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US NATIONAL MEMORY AND THE POLITICS OF THE ‘MAGA’: HISTORY, POLITICS, IDENTITY

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Abstract

This article examines the evolution of American national memorial policy through the prism of political developments that shaped the internal discourse on national unity of the American nation. The author analyzes how the memorial policy of the United States has shaped a unique political narrative that combines historical concepts of democracy, national identity, and global leadership. One of the main aspects of the study is the understanding of the foundational role of the American Revolution and the War of Independence (1775–1783), which established key ideological principles of popular sovereignty and democratic governance. The Civil War (1861–1865) is analyzed as a critical juncture that reinforced federal authority and redefined the meaning of national unity. The study considers U.S. participation in international conflicts as reflecting the country's broader ambition to assert global leadership and promote democratic ideals abroad. Additionally, the article investigates how modern memorial policies engage with issues of social inequality, particularly in racial, ethnic, and class contexts, reflecting shifts toward inclusivity in public memory. The paper also addresses the complexities of recent political discourse, particularly under Donald Trump, whose “America First” rhetoric combined isolationism with imperial undertones. Contemporary memorial policy increasingly honors figures associated with civil rights movements and marginalized communities, thus transforming the symbolic landscape. Finally, the article highlights the necessity of reassessing national memory in response to international criticism, especially in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, when reconciling patriotism with critical reflection became a defining feature of American political culture.

Keywords: memorial policy, national identity, American Revolution, Civil War, democratic ideals, political philosophy, isolationism, global leadership, contemporary discourse.

Introduction

At every crossroads of historical paths, in the context of increasing socio-political confrontation, conflicts of collective memory are becoming more prominent. This process is not prevented by either the postmodern state of collective consciousness, the virtualization of political processes, or attempts to form a global society. The United States did not create a national memory institution, unlike many post-communist countries in Eastern Europe, because Americans, as a nation, are oriented toward the present and the future (Martynov, 2020, p.10).

However, since the early 21st century, historical politics and historical trauma have become a significant element in the struggle between Republicans and Democrats. The rhetoric of MAGA (Make America Great Again) focused on restoring the greatness of the U.S. through the rethinking of history and the revival of traditional values. During Trump's presidency, the conservative shift became more pronounced. Trump revived discussions about the mission of the U.S. in the world through a call for the revival of national protectionism in the context of unjustified spending on projects from the previous

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administration. In March 2025, President Donald Trump signed an executive order Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History. The justification states that "over the past decade, Americans have witnessed coordinated and large-scale efforts to rewrite the history of our nation, replacing objective facts with a distorted narrative driven by ideology rather than truth. This revisionist movement seeks to undermine the significant achievements of the United States, portraying its foundational principles and historical milestones in a negative light... Instead of fostering unity and a deeper understanding of our shared past, widespread efforts to rewrite history deepen societal divides and foster a sense of national shame, disregarding the progress America has made and the ideals that continue to inspire millions around the world. The previous administration promoted this aggressive ideology" (The White House, 2025). According to this order, the Smithsonian Institution is tasked with eliminating anti-American ideology and determining whether, since January 1, 2020, any public monuments, memorials, statues, markers, or similar objects have been removed or altered to commemorate a false reconstruction of American history, unjustly diminishing the value of certain historical events or figures.

Methodology

The memorial discourse in the United States demonstrates a complex transformational process of revising internal and external goals, and it becomes particularly relevant around issues of national identity and collective memory. The methodology for analyzing U.S. memorial policy through the lens of political processes is based on an approach that includes historical, discursive, socio-cultural, institutional, and ideological analysis. The historical approach involves studying the development of national memory in the U.S. and its connection to political events, such as the American Revolution, the Civil War, World War II, and the Cold War. The discursive analysis focuses on how political forces shape images of the past to achieve strategic objectives, for example, through the MAGA rhetoric or discussions about historical trauma. The socio-cultural approach examines the impact of cultural and social movements, such as the fight for equal rights, on changing national narratives. The institutional approach studies the role of government agencies and memorial sites in shaping identity through memory policies, such as the National Register of Historic Places. The ideological approach draws attention to how historical narratives are used to achieve political goals, as the U.S. forms its international image and global leadership through historical memory. The methodology for analyzing U.S. memorial policy involves studying these aspects to understand how history is used to shape national identity in political and social contexts.

Several authors have explored memorial policy in the context of transforming international relations strategies, as the U.S. shapes images through its history of interaction with other nations, which are used to implement foreign policy. For instance, Vyshnevskaya (Vyshnevskaya, 2014) focused on the U.S. strategy of forming the policy of the great power, while Potekhin (Potekhin, 2016) examined the influence of the Yalta and Potsdam conferences on international relations, revealing how the U.S., based on historical memory, shaped its global political strategy during the Cold War period. Scientists have drawn attention to the methodological aspects of the deconstruction of historical memory in the United States (Ilyin, 2019; 2023).

