

## Activity 6.4: Identity in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century

**Disciplinary Practice: Analyzing Historical Evidence - Primary Sources**

**Reasoning Skill: Contextualization**

**Theme: American and National Identity (NAT-1.0, NAT-2.0)**

*Demographic and political changes in the late nineteenth century, especially the passage of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment and increased migration to the United States, led to renewed debates over American identity. Complete the following activities to explore these issues. (Key Concepts 6.2.II, 6.3.II)*

### **Steps for Analysis:**

**Step 1:** Read each document and answer the questions following that document, focusing primarily on ideas related to identity.

**Step 2:** Complete the Questions to Answer.

### **Document 1. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “The Solitude of Self.” 1892**

The strongest reason for giving woman all the opportunities for higher education, for the full development of her faculties, her forces of mind and body; for giving her the most enlarged freedom of thought and action; a complete emancipation from all forms of bondage, of custom, dependence, superstition; from all the crippling influences of fear—is the solitude and personal responsibility of her own individual life. The strongest reason why we ask for woman a voice in the government under which she lives; in the religion she is asked to believe; equality in social life, where she is the chief factor; a place in the trades and professions, where she may earn her bread, is because of her birthright to self-sovereignty; because, as an individual, she must rely on herself. No matter how much women prefer to lean, to be protected and supported, nor how much men desire to have them do so, they must make the voyage of life alone, and for safety in an emergency, they must know something of the laws of navigation. .... Women are already the equals of men in the whole realm of thought, in art, science, literature and government. . . . The poetry and novels of the century are theirs, and they have touched the keynote of reform, in religion, politics and social life. They fill the editor’s and professor’s chair, plead at the bar of justice, walk the wards of the hospital, speak from the pulpit and the platform. Such is the type of womanhood that an enlightened public sentiment welcomes to-day, and such the triumph of the facts of life over the false theories of the past.

--Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “The Solitude of Self” *The Woman’s Column*, January 1892, 2–3. Reprinted in Ellen Carol DuBois, ed., *Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony: Correspondence, Writings, and Speeches* (New York, 1981).  
or <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5315/>

**Historical Context:** What was the historical context for this excerpt? Provide at least three specific historical events or trends.

Purpose: What was the purpose of this excerpt?

Theme: How is Stanton defining her identity as a woman and an American?

**Document 2. Zitkala Sa (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin), "Why I Am a Pagan." *Atlantic Monthly* 90 (1902): 801-803.**

With a compassion for all echoes in human guise, I greet the solemn-faced "native preacher" whom I find awaiting me. I listen with respect for God's creature, though he mouth most strangely the jangling phrases of a bigoted creed. . . . He addressed me:

"Cousin. . . . Every holy day (Sunday) I look about our little God's house, and not seeing you there, I am disappointed. This is why I come to-day. Cousin, as I watch you from afar, I see no unbecoming behavior and hear only good reports of you, which all the more burns me with the wish that you were a church member. Cousin, I was taught long years ago by kind missionaries to read the holy book. These godly men taught me also the folly of our old beliefs. There is one God who gives reward or punishment. . . . In the upper region the Christian dead are gathered in unceasing song and prayer. In the deep pit below, the sinful ones dance in torturing flames. Think upon these things, my cousin, and choose now to avoid the after-doom of hell fire!" Then followed a long silence in which he clasped tighter and unclasped again his interlocked fingers.

. . . I offered midday meal to the converted Indian sitting wordless and with downcast face. . . . Thither he hurried forth with his afternoon sermon. I watched him as he hastened along, his eyes bent fast upon the dusty road till he disappeared at the end of a quarter of a mile.

The little incident recalled to mind the copy of a missionary paper brought to my notice a few days ago, in which a "Christian" pugilist commented upon a recent article of mine, grossly perverting the spirit of my pen. Still I would not forget that the pale-faced missionary and the hoodooed aborigine are both God's creatures, though small indeed their own conceptions of Infinite Love. A wee child toddling in a wonder world, I prefer to their dogma my excursions into the natural gardens where the voice of the Great Spirit is heard in the twittering of birds, the rippling of mighty waters, and the sweet breathing of flowers. If this is Paganism, then at present, at least, I am a Pagan.

--<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/ZitPaga.html>

Historical Context: What was the historical context for this excerpt? Provide at least three specific historical events or trends.

Purpose: What was the purpose of this excerpt?

Theme: How is Bonnin defining her identity?

### Document 3. Chief Joseph, An Indian's View of Indian Affairs, 1879

I can not understand how the Government sends a man out to fight us, as it did General Miles, and then breaks his word. Such a Government has something wrong about it.... I have heard talk and talk, but nothing is done. Good words do not last long unless they amount to something. Words do not pay for my dead people. They do not pay for my country, now overrun by white men. They do not protect my father's grave. They do not pay for all my horses and cattle. Good words will not give me back my children... I am tired of talk that comes to nothing. It makes my heart sick when I remember all the good words and all the broken promises.... If the white man wants to live in peace with the Indian he can live in peace. There need be no trouble. Treat all men alike. Give them all the same law. Give them all an even chance to live and grow. All men were made by the same Great Spirit Chief. They are all brothers. The earth is the mother of all people, and all people should have equal rights upon it. You might as well expect the rivers to run backward as that any man who was born a free man should be contented when penned up and denied liberty to go where he pleases....

