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MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH  
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FACULTY LETTERS AND LANGUAGES  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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DOMAIN: FOREIGN LANGUAGES  
STREAM: ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
OPTION: LITERATURE & CIVILIZATION

**American National Identity in Crevecoeur's  
*Letters from an American Farmer*  
Letter Three as a Case Study**

Thesis submitted to the Department of English & Literature  
In partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Master Degree

By: Ammari Hanifa Wafa and Benyounes Hana.

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# DEDICATION

*In the Name of God the Most Merciful and the Most Compassionate*

We dedicate our work to our loving families especially Mothers, Fathers, Sisters and Brothers along with friends.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

We thank Allah Azza Wa Jall for giving us the courage and the determination, as well as guidance in conducting this dissertation, despite all difficulties. We humbly acknowledge the continual and enduring love and emotional support given by our parents. A thank could never be enough comparing to what they have done for us.

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## ABSTRACT

The present dissertation is intended to examine the theme of American National Identity in Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer*. It aims at providing a historical background about the era in which the work was achieved. It focuses on portraying Crèvecoeur's view of major enlightenment principles. This study reflects a positive image given by the author concerning the new man "American" by tackling the meaning of Personal and National Identity. Throughout the letters, the sense of nationalism for European Countries had disappeared, so American Nationalism as a concept is discussed as well as in this work. A deep analysis is given to the third letter "What is an American", all the way through giving much importance to how American National Identity was built in the new found land by applying New Historicism theory. In order to find answers to the proposed research questions, Historical and Analytical approaches are to be used. The result of this study shows that John de Crèvecoeur's third letter is a true representation of the reflection of the American Enlightenment basis: Deism, liberation, republicanism and toleration. As a writer, Crèvecoeur might have succeeded in his presentation of depicting American National Identity along with Nationalism during the Enlightenment era. Besides.

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# **General Introduction**

Many stories had been built about the new discovered land of America. People from different backgrounds had immigrated and settled there. Many came to America to escape mainly oppressive governments, religious persecution, and poverty. Accordingly and as a new settled land, America encountered many issues related to identity and nationalism.

Respecting the fact that literature is a reflection to reality, many American authors at that time had depicted the political and historical changes that occurred at that period. An outstanding example during that era was Crèvecoeur's letters from an American Farmer. The work was written in time in which the Americans started to create their own conscious, common beliefs and ideas. Crèvecoeur portrayed the new world. He could also create a character who is a farmer in order to convey his messages which had been considered as the main contribution in creating the sense of Nationalism along with building the American Nation.

Notably, the most important letter is the third one which is entitled What is an American? The author imagines himself an English man who has come to settle in America. Through the eyes of this English settler, the author describes what he would see upon coming and how different it would be from Europe. Unlike in Europe, America has a far smaller gap between rich and poor and titles based on class and honour are non-existent. For the most part of people living in America are farmers and live in comfortable but modest houses. It is clear from the author's words that he thinks America is a great place to live in.

In the second part of the letter, the writer describes the mixture of people who have settled in America as immigrants from England, Scotland, France, Holland, Germany, and Sweden pour into America. As a result, the country has become a melting pot of many different cultures. Struggling to make ends meet, people have come to America searching better opportunities and new life where they might be able to be treated fairly and regarded as

citizens under the law. Since many of these immigrants left their countries mainly due to poverty and persecution, they have no attachment to their previous homes and consider themselves to be truly Americans.

In the third part of the letter, Crèvecoeur defines exactly what does the expression to be an American mean. According to his definition, an American is a European or a descendent of European. Therefore, America is the only place in the world where a person may have parents and grandparents all from different cultural backgrounds. The author then goes on to say that an American is one who has given up the old for the new and is motivated by hard work and opportunity to improve his life.

In the third letter, Crèvecoeur exposes many features of American identity. When the immigrants were establishing their new lives in the new world, they started also building their own notion of identity. They no more felt themselves as Europeans. In addition to that, the letter is a clear reflection to Crèvecoeur's own understanding of enlightenment principles. Moreover; the letter discusses the concept of Nationalism in the young nation. Therefore, the work is analysed through the lenses of New Historicism theory.

What drove us to do this study is the complication of the issue of identity. Many historians and theorists have not yet solved this critical problem. In its turn, the youth nation of America was a special case to discuss from that angle.

The main question that is considered the pillar of this study is: What is the contribution of Crèvecoeur to shape the American national identity? The dissertation will also discuss the following sub-questions: how does Crèvecoeur's Letters from an American Farmer depict successfully the major enlightenment principles? And how does the third letter fit into the principles of the new historicist approach?

Notably, many works had been discussed the American identity, the spirit of nationalism, and the melting pot idea. For example, “*Searching for America: The Development of Immigrant Narrative across Jewish, African, Cuban, and Korean Literature*” .This dissertation conducted by Amanda Maree Lawrence, presented for the degree of Doctor of philosophy University of Tennessee, Knoxville in May 2004. That study traces and accounts for the development of immigrant Literature within specific ethnic groups, focusing on how different generations rewrote the immigrant narrative of their own culture. This study examines the changing relationship between literary forms and identity for each group. Beside this, the study suggests ways in which these different ethnic texts speak to each other and to the myth and realities that constitute America.

Additional work ,held by Ashley Hales PHD in English University of Edinburgh 2013, entitled “*Sympathy and Transatlantic Literature: place ,genre ,and emigration*”. This thesis posits Enlightenment articulators of sympathy .It investigates the effect of emigration and place on genre and follows trajectory from documentary to fictive forms and from a small gap to one unable to be bridged.

The dissertation presented by John Michael Huffman to Department of History in partial fulfilment of the requirement for degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Harvard University Cambridge Massachusetts in 2013. Under the title: *Identity and Identification in the American Revolution*. This study of the Revolutionary crisis of identification, from 1774 to 1783, examines the ways that these instruments of identification were used to identify “Americans” in the face of this crisis, at home and abroad, and therefore how the new United States were constituted through the identification of individuals.

These literary works shed light on the theme of American identity. Therefore, what is specific about our study in comparison to other works is dealing with the theme of American national identity. This dissertation focuses on the third letter of Crèvecoeur “What is an American?” We attempt to analyse it mainly from a new historicist perspectives.

The methodological framework of this study is analytical in essence. Throughout this research, an analysis is going to be applied on the third letter in order to depict the American society that has more quality and more opportunities for self-advancement, in addition to that how this document gave an idealised view on the way of life in America, more precisely, shaping the American identity, defining the American character: what is an American?

Concerning the structure, this dissertation is divided into two chapters: The first chapter that is entitled: socio-historical and theoretical background; gives information about the origins of American nation relating it to the concepts of Enlightenment, Identity and Nationalism .Then ,it deals with the biographical notes of the writer and the historical context in which the work was produced .Finally, the chapter provides an overview of New Historicism Theory that is considered as an appropriate approach to be applied on this work.

The second chapter is entitled: Forging the American national identity in Crèvecoeur’s “What is an American”. It analyzes the reflection of the American enlightenment principles and the notion of identity and nationalism in Crèvecoeur’s “What is an American”, through applying the New Historicism approach.

# **Chapter one:**

## **Socio-Historical and Theoretical Background.**

## **I.1. America: the New Land**

The word “Exceptionalism” refers to the belief that something is exceptional, especially the theory that the peaceful capitalism of the US constitutes an exception to the general economic laws governing national historical development. The Americans used the previous term to express the belief in their uniqueness. In other words, they invented what is called American Exceptionalism. It is endowed the American nation with special role to play in human history (Byers 86).

In line with this, the professor Thomas B. Byers argues that “*American Exceptionalism is not only the claim that America is different, but it is a unique, one of a (superior) kind-and generally that kind carries with it a unique moral value and responsibility*”(Byers 86). Thus, the United States through the perspective of Exceptionalism means that the American people are a perfect human kind. This nation is tied to a specific task towards the rest of humanity in addition to its superiority.

The story behind the Exceptionalism in the American continent is generally religious. Many historians traced the idea of America as an exceptional entity to colonial era. At that time, the idea was born in the puritan settlers' thoughts who considered themselves as chosen people. They also believed in the new discovered continent as a promised land that will be a model for the rest of the world. They “*came to see America as opening vast new possibilities for themselves, as well as providing exceptional opportunities for the mass conversion of souls to Christianity*”( 86).

Therefore, religion was a major factor in shaping the American notion of uniqueness. Religious tensions in England had increased higher after the protestant Reformation. After the death of the Queen Elizabeth II in 1603, her cousin, the protestant King of Scots James VI

became King James the first of England. Many people began to lose their faith in their mother country. Thus, they started to seek for more freedom and equality especially in what was related to religion. However, this aim had never been achieved and they suffered a lot.

Most of the people were living under harsh religious persecution. Their rituals, beliefs, and doctrines were severely restricted. For them, the only solution was immigration. Accordingly, they moved to America and brought with them their own religious ideas. The most notable congregation was the Puritans. They were a group of people who left Britain and went to the newly settled land to maintain their beliefs. They felt they had inherited "*the mantle of Israel, lost by England's Stuart King*", they saw themselves as saints elected by God among the whole humankind (Calabresi 1345).

The Puritans believed that they were the ones ordered by God for a specific mission. In other words, God chose them to correct the corruption of the church at that time. Religion then must be reformed. It was a similar belief among the Separatists. In line with this, James w. Ceaser claims that:

For the Puritans the idea of being a selected agent was more than a theological possibility; it was a lived experience, formed in their exodus and errand in the wilderness. Something was taking place here, in this out-of-the-way land-- "in this little place called New England". As Cotton Mather put it--that had decisive significance for God's plan. Much as God had acted through the Israelites in biblical times, he was acting now through the Puritans, in an age in which the millennium was believed to be at hand. God's work was not just something happening to the Puritans but something that imposed a task to contribute to the achievement of the divine purpose. That purpose was in no sense a political plan for a nation, as the nation in any case did not yet exist. The "idea" ( as Tocqueville put it) for which the Puritans came was within the realm of "sacred history" concerned foremost with God's plan, not political history concerned with the things of this world (Ceaser 12).

Accordingly, one can notice clearly in James w. Ceaser's words that the Puritans mainly used religion to prove the special image they drew to America. They saw themselves as the executors of God's plan. In this latter, they were supposed to lead the world towards the millennium. Puritans came to America to create their own society. By doing so, they cut all

ties with the Church of England and established their own that should be followed by other European nations. In the same context, Stephenson agrees that the New world was the location of the millennium. It is the "*place for the end...of history*" (Calabresi, 1347). Early colonial leaders were attracted by the idea of dealing with America as Promised Land. For instance, William Bradford, the leader of Plymouth colony mentioned the same concept. In his work *of Plymouth Plantation*, Bradford expressed his belief that America had been chosen by God to be the new Promised Land and a home to the passengers who were saved in Mayflower (86).

