

Revisiting Global America: Nationalism in History and Politics

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Nationalism has been a defining feature of American history, politics, and international relations. Since its foundation, the United States has created an exceptional, expansive, and open image of itself as the “global nation” founded on a set of seemingly universal principles. The ways Americans have thought about their country have been a tremendous force for overseas expansion and an irresistible attraction for many outsiders. However, despite the success of this model of global, multiracial and multi-ethnic America, or possibly because of it, recent but not unprecedented nationalistic trends have contributed to dispute, contest or even reject its very tenets. The topic has also taken on urgency at the historiographical level. Scholars have inevitably looked with renewed interest into US nationalism and its practical, policy manifestations since 9/11. In the last few years, however, the debate has become even more intense, with a shift from explaining outcomes to questioning the nature of American identity and patriotism. The seismic waves produced by the last presidential election eventually reached nationalism studies, reinforcing a tendency that had started after the election of Obama: ethnicity, religion, and above all race were brought back as crucial elements in the analysis of the American national community and provided a tool to deconstruct the alternative visions of belonging that find space in the current political and public debate. At the same time, nationalism *per se* is being refashioned. The negative coating deposited on it by 20th-century wars is being scrubbed off by those who, even at the academic level, see strong nationalist policies as a way to navigate the current era of geopolitical uncertainty and fragmentation.

The second monographic issue—*Revisiting Global America: Nationalism in American History and Politics*—embraces this discussion, offering an ample range of perspectives on American nationalism and the many issues connected to it. The four articles composing the issue cover different historical periods, following the construction and the evolution of the American nationalist sentiment from the early Republic to the Reagan Era. What distinguishes these contributions is not only their chronological framework but also their approach to the notion of American nationalism—a concept that goes from being intended primarily as individual consciousness (as an element of personal self-determination of Americans abroad, like in Nikoletta Papadopoulou’s work) to being represented as a political battleground (i.e. an expression of partisan politics) as in Giovanni Militello’s study, who takes US nationalism not as a unitary and unifying ideology but the manifestation of distinct and, in fact, opposing practical visions of governance. In Matteo Rossi’s and Stefano Livi’s articles, instead, we see more traditional interpretations of American nationalism at work. Their views of nationalism appear as

broader conceptualizations of what America is and should be—what are the economic and ideological principles on which the national community is based, and what the government has to do in order to preserve them and fulfill, accordingly, a self-assigned (global) mission. Both Rossi's and Livi's analyses, which focus respectively on the 19th and 20th century, point to themes that returned multiple times in later US policy. Rossi's study is particularly relevant in this respect; his article rediscovers the original work of an almost forgotten 19th-century thinker, Henry Charles Carey, and it is difficult not to notice the importance that the pillars of Carey's economic theory—protectionism and a state as the guarantor of social order—would have had in subsequent stages of American history, up to the current days of economic nationalism.

The primary focus of the historical analysis therefore varies, as does the scope of the work of historical reconstruction, for a second issue of *USAbroad* that taken together shows how complex and multifaceted the nature of US national sentiment and sensibility is. The organization of the articles is chronological, constructing an imaginary trajectory of the notion of American nationalism through crucial twists and turns of US history and different geographical spaces. The issue opens with Papadopoulou's *National Anxieties and Negotiating Difference in American Barbary Captivity Narrative*. The article examines the personal experiences of those Americans who came into contact with the Berbers along the North African coast in the late 18th-early 19th centuries, in the decades immediately after the proclamation of American independence. By reviewing the written accounts left by those Americans abroad, who most often became and remained captives for years in the Barbary states, she explores the national anxieties and personal reflections arising from the encounter with a religiously and culturally complex, distant society as the one developed on the southern shore of the Mediterranean. Papadopoulou focuses on the stories of three main characters: the first is James Leander Cathcart, an Irishman by birth who had traveled to North America and joined the Revolution before being captured by Barbary pirates in 1785 aboard American schooner. Cathcart spent eleven years in captivity in Algiers, a period during which he managed to progress from the position of palace gardener to that of Christian secretary of the Dey. He would return to the Barbary Coast, years after achieving his freedom, as no less than the American consul general. Cathcart's writings, Papadopoulou suggests, "articulate an individual's experience that represents the entire nation's struggle for liberation and self-definition." The article then follows the stories of two members of the crew of frigate Philadelphia, captured in 1803: Jonathan Cowdery, the Navy appointed ship's surgeon, and William Ray, one of the sailors aboard. Their published accounts offer different, and in fact contrasting, versions of the time in captivity, showing a disparity of treatment between officers and ordinary seamen that cut through their supposedly shared, common status (and identity) as Americans. Papadopoulou therefore shows how, in the formative years of American nation and nationalism, "the Orient" became a space where themes related to selfhood, nationhood, and belonging were constantly negotiated, re-interpreted, and reconstructed. Indeed, she explains, although most American captivity narratives of the period attempt to maintain binary divisions between Christian-Muslim or Self-Other, what those works actually expose is the Americans' own ambivalence on how to preserve as well as mediate these differences, in a tortuous process of construction of American identity.