I only ask of the Government to be treated as all other men are treated.... I know that my race must change. We can not hold our own with the white men as we are. We only ask an even chance to live as other men live. We ask to be recognized as men. We ask that the same law shall work alike on all men. If the Indian breaks the law, punish him by the law. If the white man breaks the law, punish him also.

Let me be a free man—free to travel, free to stop, free to work, free to trade where I choose, free to choose my own teachers, free to follow the religion of my fathers, free to think and talk and act for myself—and I will obey every law, or submit to the penalty....

--*North American Review* 128:269 (April 1879): 412-33.

Historical Context: What was the historical context for this excerpt? Provide at least three specific historical events or trends.

Purpose: What was the purpose of this excerpt?

Theme: How is Joseph defining his identity?

### Document 4. Theodore Roosevelt, "True Americanism." *The Forum* magazine, April 1894

In the first place we wish to be broadly American and national, as opposed to being local or sectional. We do not wish, in politics, in literature, or in art, to develop that unwholesome parochial spirit, that over-exaltation of the little community at the expense of the great nation, which produces what has been described as the patriotism of the village, the patriotism of the belfry...

There is a second side to this question of a broad Americanism, however. The patriotism of the village or the belfry is bad, but the lack of all patriotism is even worse. There are philosophers who assure us that, in the future, patriotism will be regarded not as a virtue at all, but merely as a mental stage in the journey toward a state of feeling when our patriotism will include the whole human race and all the world. This may be so; but the age of which these philosophers speak is still several aeons distant... At present, treason, like adultery, ranks as one of the worst of all possible crimes...

The third sense in which the word "Americanism" may be employed is with reference to the Americanizing of the newcomers to our shores. We must Americanize them in every way, in speech, in political ideas and principles, and in their way of looking at the relations between Church and State. We welcome the German or the Irishman who becomes an American. We have no use for the German or Irishman who remains such...Moreover, we have as little use for people who carry religious prejudices into our politics as for those who carry prejudices of caste or nationality. We stand unalterably in favor of the public-school system in its entirety. We believe that English, and no other language, is that in which all the school exercises should be conducted...But we are equally opposed to any discrimination against or for a man because of his creed. We demand that all citizens, Protestant and Catholic, Jew and Gentile, shall have fair treatment in every way; that all alike shall have their rights guaranteed them.

--<http://www.theodore-roosevelt.com/images/research/speeches/trta.pdf>

Historical Context: What was the historical context for this excerpt? Provide at least three specific historical events or trends.

Purpose: What was the purpose of this excerpt?

Theme: How is Roosevelt defining American national identity?

**Document 5. W. E. B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*. 1903**

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife- this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He does not wish to Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He wouldn't bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face.

--Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. (New York: Dover Publications, 1903) (pp. 2-3).

Historical Context: What was the historical context for this excerpt? Provide at least three specific historical events or trends.

Purpose: What was the purpose of this excerpt?

Theme: How is DuBois defining American identity?

**Document 6. Chinese Equal Rights League, “Appeal Of The League To The People Of The United States.” 1892**

To the American People, Friends of Humanity: — We, the members of the Chinese Equal Rights League in the United States, who have adopted this country and its customs in the main, are at this moment engaged in a perilous struggle in which our dearest rights as men and residents are involved... We appeal to the humane, liberty-loving sentiment of the American people, who are lovers of equal rights and even-handed justice, a people from whom sprung such illustrious characters as Washington, Jefferson, Clay, Sumner, lastly Lincoln, the citizen of the world, the friend of humanity... We have and are still paying our portion of government taxation, thereby assisting in supporting the Government, and thereby sharing an equal part in the support of the Nation. We love and admire the Government, and look with joy to her instrumentality in promoting every good and just cause among men, to her unwavering love of human rights, to her glorious efforts for the advancement of human happiness. We, therefore, appeal for an equal chance in the race of life in this our adopted home — a large number of us have spent almost all our lives in this country and claim no other but this as ours. Our motto is: " Character and fitness should be the requirement of all who are desirous of becoming citizens of the American Republic." We feel keenly the disgrace unjustly and maliciously heaped upon us by a cruel Congress.... Our interest is here, because our homes, our families and our all are here. America is our home through long residence. Why, then, should we not consider your welfare ours? Chinese immigration, as well as Irish, Italian and other immigration, cannot be stopped by the persecution of our law-abiding citizens in the United States. Treat us as men, and we will do our duty as men, and will aid you to stop this obnoxious evil that threatens the welfare of this Republic. We do not want any more Chinese here any more than you do. The scarcer the Chinese here the better would be our conditions among you.

--[https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:4581473\\$9i](https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:4581473$9i)

Historical Context: What was the historical context for this excerpt? Provide at least three specific historical events or trends.

Purpose: What was the purpose of this excerpt?

Theme: How is the Chinese Equal Rights League defining American national identity?

***Questions to Answer: Reflection Questions on American National Identity***

1. What does it mean to be an American? What common beliefs do Americans have?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What common beliefs can you identify from the documents?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. How might Americans' common beliefs contribute to unifying a diverse people in the United States?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What groups do you belong to within the United States? (i.e. what are your group identities?)  
Consider: Gender, class, racial, ethnic, religious, political, region, generation, interests, other
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What tensions or conflicts exist between your different identities? Which groups do you identify with first?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. How do people living in the United States reconcile their group identity(ies) with their national identity?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. Identify several conflicts between group identity and national identity that appeared in the documents.