Moreover, John Winthrop, the first governor of Massachusetts Bay colony, delivered his famous sermon entitled *A Model of Christian Charity* to puritan settlers aboard the *Arbella* during its passage to New England (Bathke, 2012:2). This John Winthrop's sermon was regarded by many writers as the founding speech of American Exceptionalism. It "*is widely considered as cornerstone of the American identity*" (86). Winthrop inspired the image of America as a city upon a hill.

For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-world through the world. (Calabresi, 2006: 1336)

The puritans lived for a long time under the sponsoring of the British crown. The thirteen colonies were considered as a vital part in the mighty British Empire. But that situation did not last since the colonists started to question their relation with their mother country. They became no more the ones who accept everything without discussion. That trend in attitudes was the result of a thoughtful comparison. The settlers noticed the difference in rights and duties between them and those who lived on the British island. For instance, they were harshly taxed without being represented in the Parliament which was the main reason

behind rebellion. Consequently, the colonists called for their independence and declared a revolution against Britain.

Throughout that critical period in shaping the American history, the notion of Exceptionalism was prevalent. The American intellectuals tackled the term in their political writings. In his revolutionary pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776), Thomas Paine declares that America is special and different. It is a model to be followed by other countries. This idea also contributed to the outbreak of revolution. The same topic was discussed by Thomas Jefferson in his 1781 *Notes on the State of Virginia*. He portrays America as unique and exceptional .it enjoys splendid natural resources as well as a charming agrarian life.

To sum up, the core motive behind the breach between the American settlers and the British authority was merely originated in the intellectual side. The Americans had changed their views as British fellows due to the influence of a new wave of thinking centred on reason. For instance, Thomas Paine used logic in his *Common Sense*. He considered it as irrational for a small island to subjugate a large continent. Indeed, people started to rethink about their life. It was enlightenment that swept through the new continent coming from the old one. It offered creative thoughts in almost domains of life namely religion and politics.

## **I.2. A Glance at the Enlightenment**

Throughout history, human societies had developed their ways of thinking because Thoughts always had to fit with time. Therefore, the intellectual history is divided into distinctive ages. Notably, enlightenment is a name given to an important period in the Western civilization. It is known also as the age of reason coming after the Renaissance. It occurred roughly from the mid sixteenth up through the end of the seventeenth centuries in

Europe. Later on, it reached North America at the end of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

The era was known as enlightenment due to the metaphor of bringing light to the Dark Age. In other words, it was a time when an influential group of scholars, writers, artists, and scientists actively sought to use the clear light of a reason. They fought to rid the world of superstition and ignorance. As a result of their efforts, tremendous improvements occurred in the different fields of life. New ideas also were born in terms of basic human rights and democracy. It was a time when the human ability to reason was glorified. In other words, it encourages people to use their "*own understanding*" (Ball and Dagger 107).

Nearly, all philosophers of enlightenment wanted to see a strict separation of church and state. For them, the interference of government and religion was almost a recipe for disaster. Those philosophers themselves were usually people without traditional religious beliefs. Rather, they were deists. They believed in "nature's God". The term means the powerful spiritual force that had created the universe and everything then left it alone.

Originally, enlightenment was a philosophical movement. Its philosophy focused more on political subjects. Namely, John Locke was the representative of political liberalism. He thought that every human being was born with three basic natural rights: life, Liberty, and the ownership of property. It was also a major reason behind several revolutions because it enlightened the people's minds. That was clear through the works of politicians and writers.

Perhaps, the most successful pattern was the Revolution that took place on the French land. At that time, the intellectuals Francis Bacon and René Descartes published important books inspiring generations of scientists and scholars. In fact, many historians consider those two men to be the fathers of the Enlightenment. They developed the concept of the rational

steps. This idea can be followed to help in solving even the most complicated scientific problems.

During that period, Hector St. John de Crevecoeur was an iconic figure in the American Enlightenment. His outstanding epistolary work *Letters from an American Farmer* 1782 was very influential at the long term. The French writer had inspired other American writers such as Thomas Jefferson. For instance, the impact of Crevecoeur's views are clear in Jefferson's *the Declaration of Independence*. Moreover, his tract *A Summary View of the Rights of British America* is another illustrating example in which he (Jefferson) states that:

But let them [members of the parliament of Great Britain] not think to exclude us from going to other markets, to dispose of those commodities which they cannot use, nor to supply those wants which they cannot supply. Still less let it be proposed that our properties within our own territories shall be taxed or regulated by any power on earth but our own. The god who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time: the hand of force may destroy, but cannot disjoin them. (PTJ, 1:135).

### **I.2.1. Identity**

Generally speaking, people have distinctive features, behaviours, beliefs, and attitudes. Therefore everyone has what is called identity. The concept of identity became very important in the cultural studies from the nineteen ninety. It became so because of the emergence of cultural politics, human rights and multiculturalism as well as the philosophical and linguistic concerns. In brief, the new mode of thinking was the reason behind the wide ranging interest in the concept of identity.

The word Identity is of Latin origin (*identitas*). Commonly, it is the set of characteristics of a person or a community. These characteristics distinguish one individual (or groups of individuals) from another. Identity is also associated with the consciousness that a person has of himself or herself.

Under the influence of postmodernism and debates over multiculturalism in the late 1980s and 1990s, historians, anthropologists, and most of scholars of humanities have relied ever more heavily on identity as they explored the cultural politics of race, class, ethnicity, citizenship, and other social categories. The concept of identity has not a conventional definition. Till now, the term itself still a riddle. In this context, the sociologist Hall Stuart affirms that:

Identities are never unified and, in the late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation. (Stuart 4)

Although is considered as an enigma, the word identity is inevitable in latest and current discussions of culture, politics and social concerns. The psychoanalyst Erik Erikson is the responsible “*for the vogue in identity talk*” (Ross 44). Erikson has initiated and applied this term to a wide range of historical, social and political debates. Concerning politics, the concept of identity is at the heart of works on ethnic conflicts and nationalism (Anthony Smith 1991). In 1950, Erikson was the first to propose a theorization of the concept of identity in the field of developmental psychology. He then made distinctions between "identity of ego", "personal identity", and "group identity".

### **I.2.2. The Concept of Identity**

The notion of identity is multifaceted and complex because of its disciplinary transversality. In the broad sense, it represents a set of individual and collective characteristics that make it possible to clearly define an object. In social psychology, identity is often defined as a particular interaction of the psychological and the social in an individual.

In other words, identity is the product of the interactive processes between the individual and the society. Thus, the relationship between "personal identity" and "social identity" is often considered as an opposition between the staff and the collective. Consequently, it constitutes the central core of the problem of identity in social psychology.

The same idea is discussed by E. M. Lipiansky, a French sociologist who has claimed in the same context that while the interaction with others, identity is constructed, actualized, confirmed or invalidated. Identity is therefore a tension between these two poles. The identity of each has a double face. Firstly, it has an inner, subjective face (self-valuation). Secondly, it has an external, objective face, spelled out by others. Self-stated identity is a self-judgment. The identity expressed by others can be formed by the judgments of the partners.

One might expect it easy to find obvious and understandable definitions or statements of what is meant by identity. Devastatingly, scholars and academic users of the term identity show no need to explain its meaning to readers. In popular discourse, generally identity refers to something sacred. Yet, in the academic sense, identity is often treated as something fuzzy and complex. However, there are considerable attempts to define the Identity concept.

The simplest definition expresses identity as *"everyday word for people's sense of who they are"* (Djité 6). Also, the term is defined as *"the linguistic construction of membership in one or more social groups or categories"* (Kroskrity 111). Additionally, Hogg and Abrams defines it as *"people's concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others."* (Hogg and Abrams 1988: 2).

Moreover, Deng makes the concept of identity based on race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture. These standards are used by individuals as well as groups to define themselves and others. (Deng. M 1995: 1). As a result, the difference, complexity, and ambiguity along with these definitions are remarkable. Accordingly, they seem to refer to a

common underlying concept. Almost every one evokes a sense of recognition and none seems obviously wrong.

However, it leads us straight to the basic definition of the dictionary as available on the online version of the third edition of Oxford English Dictionary. It gives us the following definition in which identity is *“The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality”*.

Yet, this explanation does not capture what is meant by “social identity” or “national identity”. For instance, does national identity mean the sameness of a nation over all times and places, or the fact of being the same nation and not another? Obviously the concept of national identity entails an idea of temporal and spatial continuity of a nation. Thus, personal identity is not the same as national identity. The last is mainly based on Sameness and Continuity.

### **I. 3.1. Sameness and Continuity**

In philosophy, personal identity refers to the fact that a subject is an individual. At the same time, it is distinct from all others (uniqueness or synchronic identity) and remains the same through time (diachronic identity). The question of personal identity is today one of the most vivid and open-ended of contemporary philosophy. This question has arisen essentially in the context of English-speaking philosophy. It is also one of the most difficult and disturbing questions that a philosopher can encounter. In general terms, the two required principles under the identity concept are undetachable within the existence of the concerned concept. They are known as : Sameness and Continuity.

The first term, Sameness, refers to the continuity of being the same to the principles or the maintain of a person's belief in the sameness of self over time in the face of continual psychological and physical change which by its turn requires Wilderness (Erik Erikson 1959). Sociologically speaking, the Sameness principle concerns a specific relation.

The sociological term of identity, by difference, has to do with a person's self-conception, social presentation, and on wide range, the features of a person that make them exceptional, or qualitatively unlike the others. For instance: ethnic identity, national identity...etc. This can be selected from one hand. In the other hand and parallel to what has been exposed in the light of identity concept, the term Continuity is very important concept.

Continuity means to continue and carry on being distinct allowing the identity to be original and different from the rest. Change is linked to the person's perceived past, producing continuity in inner psychological characteristics as well as in social behavior and in social circumstances. Continuity is thus a grand adaptive strategy that is promoted by both individual preference and social approval. As a result, Sameness and Continuity are considered as the cornerstone of personal identity. In parallel, national identity has its own characteristics.

### **I.3.2. National Identity**

National identity is one of those concepts which seem to evoke different responses. The term indicates the person's sense of belonging to a nation. This feeling is peculiar to each person. However, for sociology, it is an internalization of identity points, resulting from the permanent visibility of the "common points" of the nation, which can take the form of symbols. This visibility is, in general, organized voluntarily by the State in order to impregnate individuals from their childhood (Macmillan, 2009).

