

Americana: Issue 1 *Highlights from the Americas*. (June 2019).

Opposite Perspectives: the American Adam versus el Hombre Natural

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Keywords: Identities, José Martí, The American Adam, Nation Building

From a hemispheric point of view, national identity emerges in different forms throughout the Americas. Thus, in the following paper I argue that The American Adam and El Hombre Natural act as personifications of discourses of exclusion and inclusion respectively, which have helped construct and legitimize the idea of the nation in the United States and Latin America. These embodiments emanate thanks to the concepts of race, religion, expansionism, and self-defense.

The discourse of American Exceptionalism can be traced back to John Winthrop's idea of the 'Promised Land'. The biblical allusion attempts to legitimize the use and abuse of the new lands that are regarded as virgin and, thus, uninhabited by any human civilization. This is why the American Adam is to be defined as a white male from European descent who is willing to silence the native population for the sake of self-profit and soil exploitation. As Lewis describes,

an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft on ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling [...]. It was not surprising, in a Bible-reading generation, that the new hero [...] was most easily identified with Adam before the Fall (5).

It is worth noting the innocence attributed to the character by inscribing him in a biblical and metaphorical dimension. The construction of the United States as a nation is founded on an idealized state of purity based on whiteness, God's will and the manifest destiny.

On the other hand, el Hombre Natural comes to existence through the recognition of hybridity. In Martí's words, "Por eso el libro importado ha sido vencido en América por el hombre natural. Los hombres naturales han vencido a los letrados artificiales. El mestizo autóctono ha vencido al criollo exótico" (28). El Hombre Natural is depicted as a 'mestizo autóctono', which refers to the fusion of the colonizer and the native on American soil. Martí

makes use of an inclusive national discourse by celebrating the result of the union and considering it a fundamental characteristic for 'Nuestra América'. Whereas *mestizaje* is explicitly praised in Latin American rhetoric, the concept of miscegenation is an unmentionable reality during the United States slaveholding history.

In terms of expansionism, the American Adam is on an *Errand into the Wilderness*, as Perry Miller would argue. Once the land has been regarded as virgin, and acknowledged as the 'promised' one, the character is now entitled to take hold of the soil and, thus, pursue the Conquest of the West. This conquest constitutes one of the foundational myths of the United States, which might account for the expansionist foreign policy of the country since its early beginnings. John O'Sullivan's "The Great Nation of Futurity" illustrates this ideology when he declares that "The expansive future is our arena, and for our history. We are entering on its untrodden space, with the truths of God in our minds, beneficent objects in our hearts, and with a clear conscience unsullied by the past" (427). This spreading is repeatedly justified by means of the Creator's authority and occurs regardless of the native inhabitants.

By contrast, Latin American narratives construct their subjects through the synthesis of diverse elements. Martí states that "el deber urgente de nuestra América es enseñarse cómo es, una en alma e intento, vencedora veloz de un pasado sofocante" (32). After an asphyxiating colonial past, the Spanish-speaking countries are to come together under the motto that unity equals strength. This strength is also necessary to surmount the overwhelming neoliberal influence of "el gigante de las siete leguas" (26) that is to say the United States. As Bauer phrases,

To the extent that Latin American intellectuals have embraced the notion of one Latin American cultural identity, they have typically attempted to theorize this cultural identity in opposition to, rather than in hemispheric unity with, the United States in the face of that country's aggressive hemispheric imperialism since the nineteenth century (236).

Hence "Nuestra América" promotes a strategic unity of the Latin American community as a means to defend themselves from the expansionist north. Furthermore, such unity works on a sub-, inter-, and national level.

All in all, the American Adam and el Hombre Natural represent divergent personifications that attempt to elucidate opposite national identity constructions. Whereas the United States hegemonic discourses rely on whiteness and expansionism, Latin American ideology as formulated by Martí is characterized by an inclusive sense of community and resistance to US imperial practices.

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