Rossi's *Protecting America: Order, Nation and Exception in Henry Carey's Social Science* looks into another crucial period in American history, that of 19th-century continental and economic expansion. The article shows the importance of Carey's economic thought in the reinterpretation of American nationalism in an era of critical growth for the country "as a nation, as a capitalist market and as a State." Born in Philadelphia in 1793, Carey became one of the major intellectual figures and interpreters of the antebellum period. He also took an active role in politics, first by entering the Whig Party and later by actively participating in the construction of the Republican Party in Pennsylvania, helping to shape the national economic platform for the 1860 presidential election. Rossi explains that Carey worked to legitimize, through economic science, a political theory of the American nation that celebrated the country's distinctiveness and, at the same time, aimed at protecting it from social conflict and crisis that marked the historical transition to capitalism. On the one hand, the author argues, Carey built his political economy on a vision of America as a historical exception (a vision that was based on what appeared as an almost limitless availability of resources in the continent); on the other, the protectionist economic policies he prescribed were aimed at preserving the country's status, marking

its uniqueness vis-à-vis Europe. The US had indeed a different and universal mission, whose objectives were prosperity, opportunity for all, freedom and peace. Economic nationalism was therefore needed to manage growth and competition while maintaining social order—a condition of prosperity to be enjoyed first by American citizens and then the entire humankind through the expansion of an American empire “voluntarily joined.” According to this interpretation, then, American exceptionalism became both a foundational element and a political goal of Carey’s economic theory; equally important, this US “exception” came to represent an essential component of American nationalism.

A similar expansive vision of US nationalism and (global) mission emerges from Livi’s *Exporting Americanism: Arthur Bullard and American Propaganda in Russia*. The article seeks to provide a broader understanding of American propaganda abroad during World War I and its aftermath by analyzing the history of the Committee on Public Information and its role in revolutionary Russia. Livi focuses on the figure of one of its directors, Arthur Bullard, whose role many scholars of Soviet-American relations have considered over the years secondary and subordinate to that of more notable figures, like ambassador David R. Francis or the head of the CPI, George Creel. Drawing on documents from the Arthur Bullard Papers and the Records of the Committee on Public Information, the article offers new insights into Bullard’s efforts in the fields of diplomacy, information, and education. Livi argues that Bullard actively tried to make US diplomacy more accessible and “democratic,” but also more pervasive and penetrating, promoting public knowledge and the spreading of American values through a strengthened communication strategy both at home and abroad. He tried to implement these principles while in Russia (1917–1919), working to reach two different, but complementary, objectives: the promotion of Americanism in the country and the containment of Bolshevism among the population. Bullard’s overarching idea, Livi writes, was to avert the decline of Americanism through the creation of a “national mind” able to counter the growing “influence of foreign cultures brought by immigrants to the United States.” This is exactly what motivated Bullard’s decision to export “American ideals and values” abroad, especially in revolutionary Russia. “While CPI’s main goal was to seek to keep Russia in the conflict,” the article states, “Bullard’s view went beyond the horizon of the war,” trying to fight off Bolshevism, spread knowledge about American history and principles in schools, and therefore bridge a new and stronger relationship between the American people and those abroad.

The last article, Giovanni Militello’s *The Battle of Montreal: Neo-Conservative vs. Regulatory Nationalism*, discusses the rounds of negotiations for the Montreal Protocol of 1987, which led to the banning of a series of Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and halons. The US administration supported the agreement, which still remains an international landmark in environmental legislation. In order to reach this path-breaking environmental deal and put pressure on the international community, the US used its diplomatic leverage, the opinions of members of the scientific and business communities, and also the work of some environmental organizations. The author, however, argues that the protocol actually served as a tool to export to the world (and impose upon it) a level of environmental protection that was already used in the US and risked damaging the competitiveness of American companies and economy. The analysis of the domestic debates surrounding the treaty shows how nationalistic rhetoric and discourse was used for partisan goals. Indeed, the negotiations became a contest of strength between a dying, “New-Dealist,” regulatory nationalism and a thriving neo-conservative nationalism. The former won the battle in Montreal, but lost the war; the agreement represented its last flicker of life before the final rise of the latter.

Militello’s work closes this monographic issue—an issue that seeks to bring new considerations to bear on the meaning of US nationalism by highlighting continuities, idiosyncrasies, and changes in nationalistic discourses, practices, and policies. To offer a comprehensive review of the topic is, of course, impossible. The goal, in this case, is to add historical pieces to the composite picture of the American nation and give useful historiographical tools to interpret our present of revived nationalism. From this perspective, in the new column *Bringing the History Back In*, the article of Federico Romero—*Globalization’s Nemesis: from Liberal Internationalism to White Nationalism*—reconstructs the complicated historical road from liberal internationalism to the white (and economic) nationalism of today.