In the same meaning, Bloom identifies national identity as condition in which *“a mass of people have made the same identification with national symbols-have internalized the symbol of the nation...”* (Bloom 1990. 52). The concept of national identity also refers to the set of "common characteristics" between persons who recognize themselves as belonging to the same nation, for instance: traditions, culture, language...etc. Therefore, National Identity, as far as it is concerned, is a social, cultural and spatial condition. These characteristics are related to a political entourage, since in general, nations are associated with a state.

Nationality concept is quite close to national identity. For instance, people born in Brazil, are of Brazilian nationality and have legal documents that prove this condition. These individuals therefore have the Brazilian identity. However, the more symbolic aspect of the concept may vary depending on the case.

A person who was born in Brazil is a Brazilian individual. Later, at the age of 5 she leaves the country to go abroad. Consequently, her national identity may be lost or faded over time. If, after having lived in Brazil for the first five years, the same person lives in Australia for the next 40 years, without ever returning to his country. It is very likely that she retains her nationality from a legal point of view but not her social or cultural identity.

This sense of collective identity is quite clearly stated and defined in Charles Taylor's thoughts. He asserted that the stability of democracies requires a strong sense of commitment and attachment to one another, which creates a strong feeling of collective identity. In other words the National identity:

“A nation can only ensure the stability of its legitimacy if its members are strongly committed to one another by means of a common allegiance to the political community....In other words, a modern democratic state demands a “people” with a strong collective identity. Democracy obliges us to show much more solidarity and much more commitment to one another in our joint political project than was demanded by the hierarchical and authoritarian societies of yesterday.”

National Identity therefore is an individual's or group's sense of self over time. Though both of them have identities, but the former define their identities in context of the latter which leads to the possibility of having multiple identities; cultural, economic, political, social, territorial, national, and other identities. These identities are raised as an item of interaction between the self or the group and other identities which are not concrete but able to change in a given time and situation.

Obviously wars are the most frequent act made as the first step by groups of different histories, religions, and languages who generally later on became a nation. Communities developed the sense of collective identity in order to differentiate their selves from others. As the British politician Michael Howard points out that "*no nation in the true sense of the word could be born without war...no self-conscious community could establish itself as a new and independent actor on the world scene without an armed conflict or the threat of one.*" It is the same case when America breached from the British Crown through the revolutionary war.

#### **I.4. The Concept of Nationalism**

Nationalism refers merely to "*collective action designed to render the boundaries of the nation congruent with those of its governance unit*" (Hecher, 2000). More broadly the term is defined for example as "intense devotion to the nation that real or supposed community of individuals who are convinced they share a common set of traditions, beliefs and the cultural characteristics." (Zelinsky, 1998).

"What is a nation" is widely a needed question that deserves to be asked when discussing what is nationalism, for that it is a elucidated "a nation is historically constituted, stable community of people formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic culture". Definitions of nationalism can be classified into three broad approaches: Political,

Psychological and Cultural. So, historians, sociologists and scientists concerned with the construction of the nation-building that is considered a political dimension of nationalism. Nationalism functions here as an ideology that can be consciously utilized by political movements to support their targets, by which also exists at a less explicit level as a scope through which individuals understand their social world.

To study the historical origins of modern nation-states, it is substantial to use the political perspective. Lieven (2004) defines nationalism as the “devotion to an ideal, abstract, unrealized nation of one’s country, often coupled with a belief in some wider national mission to humanity”, the same definition was given by Zelinsky (1998). This is as second conception of nationalism asserts the link between the individual and a generalized image of nation which is influenced by research in political and social psychology concerning the importance of the nation for the individual identity.

Psychologists distinguish nationalism (“ a perception of national superiority and an orientation toward national dominance”. [Costerman and Feshbach 1989]) from broader concept of nationalism: “a deeply left affective attachment nation” (Conver and Feldman[ 1987]). The third approach for nationalism treats it as cultural phenomenon that is a set of shared scripts and symbols used by individuals to make sense of their world and justify their strategies of action.

#### **I.4.1 The Emergence of American Nationalism**

In the case of America, many researches on American nationalism have been concerned with the way in which the national idea gained prominence among the population of the colonies and the early republic, and how its meaning has subsequently evolved over the American history. Americans were at one time citizens of Great Britain; the inhabitants of British Colonies in North America; long after they arrived the continents, they maintained

their loyalty to the king of England. At some point, once American identity took hold, the assumption is that American Nationalist sentiments welled up throughout the colonies in the eighteenth century, there was time for most of colonists of North America when they stopped thinking of themselves and began thinking of themselves as Americans, and this process can be referred as the emergence of the American National Identity.

### **I.4.2 State and Nation Building**

With most of other countries, United State is viewed as a historically civic nation; its population was ethnically, racially and religiously diverse. According to Richard Handler, Nationalism is: ‘an ideology about individuated being concerned with bound-ness, continuity and homogeneity encompassing diversity’. Few years before prior the revolution, the colonies first began to view themselves as members of a new American nation. This was according to Savelle (1962: 903).

In the case of America such concepts of identity whether individual or national, nationalism... were very prominent when the new nation was building itself. Consequently, these concepts were widely discussed in literary productions respecting the fact that literature is the mirror of reality. The most outstanding writer who successfully described the first steps of the young nation was Crèvecoeur. His masterpiece, “*Letters from an American Farmer*” is considered a suitable reference to examine his contributions. This epistolary work is included under the genre of travel literature; a type with a remarkable significance in the world of writing.

## I.5 Travel Literature

The richness and diversity in ideas, opinions, and circumstances of people made them write in different ways. Consequently, the messages and thoughts carried through literary works were not the same. Therefore, literature was classified into several types. One considerable kind is Travel literature. It was originated in the writings of people who were led by circumstances to travel around.

It is presented as a subgenre that includes texts that capture the events, feelings and impressions of a traveler (the narrator). From a critical perspective, it can be argued that mere enumeration of facts does not constitute literature in itself. Yet, this is not a universal posture. Works that speak of adventure, conquest or explorations are also usually collected under the category of travel literature.

The travel books are dated back to the 14th century and they had been written throughout centuries. An outstanding example is viewed in the writings of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas and Bernal Díaz del Castillo. Their works about the European conquest are considered the first in the literary history of America. Later on, "*the last two decades of the eighteenth century produced a new type of travel writer*" (Crevecoeur's Eighteenth-Century Travels in Pennsylvania and New York, 1961).

The most well known writer in that new wave was Crevecoeur. He contributed to the improvement of American travel literature. He was a travel author who belongs to the new generation. However, he gathered both types of travel writing: the old one that is based on a descriptive, neuter and geographical sort of writing. Additionally, Crevecoeur embraced the new type that cares for writer's feelings and point of view. In other words, he "*had both types of travel literature as models.*" (Crevecoeur's Eighteenth-Century Travels in Pennsylvania and New York, 1961)

## **I.6 Biographical Notes on Hector St. John de Crevecoeur**

Michel Guillaume Jean de Crevecoeur, J. Hector St John, was born to a French noble family in Caen, Normandy (1735-1813). At the age of twenty, he moved to Canada and participated in the French Indian War. He enlisted in the French Colonial Militia and became an officer. After that, he migrated to New York, where he changed his name to J. Hector St John. He also kept his French name and used it when he went to France. The name 'Crevecoeur' means in French 'Broken Heart'.

Later on, he worked as a surveyor and Indian trader which represent the reason that required him to travel across the English colonies. In 1765, he became a naturalized citizen of New York and chose farming. Consequently, he exploited being a farmer and began to write a series of essays about American life and manners in 1774. However, and before he had finished, the Revolutionary War broke. Crevecoeur, as a British sympathizer, requested permission to return to Europe. Unfortunately, he was caught and imprisoned by the British. They accused Crevecoeur of being a spy for the American side.

He returned to France after a 27 year absence. Before that, he had his essays on American life published as *Letters from an American Farmer* in London. They were reprinted across Europe, making him a literary celebrity. Later, he was appointed as a French consul to America and returned to New York where he became a well-respected diplomat.

### **I.6.1 Crevecoeur's Style of Writing**

Crevecoeur was not a historian, political scientist, or an expert in American Studies. Yet he was the first writer to look at the colonies as "America". Moreover, he was the pioneer to describe to Europeans – employing many American English terms – the life on the American frontier. Also, He could explore the concept of the American Dream. In addition to that,

Crevecoeur was able to create the sense of American nationalism and identity as well as implanting the concept of Unity in Americans.

The artistic side appeared very clearly in Crevecoeur's writings. He was known for the use of fiction as he did in his *Letters from an American farmer*. He made the political view seem just like a painting through employing nature. According to Crevecoeur, environment reflects the moral and political identity of its denizens.

Through his writings, Crevecoeur examines the functions of an individual within an agricultural community, and expresses deep skepticism of those that utilize the environment outside of a socially-constructed land ethics. According to Crevecoeur, ultimate personal freedom in America is achieved by working and owning land. Thus his works, influenced by enlightenment virtues, establishes the link between American land and freedom.

### **I.6.2 Crevecoeur's Major Works**

J. Hector St. John De Crevecoeur was truly a unique man. His works were known for their great influence on people's lives that knew him and those that would have enjoyed the chance to be able to know him.

Some of Crevecoeur's major writings are *Mémoire sur le Commerce Entre la France et les États-Unis D'Amérique* in 1784. Also, he was famous for "*Eighteenth-century travels in Pennsylvania & New York*, 1801. In addition to that, there are many other notable works that had immortalized the name of Crevecoeur mainly *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782). In these letters, he describes certain provincial situations, manners, and customs. He also conveys some ideas of the late and present interior circumstances of the British Colonies of North America.

### **I.6.3 An Overview of *Letters from an American Farmer***

Crevecoeur's work is part autobiographical memoir, part philosophical travel book, and part formal essays. They all framed as a series of twelve letters from an American farmer, named James, to a correspondent in England who is curious about the manner of life in the American colonies. In 1782 Crevecoeur's essays on American life were published in epistolary (or letter) form under the title of *Letters from an American Farmer*.

The letters showed an optimistic and idealistic view of American life at the end of the 18th century. They were reprinted in Germany, Holland, Ireland and France. The letters were very popular in France. *Letters from an American Farmer* helped to create the European view of America as a place of serenity and a paradoxical land of innocence and progress. The third letter is considered by many historians, the most important one. It is the perfect pattern to examine Crevecoeur's thoughts taking into consideration the American identity and nationalism.

