language.

Print literacy is acknowledged by everyone as a primary aim of schooling. But not everyone has drawn out the implications of that accepted truth. We now know more about the implications that follow from the fact that a common standardized language is an economic and social political necessity based on silently shared knowledge. Although the economic imperative had produced language standardization and ever-broader schooling in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was not until the 1960s that psycholinguistics was to make fully clear that the successful use of a common language requires a huge store of unspoken shared beliefs, facts, and attitudes. Note the unspoken assumptions a reader needs to fully understand that last sentence. Anyone will understand its meaning better who knows that current American schools have been treating reading comprehension as a technical skill involving general comprehension strategies—a failed policy inconsistent with the scientific understanding of language comprehension as a domain-specific form of expertise, dependent on domain-specific knowledge.

Two decades after this basic research into the need for unspoken knowledge, in the 1980s, Walter Kintsch and Teun A. van Dijk published a pathbreaking book that generalized the earlier insight and caused it to be widely accepted in cognitive science. The authors summarized the principle as follows:

One of the major contributions of psychology is the recognition that much of the information needed to understand a text is not provided by the information expressed in the text itself but must be drawn from the language user’s knowledge of the person, objects, states of affairs, or events the discourse is about.

A text is “like a picnic to which the author brings the words and the reader the meanings,” said the literary critic Northrop Frye. And those meanings are not compelled by the words, which are highly ambiguous items. The words can only be disambiguated and made coherent by the reader’s relevant knowledge—unspoken knowledge that is shared between the author and reader, speaker, and listener. The reason that Google Translate so often does such a poor job, despite the billions spent on machine translation over the years, is its inability to guess what relevant knowledge and context is being taken for granted. Dictionaries and grammar are not enough. If they were, Google Translate would do a far better job.

The recent scientific consensus about the role of unspoken shared knowledge in the language transaction has implications for educational policy that American educators have not yet been willing to draw. If shared background knowledge is essential for effective reading, writing, speaking, and listening in a nation, then the schools of a nation need to be common schools that teach this shared knowledge of the public sphere. They must do so if all citizens are to be literate. It doesn’t mean that all schools must be exactly the same, but it does imply that along the way, and in their own ways, the schools must impart a core of knowledge that is the same for all. Otherwise huge literacy gaps will remain among Americans.

That necessary logic must not be clouded by the current debates over the so-called Common Core initiative in the United States. Those debates are largely about everything except shared knowledge. The language standards of the Common Core do not require specific knowledge. Neither do the literacy standards of individual states. Specific knowledge is the last thing that our educational experts (under the reign of progressivism) wish to define. They prefer to close off that issue by saying it's a local political issue and by asking this embarrassing question: "Who decides?"

There is a clear answer to that conversation stopper. Writers like Lin-Manuel Miranda and other influential language users have already decided. The public sphere is de facto the knowledge and language in use by those who can read and communicate effectively. They receive high scores on reading tests. They can read Hamilton (in the print version even if they can't get a ticket), and they can read The New York Times. The content-impoverished skill and vocabulary exercises conducted by the schools continue to leave large reading gaps between social groups. That's because the reading gaps are knowledge gaps—the results of schooling that rests on empty skill practice and slogans like "Who decides?"

An inherent logic can thus be applied to answer the question "Who decides?" We can start with the psycholinguistic insight that effective language use requires speaker and listener to share common knowledge, sentiments, and beliefs. Then, as the philosopher of language H. P. Grice showed analytically, the speaker has to know what the listeners know and the listeners have to know that the speaker assumes they know it. This shared knowledge is what competent listeners and speakers, readers and writers, possess, and which they know their co-language-users possess. This is the very knowledge that makes them competent. This shared knowledge is limited; if it were not it couldn't be shared. It is necessarily known to all competent speakers and writers. Thus, the core of knowledge has already been largely decided by a lot of competent language users over time. The schools need to perpetuate that competence for all—even as they may try to amplify, amend, and improve our commonly shared knowledge, sentiments, and beliefs. The schools can and should improve culture, but without (as now occurs) leaving many of their students incompetent because they are ignorant.

Partly because of inadequate theories about education and language, an understanding of the basic acculturative duty of the schools in a liberal democracy has receded. The main responsibility of a nation's elementary schools is not to develop and nurture each child's individuality. Individuality is made not born. It is a late product of socialization and education, as the noted pragmatist philosopher G. H. Mead rightly held. Only through children's mastery of the public sphere and its language can all children be offered a fair chance in the modern economy, and thus a chance to fully develop their individualities. Moreover, mastery of shared knowledge is also a necessary part of a shared sense of community in a nation.

### **We Are All in the Same Boat**

The popularity of Hamilton offers hope that recent educational ideas of hyperindividualism and anti-nationalism may be open to revision. The admirable post-Vietnam attack against prejudice, tribalism, and stereotypes needs to be freed from its unnecessary admixture of nation-bashing that marches under the banner of "multiculturalism." This trend so disturbed the liberal historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. that he paused in his scholarly labors to write an alarmist pamphlet entitled *The Disuniting of*

America (1991). It induced the celebrated liberal philosopher, Richard Rorty, to write in 1994 a pungent op-ed in *The New York Times* titled “The Unpatriotic Academy” and four years later a passionate book, *Achieving Our Country*.