### **I.6.4 Letter Three: What Is an American?**

"*What is an American?*" is the third and most famous of the twelfth letters. This letter shows the promises of American life in contrast with the decadence of Europe. In this context, America is described as an innocent land of opportunity. This letter is responsible for initiating the idea that America is a "melting pot" of various nationalities which together form a new national identity.

The letter rejects European feudalism and embraces the principles of agrarian democracy. It proves Crevecoeur's despise to the old ideas of the European class system. In his work, he accuses indirectly Europe for oppression, exploitation of the poor, poverty, and abuse of religion. Moreover, it expresses the major American enlightenment thoughts

including deism, liberalism, republicanism, and toleration. Notably, the images of American nationalism and identity are well studied through the application of the New Historicist perspective.

## **I.7 New Historicism Theory**

### **I.7.1 An Overview about New Criticism**

The importance of literature is not in its reading by the audience. Rather, literary works are written to be analysed for their value and messages. Therefore, literary theories are established to accomplish that aim. The term “Literary theory” has many definitions. For instance, the concept indicates the body of ideas and methods used in the practical reading of literature. Thanks to it, the underlying meanings of literature are revealed. As any field of study, literary theories had developed over time. Also, there are so important approaches which are well-known when talking about analyzing literature. Among them, New Criticism that was a dominant approach during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.

That theory focused on the form of the literary text rather than historical, authorial or reader concerns. New Criticism claimed that the emphasis should be on the close reading of the text itself, as an independent entity and not upon the external circumstances, or effects. According to this theory, it is not important to know about the author’s biography or his historical or cultural background. Instead, a critic should pay attention to the only present elements of the text.

Therefore, the text is the cornerstone of New Criticism. It tackles its components including imagery, metaphor, rhyme, meter, and tries to find the meaning as well as the beauty of the text. In the other words, New Criticism as a literary theory tends to emphasize the text as an auto-telic artifact, something complete within itself and written for its own sake.

New Criticism is included under the formalist criticism since it focuses on literary work's formal and technical properties such as form, style, and language. Thus, it ignores the historical context of a literary work. However; this theory was not totally accepted by critics. For that reason, other approaches had appeared notably New Historicism.

### **I.7.2 New Historicism Theory**

The term suggests that it is a new view of literature that emerged in a response to formalist criticism known as New Criticism and Russian formalist. New Historicism is a recent critical approach based on the idea of interpreting the context of both the history of the author and the history of the critic .In addition to that ,It is based on the parallel reading of literary text and non literary text of the same historical context.

Moreover, it is a label to describe the studies carried out in the early 1980s by scholars particularly in Renaissance studies. A number of names were given to this approach by New Historicism including: “Cultural Historicism”, “historical materialist Criticism”, and “cultural poetics”. Its main concern is to draw attention to the close connection between cultural text and history whatever the name was. Generally, New Historicism is originated as a reaction to New Criticism. However, there is a detailed story behind its emergence in the scope of literature as any body of knowledge.

### **I.7.3 Origin of New Historicism**

New Historicism developed and became popular during the 1980s by Stephen Greenblatt. In his “*Renaissance Self- Fashioning: from More to Shakespeare*”, he declared the major characteristics of New Historicism. Greenblatt preferred to call his project “Cultural poetic. Later on, he invented the phrase “New Historicism”. It was as a rebuttal to the New Criticism theory. Actually, it is rooted in Marxism and shares some connections with Postmodernism.

In fact, New Historicism was not a new branch of literary theory. Simply, the critics had taken old theories and applied the analysis of historical content to their interpretations.

#### **I.7.4 Prominent figures of New Historicism**

Each field is known for its prominent figures that have widened the field and contributed in developing it. In the context of New Historicism, there are many critics who innovated and influenced the field. Perhaps, the most popular names in this approach are Stephen Greenblatt (1943) and Hippolyte Adolph Taine (1828-1893).

Greenblatt was an American literary critic, theorist and scholar. He is regarded as one of the founders of New Historicism by many historians. Sharma claims that Greenblatt's works have been influential since the early 1980s when he introduced the term "Cultural Poetics" (which became New Historicism). Numerous books and articles relevant to New Historicism have been written and edited by Greenblatt. "*The study of culture*", "*Renaissance studies*" and "*Shakespeare studies*" made him an expert in these domains.

Another prominent figure of New Historicism theory is Hippolyte Adolph Taine. He is a French critic and historian .He argued that literary work is less the product of its author's imaginations than the social circumstances of its creation. Taine is famous for his three main aspects which he called race (nation), milieu (environment), and moment (time). In addition to Greenblatt and Taine, many other prominent critics left their print in the field of New Historicism theory such as Jonathan Goldberg, Jean Howard, Edward Pechter, Catherine, Louis Advain Montrose and D.A. Miller at U.C, San Diego.

#### **I.7.5 Major Tenets**

To understand literature, one must understand culture and society which produced it. Instead of dealing with a text in isolation from its historical context, New Historicists attend

primarily “to the historical and cultural conditions of its production, its meaning, its effects and also its later critical interpretations and evolutions” (Abram, 1999: 182- 183). Therefore, literature is historical which means that New Historicists read texts and their contexts together because they see them as expressions of the same historical moment.

Consequently, New Historicism paves the way for a deeper interpretation of the literary text. It explores how social, economic, political, psychological, sexual and aesthetic phenomena as a historical forces interact with the cultural text (Cox and Reynolds, 1993:3). In other words, New Historicism doesn’t differentiate literary texts from non literary ones. Rather, it encompasses a parallel reading of both. This is the major difference between New Historicism and its old counterpart.

The previous historical criticism pays more attention and limits itself to the confines of the literary work. However, New Historicists evaluate how the work is influenced by the surrounding context. They express how the text is a reflection of its time in which it was produced. For example, the context may include the social sphere in which the author lived, the psychological background of the author, the books and theories that may have influenced him, and others. Thus, New Historicism gives equal weighting to literary and non-literary material.

Among the prominent New Historicists are Richard Wilson and Richard Dutton. In the introduction of their collection of essays *New Historicism and Renaissance Dram*; they use Shakespeare’ writings as an example to illustrate their theory. Additionally, they tackle the difference between the old and the new approaches:

Where [earlier] criticism had mystified Shakespeare as an incarnation of spoken English, it [New Historicism] found the plays embedded in other *written texts*, such as penal, medical and colonial documents. Read within this archival continuum, what they represented was not harmony but the violence of the puritan attack on carnival, the imposition of slavery, the rise of patriarchy, the hounding

of deviance, and the crashing of prison gates during what Foucault called ‘the Age of confinement, at the down of carceral society. (Wilson and Dutton, 1992: 8)

Furthermore, the Montrose makes a distinction between literature and history. He indicates that New Historicism is new “*in its refusal of traditional distinctions between literature and history, between text and context; new in resisting a traditional opposition of the privileged individual – whether an author or a work – to a work outside*” (Montrose in Parker and Quit, 1986: 304). The uses of culture in New Historicism differ from the other approaches as Marxism and sociology. Notably, culture is one of the distinguishing traits of New Historicism. That approach was borrowed from Clifford Geertz, an American cultural anthropologist. Geertz asserting that human beings are cultural artifacts brought anthropology closer to the practices of literary studies. In his essay, “*The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man*”, Geertz reflects the idea that man is a cultural product:

Our ideas, our values, our acts, even our emotions, are, like our nervous system itself, cultural products – products manufactured, indeed, out of tendencies, capacities, and dispositions with which we were born, but manufactured nonetheless. Chartres is made of stone and glass. But it is not just stone and glass; it is a cathedral, and not only a cathedral, but a particular cathedral built at a particular time by certain members of a particular society. To understand what it means, to perceive what it is, you need to know rather more than the generic properties of stone and glass and rather more than what is common to all cathedrals [...] It is no different with men: they, too, every last one of them, are cultural artifacts(Geertz, 1973: 51).

Geertz argues that culture is a major component in forming human beings, rather than being an addition to human life that is developed after biological core. Therefore, human beings are actually required to be cultural symbols and signs in order to function at all. Geertz also declares that “*There is no such a thing as a human nature independent of culture [ ...] without men , no culture , certainly ;but equally and more significantly ,without culture ,no men*”( Geertz, 1973 : 94).

One of the most important concepts in New Historicism is Geertz’s “Thick description”. It means “*an analysis of the conditions of cultural production*” (Rayan, 1996: 96). It proposes

focusing in the impact of the text in a network of practices instead of seeking the meaning of a text in the intention or mental content of either the author or the work.

“Thick description” distinguishes New Historicism from formalism by locating the meaning of the text neither in the text alone nor in some general pre-existing background. For that reason, New Historicist critics interpret texts as cultural events not as general historical phenomena. As Gallagher and Greenblatt argue on Geertz’s Thick description of cultural text:

strengthened the insistence that the things that draw us [new historicists] to literature are often found in the non-literary, that the concept of literariness is deeply unstable, that the boundaries between different types of narratives are subject to interrogation and revision. (Gallagher and Greenblatt, 2000: 30)

There is no place in New Historicism for faith in “objectivity”, “permanence” and direct recreation of the past. Rather, there is a stress upon “*The process by which the past is constructed or invented*” (Cox and Reynolds, 1993: 3). New Historicists tend to see all texts as “*objects and events in the work, as a part of human life, society, the historical realities of power and authority*” (Cox and Reynolds, 1993: 3).

Generally, the principles of the New Historicist method can be summarized in the following points. First, literature is historical, social and cultural construct shaped by more than one consciousness. Then, the appropriate way to understand it is through the culture and society that produced it. In addition to that, literature is not a distinct category of human activity. It must be assimilated to history. Moreover, like words of literature, man himself is a social construct, a composition of social and political forces since here is no such thing as human nature that transcends history.

To conclude, New Historicism asserts that a literary text as any other phenomenon is formed by the special conditions of time and place. It should be discussed in its own context which means the social and cultural patterns of the era in which it is produced. Therefore, it cannot be well understood unless one considers these accompanying influences.

# **Chapter Two:**

## **Forging the American National Identity in Crèvecoeur's What is an American?**

## II.1 The Reflection of American Enlightenment Principles in *What is an American?*

The changes which occur in the human societies are influenced by many external factors. For instance, the intellectual movements which play an important role in shaping reality and enlightenment are not an exception. In the case of America, the former was a vital element in paving the way for building the young nation's identity and nationalism. In line with this, the American critic Elayne Antler Rapping proclaims that the Age of Enlightenment was also "*the age in which a new nation was being established on a newly settled land*"(qtd in Yu 97). In other words, enlightenment coincided with the process of building the American nation. More precisely, there was what is known American enlightenment.

During the eighteenth century, enlightenment spread to the new discovered continent where the American version was born. It is remarked that the American intellectuals kept the same core tenets of the movement as their European counterparts. Therefore, American Enlightenment was "*a movement marked by an emphasis on rationality rather than tradition, scientific inquiry instead of unquestioning religious dogma, and representative government in place of monarchy*" (Katheryn 18).

Moreover, the natural rights of man were embraced by Enlightenment thinkers and writers in both Europe and America. Their writings "*were devoted to the ideals of justice, liberty, and equality*"( 16). One of the American enlightenment figures is Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, whose *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) draw the features of American enlightenment.

Probably, Crèvecoeur is one of the outstanding writers who should be mentioned when talking about American identity and nationalism during the age of enlightenment. He was the first to express the complex of literary and philosophic ideas which came together in eighteenth-century. The enlightenment ideas were clearly conveyed through Crèvecoeur's writings especially in his *letters from an American farmer*. This piece is an epistolary work written in twelve letters.

Notably, the third letter which is entitled *What Is an American?* is very interesting to study. It is the best example to explore Crèvecoeur's view of enlightenment. In this letter, the author declares that he wishes he "*could be acquainted with the feelings and thoughts which must agitate the heart and present themselves to the mind of an enlightened Englishman when he first lands on this continent*" (Crèvecoeur 01). One can understand from this quote that Crèvecoeur is focusing on the intellectuality of Americans as an enlightened people.

Additionally, Crèvecoeur assists the principles of enlightenment which depend on the use of reason and logic instead of guessing and hope. He declares himself as a thinker not as a wisher (02). Generally, the enlightenment premises which are discussed in *What is an American?* are mainly deism, republicanism, liberalism, and toleration.

### **II.1.1 Deism**

The enlightenment protagonists were secular in their outlook. Enlightenment was against traditional religion since its thinkers had preferred the formula reason versus the Church. In other words, they did believe in God, even if they were hostile to the Church. The enlightened people mainly held Belief in an original Creator; a God who had not intervened in worldly affairs since Creation. Thus, they declined the Church's claim to mediation between divinity and humanity. For such thinkers, evidence for God and a rational or natural religion'

lay in the qualities (especially reason and conscience) of an unchanging human nature and the frame of nature itself.

European Enlightenment thinkers considered tradition, custom and prejudice as barriers to gaining true knowledge of the universal laws of nature. The solution was deism or understanding God's existence away from holy books, divine providence, revealed religion, prophecy and miracles. Deists were typically Protestants who shared a disdain for the religious dogmatism and blind obedience to tradition exemplified by the Catholic Church.

Rather than fight members of the Catholic faith with violence and intolerance, most deists resorted to the use of tamer weapons such as humour and mockery. Both moderate and radical American Enlightenment thinkers, such as James Madison, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, John Adams, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson were deists. Some struggled with the tensions between Calvinist orthodoxy and deist beliefs.

The concept of God was the cornerstone in deist thinking. For instance, Thomas Jefferson's *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth* which was known also as the Jefferson Bible. In this work, Jefferson deals with the life of Jesus Christ from a deist perspective. The reason behind this is that Jefferson eliminates all mention of miracles or divine intervention. The entity of God for deists such as Jefferson never loomed large in humans' day-to-day life beyond offering a moral or humanistic outlook and the resource of reason to discover the content of God's laws. Despite the near absence of God in human life, American deists did not deny His existence. That was because the majority of the populace still remained strongly religious, traditionally pious and supportive of the good works.

As an American author who believes in enlightenment principles, Crèvecoeur mentions deism in his third letter. He appreciates God as a reasonable Deity who endowed humans with rationality in order that they might discover the moral instructions of the universe in the natural law. Crèvecoeur declares that the Americans “*must trust to the great Creator.*” (Crèvecoeur 07). In other words, the great Creator is God created the universal laws that govern nature, and afterwards humans realize God’s will through sound judgment and wise action. Therefore, humans should believe in him to achieve moral values such as freedom and liberty. These values can be expressed in republicanism and liberalism.

### **II.1.2 Republicanism**

The type of governance is not the same all over the world. There are countries which determine the state’s highest public authority through heredity. In other words, some governments are under the rule of monarchy. However, in other nations, the state’s public official is determined by a general election. The latter is an example of republicanism which is deeply rooted to enlightenment. In short, it was considered as the ideology of that movement (Wood 19).

The Enlightenment was, as Peter Gay has called it, “*the rise of modern paganism,*” considering classical republicanism as its creed. In the eighteenth century to be enlightened was to be interested in antiquity, and to be interested in antiquity was to be interested in republicanism (Wood 19). The antiquity writers such as the Roman ones as Cicero, Virgil, Sallust, and Tacitus established republican ideals and values about politics and society that have had a powerful and lasting effect on Western culture.

These classical ideals and values were revived and refurbished by the Italian Renaissance-becoming what has been variously called "civic humanism" or "classical republicanism". After that, they were carried into early modern Europe (19). In that time, it was a remarkable extent to which the thinking of eighteenth century educated Englishmen on both sides of the Atlantic was republicanised in substance (19). Thus, republicanism influenced Europeans as well as Americans during the age of enlightenment.

Obviously, the American Enlightenment promoted the idea that a nation should be governed as a republic. Therefore, the state's head is popularly elected, not appointed through a hereditary blood-line. The North American colonists became increasingly convinced that British rule was corrupt and inimical to republican values. For that reason, they joined militias and eventually formed the American Continental Army under George Washington's leadership. When he was elected to the highest office of the land, Washington famously demurred when offered a royal title, preferring instead the more republican title of President.

During the founding era, America was the only place where every man could have a land. The Jack Greene notes that the "*widespread possession of landed property...turned the Colonies into societies in which virtually' every [free] Male Inhabitant became a Freeholder, and by consequence entitled to a share in the Government of the Province*". From this viewpoint, it is clear that property-based personality is common among the Americans. Such a characteristic is one of the vital principles of republicanism. Yet, there are other important accompanying values.

Additionally, republican values include mainly civic patriotism and virtuous citizenship. In line with this, Crèvecoeur states that the Americans are ranked as citizens (Crèvecoeur 03). Additionally and as it is supposed in a republic government, the life of the Americans is ruled by fair laws. Crèvecoeur describes them as “*indulgent laws*” (03) which protect the citizens in their different lives (03).

Classic republicanism differed from early liberalism in terms of natural rights. From the republican point of view, the rights were not thought to be naturally granted by God as the case in liberalism. However, they were the products of living in political society. For instance, classical republican views liberty as a practise within the context of existing social relations, historical associations and traditional communities. Whereas liberalism considers it as autonomous activity set apart from social and political ties.

In this way, liberty for the classical republican is positively defined by the political society instead of negatively defined in terms of the pre-social individual’s natural rights. No one can deny the scholarly debate which persists over the relative importance of liberalism and republicanism during the American Revolution and Founding. Yet, the view that republican ideas were a formative influence on American Enlightenment thinking has gained widespread acceptance. On the other hand, liberalism had also its own effect on the American enlightenment.

### **II.1.3 Liberalism**

Everyone wants to live under equality and liberty; these principles are the cornerstone of what is known as Liberalism. As its counterpart republicanism, the ideology of liberalism first became a distinct political movement during the Age of Enlightenment. Later on, when the enlightenment had first reached America, the same key ideas were kept by the founding fathers. Liberalism was among these core concepts. In brief, the notion means that humans

have natural rights and government authority is not absolute, but based on the will and consent of the governed populace.

In this way, liberal thinking was anti-authoritarian. It favored a parliamentary form of government that protected liberty of expression and movement. For instance, on the American land “*man is free as he ought to be; nor is this pleasing equality so transitory as many others are*” (Crevecoeur 02). In addition, it sponsored the right to petition the government, separation of church and state, and the confluence of public and private interests in philanthropic and entrepreneurial endeavors.

The principal claim of liberalism is that private individuals have fundamental God-given rights. For example, they include property, life, liberty and to pursue their conception of good. It began with the English philosopher John Locke. Later on, it was expressed in Thomas Jefferson’s “*The Declaration of Independence*”. Furthermore, The U.S. Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the Constitution, guarantees a schedule of individual rights based on the liberal ideal. Similarly, in *What is An American?* Crevecoeur claims that the Americans citizens “*will carefully read the news- papers, enter into every political disquisition, freely blame or censure governors and others*” (05). In short, it protected citizens against state governments.

Another important theme which developed in parallel with liberalism was toleration. The American creed revolved around the ideals of representative government, equal opportunity, and a freedom of religion. The reason behind the last element is that Americans believe in toleration of difference.

## II.1.4 Toleration

During the age of the enlightenment there was a general increase in toleration; people with opposing views should be able to live peacefully alongside each other. In fact, John Locke was the first prominent figure to discuss the concept of toleration under the umbrella of enlightenment. In his *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, Locke argued that government is ill-equipped to judge the rightness or wrongness of opposing religious doctrines.

Therefore, faith could not be coerced and if attempted the result would be greater religious and political disorder. So, civil government ought to protect liberty of conscience, the right to worship as one chooses (or not to worship at all) and refrain from establishing an official state-sanctioned church. In fact, Many American Enlightenment thinkers, including Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, read and agreed with John Locke's thoughts.

Perhaps, religious tolerance is an outstanding example about toleration. This aspect is quite clear in *What is an American?* For instance, people can convert to another religion if they want. Religious meetings and church associations are allowed (Crevecoeur 06). In brief, they are at liberty to practise their distinctive ceremonies. Using different examples about the religious life in America, Crevecoeur shows "*how religious indifference becomes prevalent*" (Crevecoeur 06) on the American soil during enlightenment.

According to Crevecoeur, "*one of the strongest characteristics of the Americans*" (07) is the religious freedom; which was common throughout the Americans at that time. The letter portrays this during that period; all the religious congregations were living in a peaceful world. However, conflict and persecution was the prevailing scene in Europe when talking about religion. On the American land, no one is persecuted because of their religious

background. In an American town, the Catholic citizen lives peacefully beside his Lutheran and Seceded neighbours (07). Moreover, this aspect influenced the American political life.

Unlike the other western nations, the United States did not claim an established church or an official religion. The reason behind the previous fact is that "*religious freedom is one of the central constitutional principles of the United States*" (Finkelman 01). In America, religious tests for public, civilian, or military offices are considered as forbidden. The ban is originated in the US Constitution written in 1787 (01).