These two distinguished writers of the older, labor-union left attacked the self-righteous, ivory-tower intellectualism of the new academic left. In *Achieving Our Country*, Rorty warned that such anti-national disdain, with its lack of practical engagement with the plight of American workers, would open the country to full-scale resentment against political correctness, and make the nation vulnerable to the demagoguery of some fascist strongman who would play on their discontent and defensive prejudices:

The nonsuburban electorate will decide that the system has failed and start looking around for a strongman to vote for—someone to assure them that once he is elected the smug bureaucrats, tricky lawyers, overpaid bond salesmen, and postmodern professors will no longer be calling the shots. . . . All the sadism which the academic left has tried to make unacceptable to its students will come flooding back.

Both Rorty and Schlesinger were strong nationalists of the federated kind. Melville adopted the word “federated”—putting him squarely on the side of Hamilton and Washington, the leading Federalists of the early era. They were intent on creating a strong cohesive nation out of the disparate parts—without erasing the parts. Necessity had forced the American founders to federalism—to a compromise between strong localities and a strong central government: “Out of many, one,” but without erasing the many. This unity-in-diversity idea has greatly helped American political and economic growth. It has helped us to avoid the worst excesses of tribal nationalism. The American idea that local autonomies can coexist with national unity signaled from the beginning that we are not a melting pot but a mosaic. The federal principle is reflected in our flag. What other national flag is so visually busy, so like a mosaic?

American federalism had accidentally hit upon a deep insight about human groups. Sociologists have found it useful to distinguish two kinds of social arrangements using the German terms *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. *Gemein* means shared, common; a *Gemeinschaft* is a society with common cultural and even kinship ties. It is a cozy, often local arrangement with a powerful sense of group identity and loyalty. It fulfills the psychological need for group identity and even for personal identity, the sort of feeling Sebastian Junger describes in *Tribes*. The German word *Gesell*, by contrast, does not mean common; but instead means fellow or companion—like a fellow passenger on a train, or a fellow worker in a company. *Gesellschaft* is a German term for a commercial company. Mono-cultural nationalism of the *Gemeinschaft* type justifiably got a bad name by being associated with racial and tribal feelings as in Hitler’s Germany, or with the hate-filled nationalist wars in the Balkans and elsewhere with their “ethnic cleansing.” The *Gemeinschaft* sort of nationalism leads to an us-versus-them mentality, hatred of the other, and to war. Such tribalism is deeply ingrained, and has left a bloody track through history, even while it has fulfilled the deep-seated need for community. The successes of the American experiment are partly owing to federalism, an idea that offers the practicality of a *Gesellschaft* while retaining the emotional fulfillment of a *Gemeinschaft*. Our federalism has managed to induce a vigorous, unifying public culture without abolishing the cozier cultures of the home and the locality.

Federalism is a delicate balancing act and a continuing work in progress. It is the model for the successful modern nation. Gellner puts the matter succinctly: “Nationalism is a phenomenon of *Gesellschaft* using the idiom of *Gemeinschaft*: a mobile anonymous society simulating a closed cozy community. It is engendered basically by two facts: the dissolution of the old rigid hierarchical order in

which most men knew their place and were glued to it, and the fact that the new order, because of the nature of work within it, needs to operate in a [common public] culture.”

This national public culture is an invented construct that is sustained and improved by the schools of a nation. Our schools have played a key role in our past national success. But the Americanization project of the schools got waylaid by individualistic education and anti-nationalism. Hamilton, written by a genius who is the product of American schooling, shows that the schools have not fully abandoned their democratic responsibilities. But it is clear to a growing number of experts that those responsibilities must include teaching the national public culture to all, and encouraging loyalty to the national community and to its best ideals.

That will require American schools to teach a lot more history and civics, including the basic Enlightenment principles of the nation. The bloody and successful civil rights movement of the recent past was predicated on everyone knowing those principles. Even the Black Panthers quoted them. During the civil rights movement, national pride was not only consistent with national progress; it was part of its originating force.

The sense of belonging diminishes the sense of alienation from the group. It also diminishes the sense of alienation from the individuals within the group. The sentiment of membership in a big-tented America enhances a sense of connection with the Other. The alarming persistence, even intensification, of racism in the United States can be overcome only by enhancing, not diminishing, our national sense of solidarity.

If the old patriotic songs for the schools don't now pass muster, why is no one writing new ones? Perhaps someone is. But, really, what is wrong with “America the Beautiful,” which aims to “crown thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea?” Brotherhood surely includes sisterhood, and is a reasonable translation of “Gesellschaft as Gemeinschaft.” But if that doesn't appeal, our schools nonetheless need to agree on some other patriotic songs to put in the place of “America the Beautiful” and “My Country 'Tis of Thee.” Maybe “This Land Is Your Land” and “We Shall Overcome”—any songs that reaffirm the nation's Enlightenment ideal of “freedom and justice for all.” That ideal is still something to be proud of.

Maybe Lin-Manuel Miranda will write a great rap-hip-hop version of “America the Beautiful” celebrating the stars-and-stripes national community. The federated American idea continues to be, as Abraham Lincoln said, the “last best hope of earth.” The “disuniting of America” has been an unfruitful effort. The individualism of our schools coupled with the divisive anti-nationalist pieties of the recent past have encouraged polarization and helped make our internal politics tribal rather than federated. Our elementary schools need to stop abetting that ominous trend and instead become the first line of defense against them.

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