## **II.2 The American Notion of Identity**

### **II.2.1 Contrast of Europe and America**

Since the pilgrims had put their first steps on the American soil, they felt themselves as special people. Accordingly, they lived the difference between the new discovered land and the old European continent. They "*arrived on a new continent; a modern society...different from what [they] had hitherto seen*" (Crevecoeur 01). Therefore, their established society was framed by the novelty which characterised the new world. As a true reflection to the American life at that time, *letters from an American Farmer* by Crevecoeur convey a detailed description about it mainly the third letter. In this work, America as a magical piece free of the encrusted beliefs, customs, and traditions that had disfigured European society (Grestle 524). In the same line, Crevecoeur states:

Thus are our first steps trod, thus are our first trees felled, in general, by the most vicious of our people; and thus the path is opened for the arrival of a second and better class, the true American freeholders; the most respectable set of people in this part of the world: respectable for their industry, their happy independence, the great share of freedom they possess, the good regulation of their families (Crevecoeur 09)

In *What is an American?* Crèvecoeur establishes a semiotic binary between what an American is and what a European is. In fact, the work is a good representative of American thinking. It depicts how this new thought is counterpoised against the privileged assumptions of European readers. It establishes a set of parallel value associations which remain potent in contemporary American sentiments such as rural urban, simple intellectual, American European, physical labour and mental labour.( Garrett Dash Nelson 34). The linking of the previous elements is critical not only in Crèvecoeur's own portrayal of American life, but also in establishing an American ethno-cultural system in which rural life is historically orthogonal to life in the cities.( 35).

Throughout the letter, there are three animating beliefs that Crèvecoeur shares with many of his contemporaries which were to shape the difference between America and Europe. There is, first, the belief that American nature is superior to European culture which is older than even “the half-ruined amphitheatres”. However, the virgin nature in the world is subject to perpetual, seasonal renewal, much newer and fresher.

Nature is one of the major differences in this contrast. Unlike the European, the American land is a new discovered piece of earth. The first comers to America could not hide “*Their astonishment at their first arrival..., it is to them a dream*”(Crèvecoeur 12).Crèvecoeur deduces that “*The contrast must be powerful indeed*” (12) for a reaction like this. The natural richness and the environmental variety there was truly astonishing. They were literally “*fatigued with luxury, riches, and pleasures*” (14) of the old world. In this wild paradise, the immigrants really found “*a sweet relaxation in a series of interesting scenes as affecting as they are new*” (14).

Second, Crèvecoeur claims the belief that America is the place where the oppressed of Europe can find freedom and independence as “tillers of the earth.” Social classes have no

existence in the new land. All people are equal unlike the hierarchical classification in the old world. America, as Crèvecoeur declares, is “*not composed, as in Europe, of great lords who possess everything, and a herd of people who have nothing*”. (01). In the new world, people consider themselves as “*equal*” (11). Instead of “*being employed by a haughty person*”, they are hired, go to work, and work moderately. The worker there enjoy high wages and “*his bed is not like that bed of sorrow on which he used to lie.*” (11).

In the old world, people were exploited by lords and nobility. Their efforts were used to increase the wealth of the high class. However, in the new world the same opportunities were offered to every individual:

“From nothing to start into being, from a servant to the rank of a master; from being the slave of some despotic prince to become a free man, invested with lands, to which every municipal blessing is annexed! What a change indeed! It is in consequence of that change that he becomes an American.”(Crèvecoeur 11)

What can be understood from what has been mentioned earlier is that the social status of people had been changed since the immigration to the new world. They enjoyed more rights and dignity. In brief, they became no more slaves. On this new land “*each person works for himself.*” (02)

The new man at the centre of this perfect society reflects the third belief animating this book. The American, as Letters describes him, is the product of “*the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds.*” (04). The narrator proudly declares “*here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men.*” (04). This is the main difference between the new American individual and the old European:

Europe contains hardly any other distinctions but lords and tenants. This fair country alone is settled by freeholders, the possessors of the soil they cultivate, members of the government they obey, and the framers of their own laws by means of their representatives. This is a thought which you have taught me to

cherish our difference from Europe, far from diminishing, rather adds to our usefulness and consequence as men and subjects. (Crèvecoeur 09)

Generally, the new world offered a golden “*opportunity for something like a new beginning*” (Zuckert05). The New World seems to be a classless society, and everyone stands on an equal footing with one another. In America, there are “*no aristocratic families, no courts, no kings, no bishops, no ecclesiastical dominion, and no invisible power giving to a few a very visible one...*” Here in this “*great American asylum*”(1), was a melting pot of many nations “*whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world*”(4).

Crèvecoeur’s idyllic vision of bucolic America would become sullied by the mutual suspicions, enmities, and acts of violence between neighbours brought about by the Revolution. His characterizations nonetheless point to an American whose character, once separated from the suffocating yoke of European monarchies was able to experience the rewards of industry and self-reliance for the first time. Additionally, he became conversant with the ideas and principles that would become the Declaration of Independence.

Enlightenment intellectuals, especially the French philosophers, provided Crèvecoeur with a whole array of ideals to imagine a new society on the new soil. Taking his cue especially from the physiocrats, Crèvecoeur invented Farmer James and established him “*as one of the nation’s most potent and seductive cultural archetypes*”(Carlson, “Farmer versus Lawyer” 258). Crèvecoeur’s European past finally dragged him back to the earth. The Letters transatlantically allows the reader to see the Americanness of Farmer James as well as his Europeanness. We see in him the American Farmer, “the new man,” as well as the old colonial planter. Crèvecoeur forges a new language for readers to imagine a new world (His-hsi Yu) different from the old one. Consequently, people who were living there began to establish both a new identity and nationality.

## II.2.2 The Image of an American: Personal Identity

When the immigrants were establishing their new lives in the new world, they started also building their American identity. They no more felt themselves as Europeans. Rather, they were impressed by the novelty and the trends which occurred in the newly settled colonies. Accordingly, in his famous passage, Crèvecoeur writes:

“What then is the American, this new man? ....He is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. He becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our great Alma Mater.” (04).

The general idea of the quote above is that the settlers had literally changed the modes of their lives and adopted new different ones to be able to live in the American wilderness. Therefore, they did not consider themselves as individuals from the different European countries. In fact, they saw themselves as Americans. An American is an active citizen and willing participant in society. He is not bound by conventional dogma; he seeks liberation from conventional history and the resurgence of innocence and youth (McClay, 4). An American looks toward the future, not the past.

What is remarkable concerning the New American character is the notable influence of acquiring land upon him. Crèvecoeur portrays the American individual as an image mainly dominant by farming (Madachy 37). Indeed, it is agreed that Hector St. Jean de Crèvecoeur created perhaps the most overt connection between the “American” and his land. The author of *What is an American?* Continually enumerates the values of land ownership, revealing it as a source of identity for Americans. Crèvecoeur’s very opening sentence, in the third letter to a friend in Europe, instantly connects him to the land as he hails his friend: “*Behold, sir, a humble American planter, a simple cultivator of the earth*” (Crèvecoeur 11).

The author's comments about the individual being shaped by the land he comes from are similar to Shepard's own observations about his connection to the place where he grew up. During his self-imposed three-year exile in England, Shepard gained a new perspective on his homeland. In a 1974 interview (while still living in London), he says, *"I mean it wasn't until I came to England that I found out what it means to be an American. Nothing really makes sense when you're there, but the more distant you are from it, the more the implications of what you grew up with start to emerge"* (Chubb et al. 198). Shepard asserts that the individual's connection to place even affects speech patterns: *"I have a feeling that the cultural environment one is raised in predetermines a rhythmical relationship to the use of words. In this sense, I can't be anything other than an American writer* (Shepard, "Language" 52).

Another major characteristic of the American individual is self-reliance. The American is a new man who depends on himself and only himself in his striving for life. In other words, the American's *"labour is founded on the basis of nature, self-interest."*(Crevecoeur 4). The American works for himself and his loved ones. Yet the contribution he makes to his community and society is freely given, without fear or favour. Describing a prosperous and thriving America in this way lends to the contention that Crevecoeur viewed the assiduous man as a critical part of the foundation of this country (Professor Kari Miller 3).

Generally, Crevecoeur was the first to express in literature a fundamental American attribute: the ability to question one's own identity (Manuela Albertone). Crevecoeur declares that the American *"must therefore entertain new ideas and form new opinions. From involuntary idleness, servile dependence, penury, and useless labour, he has passed to toils of a very different nature, rewarded by ample subsistence."*(Crevecoeur 04). In fact, Crevecoeur is viewed as the earliest European to develop a considered vision of America and the new American character (outline of the American literature 18).

As it is clear throughout the third letter, James, the narrator, elaborates on how “*Europeans become Americans*”.( Crevecoeur 11). He describes the process in detail and then concludes: “*What an epocha[sic] in this man’s life! He became a freeholder, from perhaps a German boor. He is now an American*” (83). Therefore, on the newly settled land, a new man is born: the American. He is a self- reliant person who feels the strong connection to his land. Accordingly, this point paves the way to discuss the American national identity.

### **II.2.3 The Image of Americans: National Identity**

The Americans felt themselves as new and different individuals. Thus, they saw it necessary to be united under specific rules, customs, and attitudes. Subsequently, their national identity was created. In line with this, Crevecoeur defines in economic terms the change that had produced the American national identity. In doing so, he gives rise to a new social hierarchy based on land: “*On it is founded our rank, our freedom, our power as citizens, our importance as inhabitants of such a district...*”( Crevecoeur 10 ). This is what may be called the true and the only philosophy of an American farmer (ManuelaAlbertone).

It is commonly agreed that the 1700s marked the beginning of the United States national identity. Therefore, the main question to ask in this context is “what is the American identity?” Or in the words of the writer J. Hector St. John De Crevecoeur, “*What is an American, this new man?*” (4).

It is hard to accurately define what the American identity is. However, research shows one unmistakable characteristic which is that America’s identity is based on ideas. Unlike Ireland, whose identity is based on a unifying religion, or Britain united around its monarch, America’s identity is built on abstract ideas with the intent of making them concrete (Zelinsky16). Influenced by the Enlightenment and the white male elite of the time, the

American national identity was formed by three major ideas which are liberty, individualism, and republicanism (Nye 47; Gellert 21 and Mann 47).

The Enlightenment advocated the rights of the individual, especially in government. The government was a representative of people and if a time ever arose that the government neglected people, then they had the right to oust the government (Delouche 270). Individuals are guaranteed certain liberties simply because they are human and these rights cannot be taken away. The Enlightenment was about breaking away from tradition, repelling the shackles of authority, and emphasizing the individual. America did just that when it became the first colony to break away from the Mother Country. In America, “All men are by nature free...No man has a right to any authority over another without his consent” wrote James Wilson of Pennsylvania, who later signed The Declaration of Independence (Nye, 314).

Another principle that forms a cornerstone of the American national identity is equality: equality of opportunity and equality of rights (312, 314). Every American regardless of birth order, religion, or trade had the same chance for improvement and success. Equality was seen as a natural right of the individual; it was not something given by the government and nor could it be taken away.

According to Crèvecoeur, there is a very important element in forging American identity. It is its ability to be built through the successful synthesis of people with distinctive origins. There is no sense of threat posed by immigrants, provided they leave old customs and beliefs behind and embrace a “new” American identity (Fraga and Segura 208). In the third letter, the narrator claims:

What, then, is the American, this new man? He is either an European or the descendant of an European; hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. I could point out to you a family whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son

married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations. *He* is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. He becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our great Alma mater. Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world. (Crevecoeur 4)

Therefore, what is an American? Extrapolating from those ideas, an American is an individual who acts on reason and principles, a new breed of man. Americans are not English; Americans are multicultural beings who have arisen from the melting pot of England, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Sweden, Scotland, and Ireland.

Generally, Crevecoeur states that Americans enjoy a set of characteristics. Through the words of protagonist James, the American attributes are summarized in the following points: “*Industry, good living, selfishness, litigiousness, country politics, the pride of freemen, religious indifference*”(Crevecoeur 05). The purpose of this statement is showing the unique traits which the Americans share in common. In other words, there is no other nation except the Americans who can have such a specific set of qualities together.

Signing the Declaration of Independence in 1776 by all the thirteen colonies was a turning point in the American History. In the same context, the scholar Alexander Ziegler clarifies:

At some point a sense of American identity took hold. The assumption is that American nationalist sentiments welled up throughout the colonies in the 18th century. There was a time for most of the colonists of North America when they stopped thinking of themselves as British and began thinking of themselves as American. This process can be referred to as the emergence of American national identity.( 347)

The colonists proved to the Mother Country that an American national identity was emerging. In the case of the United States, the people established an identity before they could win the “status of nationhood” (Rossiter 39). Consequently, it was also a period in which the American nationalism emerged.

### **II.3 The Emanation of American Nationalism**

Throughout the world, people share the same feeling towards their nations. They love, respect, and glorify their countries. In other words, they feel the so-called concept nationalism. According to the scholars Citrin and colleagues (1994:2), “*nationalism is successful when it takes precedence over available alternative foci of affiliation such as kinship, religion, economic interest, race or language.*” Nationalism is the strongest feeling that the citizens can encounter. “How close do you feel to your [town or city; state; America; North America].” Respondents were about twice as likely (51 percent) to report feeling “very close” to “America” than to any other region or political unit( Bonikowski 6, Bart, and Paul DiMaggio, 2016.

In the third letter, Crèvecoeur was especially fascinated because of his mixed background: born in France, he spent time in England and Canada before settling as a planter in New York State. His question “*What then is the American, this new man?*” discusses very clearly the notions of identity and nationalism. Answering his own question, Crèvecoeur then suggests that “*the American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions.*” That was a common theme in literature surrounding the American Revolution. As the American colonies became a new nation, the United States of America, writers and many others applied themselves to the task of announcing just what this new nation represented, and what the character and best hopes of the American might be.

It is remarkable that the most discussed point by Crèvecoeur concerning the American nationalism is the sense of pride of being an American. Indeed, Crèvecoeur gives a glowing idea of opportunities for peace, wealth, and mainly pride in America. The new man “*must greatly rejoice that he lived at a time to see this fair country discovered and settled; he must necessarily feel a share of national pride, when he views the chain of settlements which embellishes these extended shores. When he says to himself, this is the work of my countrymen*” (Crèvecoeur 13)

The new settlers started to feel nationalism towards America since the latter offered for them many opportunities that did not exist in Europe. Therefore, they felt America as their true nation. In line with this, Crèvecoeur states, “*it is here, then, that the idle may be employed, the useless become useful, and the poor become rich, but by riches, I do not mean gold and silver. We have but little of those metals. I mean a better sort of wealth: cleared lands, cattle, good houses*” (10). In other words, the new land meant employment, wealth, and better conditions for the immigrants. The experience of living on the American land literally highlighted the difference between the old and the new world:

There is no wonder that this country has so many charms, and presents to Europeans so many temptations to remain in it. A traveller in Europe becomes a stranger as soon as he quits his own kingdom; but it is otherwise here. We know, properly speaking, no strangers. This is every person's country; the variety of our soils, situations, climates, governments, and produce, hath something that must please everybody. No sooner does a European arrive, no matter of what condition, than his eyes are opened upon the fair prospect. (Crèvecoeur 10)

What can be understood from the quote above is that the new life on the new discovered land instilled new feelings and emotions in the hearts and minds of the American citizens; it was nationalism. In *What is an American?*, the farmer James describes the situation in his own words: “*new laws, a new mode of living, a new social system. Here they are become men. In Europe they were as so many useless plants*”.( 03). Additionally, the new

settlers experienced their true value as human beings whereas they were neglected and disrespected in Europe. The author of the letters wonders if those people could “*call England or any other kingdom [their] country?*”(Crevecoeur 03). In America, every human has a place there (10)

Throughout the letters, the sense of nationalism for the European countries had disappeared in the lives of the inhabitants. Instead of it, they felt such a feeling for the new American land. Crevecoeur depicts this situation:

He involuntarily loves a country where everything is so lovely. When in England, he was a mere Englishman; here he stands on a larger portion of the globe, not less than its fourth part, and may see the productions of the north, in iron and naval stores; the provisions of Ireland, the grain of Egypt, the indigo, the rice of China. He does not find, as in Europe, a crowded society, where every place is overstocked; he does not feel that perpetual collision of parties, that difficulty of beginning, that contention which over sets so many.( 10)

The wind of change is very clear in the words of Crevecoeur. Almost, everything had changed in the lives of those people. Their lifestyles, social status, jobs.... For that reason, their thinking and prospects concerning nationalism had changed also. In his part, Crevecoeur describes the circumstances of that period: “*What an epoch in this man’s life! He is become a freeholder: from perhaps a German boor, he is now an American, a Pennsylvanian. He is naturalized; his name is enrolled with those of the other citizens of the province.....He is called the inhabitant of such a county or of such a district*” (11).

Generally, the concept of nationalism was born on the American land because of many shifts. People had moved from Europe and different parts of the world to settle in the new discovered land. They experienced the newness in every detail in their lives. Moreover, their feelings of nationalism towards their mother countries had changed also. However, they began to regard America as their true country since it offered them all what they lacked in

their homelands. The emergence of the American nationalism is mainly related to the political and psychological sides.

### **II.3.1 Political background**

Politics is viewed as a key term in the history of any country. Nations cannot be considered so unless they have political backgrounds. In addition, the term enjoys a very special relationship with the concept of nationalism. In the case of America, this opinion is confirmed obviously through the pens of the writers at that period. Notably, in his *Letters from an American Farmer* and exactly in *what is an American?* J. Hector St. John De Crevecoeur seems to capture that link between politics and nationalism.

Crevecoeur claims that the American government “*is derived from the original genius and strong desire of the people, ratified and confirmed by government. This is the great chain which links us all ;*” (Crevecoeur 03). It is quite clear, through the words of Crevecoeur, that the American unity and nationalism is deeply linked to the government. This latter is the concrete expression of politics.

The case of the emergence of American nationalism can be seen as an exception. National identities are typically founded on a common language, religion, or ethnic heritage. American identity, however, is ideological in nature, defined in terms of a commitment to a set of values and political principles (Gleason 1980; Huntington 1981; Harrington 1980; Citrin, Reingold & Green 1990). In other words, the diversity of people who settled in America did not affect their sense of unity and nationalism. Rather, they were politically united under specific political principles.

In his classic study on American society, Gunnar Myrdal (1962:3) argued that “*Americans of all national origins, classes, regions, creeds, and colors, have something in common: a social ethos, a political creed.*” Myrdal (1962) asserted that the *American Creed*,

rooted in the philosophy of enlightenment, Christianity and English law compasses the ideals of liberty, equality, justice, and fair treatment of all people. Historian Richard Hofstadter stated, “*It has been out fate as a nation not to have ideologies but to be one*”(Kohn 1957:13).(Michele Elizabeth Bendall 6,7)

In accordance with this, Crèvecoeur mentions suitable examples about this political creed. He talks about equality, freedom, and liberty among the Americans despite the multiple differences between them. Furthermore, the author discusses the psychological features that accompany the political ones, which affected the establishment of the American sense of nationalism.

### **II.3.2 Psychological Characteristics**

The concept of nationalism is logically influenced by the psychological state of people. The Americans for example, consider themselves a superior nation. This belief strengthens their pride of being Americans. In other words, their sense of nationalism towards the American soil exists in their deep unconscious or psyche. In *What is an American?* the narrator triumphantly declares: “*We are the most perfect society now existing in the world.*”(02). They see themselves as perfect sect of people because they are Americans.

According to Crèvecoeur, the new settlers felt that this new land has offered them a new chance for life. It gave them all what they need to make them humans. In other words, they got a land to live on, a bread to eat, and an entity to protect them. In brief, they got a country (Crèvecoeur 04). However, they did not experience the same situation in Europe. Therefore, they gradually lost the emotional link with their mother European countries. In the third letter, Crèvecoeur clarifies: “*What attachment can a poor European emigrant have for a country where he had nothing?*” (Crèvecoeur04). Consequently, “*the American ought,*

*therefore, to love this country much better than that wherein either he or his forefathers were born*” (04).

#### **II.4 *What Is an American?* Through New Historicism Perspectives**

During the formative years around the Revolutionary War, writers who produced materials during this time were transplanted Europeans who attempted to recreate their identity to embrace the ideals of a new nation. Many American writers consciously attempted to create not only a sense of patriotism, but also to establish a national identity. Writers such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and Hector St. Jean de Crevecoeur produced literature that also served as historical document. Therefore, literature and history are sometimes interchangeable.

The special relationship of literary and historical writings is the major tenet in the theory of New Historicism. This approach concentrates on how events, society, and culture affect writing of the time. In this context, the epistolary work *What is an American?* of Crevecoeur is a suitable pattern to examine the influence of the surrounding circumstances on literature.

Crevecoeur celebrates the perfection of America. His work is driven by certain convictions, about nature and natural rights, a new man and society, that he certainly shared with other American writers of the time – and, indeed, with some of his Romantic counterparts in Europe. Now here are such convictions given clearer or more charged expression. Letters begin with the claim that to “record the progressive steps” of an “industrious farmer” is a nobler project for a writer than any to be found in European literature. That claim is supported, and the project pursued with enthusiasm in the ensuing

pages, where the hero is, quite simply, “the American.” The analysis of the third letter through the lenses of New Historicism treats three major dimensions: historical, social, and cultural.

### **II.4.1 Historical Analysis**

The reason behind making this special man is all the coincided events that happened before, during and after the settlement in the new world. Mainly, three major causes shaped this new man. First, the persecution that was practised against the religious sects made them feel as if they were oppressed humankind. Second, the hardships which marked their journey to the new Promised Land. Third, the hardships which the settlers faced on the new discovered wilderness.

In the third letter, Crèvecoeur considers the birth of the American character a specific event that encountered many circumstances. At the beginning of his work, he clearly declares that he is going to show the reader “*how Europeans become Americans*”, (Crèvecoeur 06). At the end, he concludes: “*Thus Europeans become Americans*” (11). In line with this, a new society had emerged. In that new community, specific factors were considered as turning point at that time.

### **II.4.2 Social Scrutiny**

The idea that a good society was predicted on a good environment was not particularly controversial in the eighteenth century. But it was Crèvecoeur, in his landmark *Letters from an American Farmer*, who first published the fundamental argument that the particular rural environment of the American colonies was the one which would inevitably yield an egalitarian, free, and self-determinate society. For Crèvecoeur was not merely a literary figure but also a social theorist.

Crevecoeur's central contribution to the nascent social theory of America was the argument that the layout of its landscape was what made its societies so exceptional, so invulnerable to Old World problems, and so radically modern. It must have been a fairly intuitive observation to anyone who left Europe for America during the eighteenth century. The change in environmental scale would have been staggering.

At a time Western Europe was buckling under the own weight of its population, all of its hinterlands were crisscrossed with villages and roads, and its natural resources were beginning to approach their limits. On the other hand, the young colonies were perched on a vast under populated continent. Farmers who had emigrated as landless tenants could claim easy title to plots of land larger than noble estates in Europe. In the same context, Crevecoeur declares "*Thus have I faintly and imperfectly endeavoured to trace our society from the sea to our woods*" (Crevecoeur 09). Even the largest and most in filled American towns dropped off quickly at their margins into zones of effective wilderness. (Garrett Dash Nelson 28).

The social scrutiny of the American society shows a great diversity when talking about the origins of its individuals. Yet this mixture of people does not affect the unity of the American community. In fact, "*They are a mixture of English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans, and Swedes*". (02). However, "*In them the name of Englishman, Frenchman, and European is lost, and in like manner, the strict modes of Christianity as practiced in Europe are lost also.*" (06). The colonists did not lost only their sense of belonging to their mother countries, but they forgot also about their previous European traditions and costumes. In short, they became Americans with an American way of life.

In the young American society, the figure of the farmer is very important. It created a new social stratification. Therefore, the farmer James is the main character in Crevecoeur's letters. The author was influenced by the position of the farmer and chose that persona to

convey his message to the audience. In the third letter *What is an American?* James represents the opponent to the European individual. In the old world, the principles of dignity and hierarchy based on tradition and custom. On the other hand, the social model represented by small holders in the American interior, midway between the sea and the forests defined a new class that was unknown in Europe. Crèvecoeur gives special characteristics to this new rank of people:

The simple cultivation of the earth purifies them; but the indulgences of the government, the soft remonstrance of religion, the rank of independent freeholders, must necessarily inspire them with sentiments very little known in Europe among a people of the same class. What do I say? Europe has no such a class of men. (18)

At that time in America, owning land meant more than getting a property. Earth guaranteed personal independence that was therefore the beginning of a new social hierarchy founded on agrarianism. Accordingly, the exercise of rights of citizenship was based on the belief that agriculture was the most dignified activity, and capable of ensuring national prosperity. (Manuela alb19).

Generally, the American society was mainly influenced by land possession and cultivation. This is the main factor that made it different from its European Logically counterpart, the social surroundings affected the cultural environment during that era when the new nation was building itself.

### **II.4.3 Cultural Examination**

Culturally speaking, the most prevalent scene in America at that time was the birth of “the melting pot”. Crèvecoeur poses his famous question: “What then is the American, this new man?” In his answer, he uses the word “melt” to describe the process of forming a new nationality. He stresses a new way of life and a new set of values. His answer illustrates how immigration gives meaning to the motto on the Great Seal of the United States

*“The daughter of the Catholic will marry a son of seceder” (Crevecoeur 07)*

Crevecoeur’s passage specifies that through its laws and industry a man is able to become part of his country, a citizen. Without prejudices and ancient manners, the American obtains a new social system and a government he is willing to obey. In this nation, peoples’ labors greatly affect the world. An important part of America as well, its deep diversity allows for a great melting pot of a new race who will carry on the arts, sciences, vigor, and industry of the east and still work to improve it.

Crevecoeur spent mostly more than half of his life in the new world, he contributed two key concepts to the American Consciousness which the first of them can be sited as "American Adam" i.e. the idea that there is something special about Americans, and the second one is "the melting pot" that their unique American Identity exceeds their ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds as it’s seen in the previous quotes from his letters, both of the previous ideas had a tough impact on the American culture, in fact, it created the base of the American culture house, helping the Americans to build all their culture on that base.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we have captured Crèvecoeur's ways of portraying the new land along with the American individual through examining his Letters, using the Gets modeling (general-to-specific) during the process. Moreover, we tried to find out the impact of the text on Americans before the revolutionary war, in order to reveal and disclose if Crèvecoeur's letters were one of the reasons behind the birth of the American National Identity, in addition to the American's will of uniting under one nation. We have also examined the ways Crèvecoeur used in the intention of creating the sense of Nationalism in Americans.

We have on top explored the notion of identity in general, self-identity and national identity in specific, then, we looked for the elements from time, figures to place which affected and inspired the writer to write his text. We have investigated this study in our research paper on a number of related topics with the support of many sources written by thinkers who have dealt with related topics on American national identity over more than decades such as Erik Erikson. The final section has examined the text through applying the new historicism literary theory; starting from analyzing Crèvecoeur's life and ending up by doing the same to his letters.

Finally; we have dealt in detail with the third letter focusing mainly on the "what is an American?" question trying to find out what that expression meant and represented to Europeans in general and to Americans in specific. The study analyses show that America's physical and cultural in addition to historical landscape is captured in this classic of American history. *Letters from an American Farmer* provides a priceless view of the pre-Revolutionary and Revolutionary eras; sketches details in glowing prose the physical setting in which American settlers created their history.

In his Letter from an American Farmer: “what is an American”, Crèvecoeur portrays the ideal American as the product of cultural exchange and the new, specific environment. He explains that Americans were once “scattered all over Europe”, as if to metaphorically suggest that the citizen’s of this new state came from different European origins while at the same time, suggesting that they are no longer scattered but united in their new American h Home. This connects to Crèvecoeur’s clear intentions of identifying and elucidating a sort of proto-nationalism that idealizes specific American attributes: industriousness, diverse origins, and essential equality.

When operating from the relatively new school of criticism, the New Historicism, one will soon become conscious and realize that *Letters from an American Farmer* is a myth, a so-called founding myth. Letters from an American farmer were not written by an American farmer but by a well-educated European, a man born in France to a family that did not completely consist of farmers. This man Crèvecoeur was an idealist and a reformer because in a way we can conclude through his letters that he tried to invent and come up with an ideal society, using an imaginary way by pretending to live in that society.

To some extent, Crèvecoeur’s book has deceived many people. It has produced an image that when examined in combination with its historical context has turned out not to be true. There is no religious tolerance in the United States, there is not an official aristocratic class but the inequalities between races, sexes, and classes yet have always been as great as in other parts of the world. But still; the story itself has succeeded in being used as a proof for the perfect nature of the New World to people of other nationalities, and for the immigrants themselves. It has helped the latter to build up their self-confidence, and it has made them believe in a certain image of the American society during the founding years: an image that

sets America apart from Europe that proves America to be a better, if not perfect place. The purpose of the book, therefore, is obvious.

John Crevecoeur also believed in a good, solid, independent personality; however he defined Americans as free and able to live their life the way they preferred. He focused a lot on how America was full of opportunity where people could practice equality, unlike Europe where there were solely Lords with tenants and servants. He felt that people tended to group themselves.

The results of this analysis demonstrate two features that define what to be an American means (The desire to better oneself morally and financially and the self motivation), these features are dependent on the perspective of the two well-known writers from the time of the American nation's conception, Benjamin Franklin and Hector St. John de Crevecoeur spotted in their works "*Autobiography*" and "*Letters from an American Farmer*". Both of the writers illustrate Americans as a chosen people. They share the belief that the willingness of the American citizen to better their lives and their desire to seize opportunities for prosperity are two qualities that help to distinguish the American citizen from the rest of the world's inhabitants.

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## ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى مناقشة وتحليل موضوع الهوية الوطنية الأمريكية في "رسائل من مزارع أمريكي" للكاتب الفرنسي جون دو كريفيكوير؛ بغرض عرض الخلفية التاريخية للعصر الذي تمت فيه كتابة هذه الرسائل. وتتمحور هذه الدراسة حول تصوير وجهة نظر كريفيكوير من مبادئ التنوير الرئيسية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك؛ فهي تعكس الصورة الإيجابية التي رسمها المؤلف عن الرجل الجديد "الأمريكي" من خلال معالجة معنى الهوية الفردية والوطنية. ونلاحظ اختفاء الشعور القومي للبلدان الأوروبية في جميع الرسائل؛ لذلك أخذنا القومية الأمريكية كمفهوم للمناقشة في هذا العمل. وعلاوة على ذلك؛ قمنا بتحليل معمق للرسالة الثالثة "ما حقيقة الأمريكي؟"؛ وهذا من خلال إعطاء أهمية كبيرة لتحقيق وتحليل كيفية بناء الهوية الوطنية الأمريكية في الأرض الجديدة التي تم العثور عليها؛ بالاعتماد على تطبيق النظرية التاريخية الجديدة. ومن أجل إيجاد إجابات للتساؤلات التي يثيرها هذا البحث؛ وجب استخدام المنهج التاريخي والتحليلي. وتظهر نتيجة هذه الدراسة أن رسالة جون دي كريفيكوير الثالثة هي الممثل الحقيقي لتفكير أساس التنوير الأمريكي: الربوبية، التحرير، الجمهورية والتسامح. يمكن القول ان كريفيكوير ككاتب قد نجح حقا في عرضه لتصوير هوية الأمة الأمريكية جنبا إلى جنب مع القومية خلال عصر التنوير و إلى جانب هذا؛ يثبت البحث أن كريفيكوير يرجح كمال أمريكا.