A number of studies (Vovk, 2020; Koch & Uzun, 2024) focuses on the interconnection between historical memory, identity, and security. In the work of Metielova (Metielova, 2019), the influence of memory politics in the U.S. on international relations is discussed, showing how it becomes a tool for internal politics and diplomacy. Tolstov (Tolstov, 2017, 2020) concentrates on the instrumental aspects of memory politics. The peculiarities of shaping the space of memory politics, the axiological orientations of American society, and their changes are the subject of Kosheliev's attention (Kosheliev, 2023, p. 20). Social discussions in the U.S. regarding national memory sites have been explored by Allison (2018), Cooper, et al. (2021), Titus (2018), Phelps, & Owley (2023), Treisman (2021). The issue of forming memory sites in the U.S. and the problem of inequality in honoring historical figures in cities are the subjects of research by Shane (2011), Capps (2016), and Lewis (2016). Complementing the understanding of memory politics in the U.S. is research on memory in the context of global history (Kolesnyk, 2022; Smolii, et al., 2022). The authors note that memory politics has become a tool for asserting the U.S. as a global leader.

The aim of the article is to explore the evolution of American national memorial memory through the lens of political processes that influenced the transformation of the internal discourse on the foundations of the unity of the American nation.

The concept of U.S. national history is built around stereotypes that embody the advantages of the American way of life and present the country's political system as a model for other nations to follow.

Interpretations of key points in U.S. national history aim to form a patriotic understanding of heritage, which is reflected in the creation of memorial complexes and their inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places, established in 1966. The register contains over 80,000 sites, of which 2,430 are designated National Landmarks, receiving protection and funding from the federal government. Among them are the megalithic sculptures of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln on Mount Rushmore in South Dakota, created between 1927 and 1941, which symbolize key stages in the formation of U.S. unity (Martynov, 2020, p. 15). On Stone Mountain in the Appalachians, Georgia, the *Confederate Memorial*, completed in 1972, honors the president of the Confederate States of America, Jefferson Davis, and Generals Robert Lee and Thomas Jackson (Yancey-Bragg, & Stanglin, 2017, p. 1). Meanwhile, the unfinished mega-sculpture of Crazy Horse, the leader of the Oglala tribe (1840-1877), has been under construction since 1947 in the Black Hills.

Among the representations that shape the uniqueness of American political consciousness, the official tradition highlights: 1) the notion of the state being founded on the tradition of *democratic* governance, sanctified by the successes of the American Revolution and the War of Independence against England (1775-1783), and the successes in forming national identity (up until the 1860s); 2) the idea of the necessity of positively articulating and memorializing one of the most complex periods in U.S. history – the Civil War between the North and South (1861-1865), the results of which confirmed the unity of the Union; 3) the recognition of the significance of U.S. involvement in regional wars to support democratic regimes and protect U.S. national interests; 4) the idea of social and, later, ethnic-racial equality in the U.S.; 5) the notion of imperial grandeur and global leadership (Tolstov, 2017, p. 152).

Roots of U.S. National Memory: Victory in the War of Independence, Political Consensus as the Ideal of Democratic Governance

A key element in the system of national collective beliefs in the United States is the idea of the state being founded on the tradition of democratic governance. U.S. memorial policy focuses on creating an image of the country that revives the ideals of democracy and self-governance, with the first memorial being recognized as the Mayflower Compact (1620), which declared the natural principles of popular rule. In the history of the U.S. as a nation of immigrants, each community had its unique characteristics, but ultimately, it was these communities that formed the first universal nation in the world.

The American War of Independence is regarded as the result of the implementation of a consensus between the opposing political views of the Federalists and Anti-Federalists. In the 1790s, A. Hamilton advocated for a strong central government, while T. Jefferson championed states' rights. The reconciliation of the elites regarding the formation of the political system allowed for the realization of the current formula of American democracy.

For a long time, American historiography was focused on the images of the heroes of the War of Independence—the First President of the U.S., George Washington, and the Third President and author of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, whose monuments have been erected in Washington. The historical narratives from the period of the struggle for independence form the basis of collective memory in the U.S. (Breen, 2005, p. 35).

The War of Memory: How the United States Interprets the Legacy of the Civil War

Another significant event around which national discourse continues to evolve is the Civil War. The official interpretation of the war has been framed as a tragedy, in which both sides lost 640,000 people. The idea of the necessity of memorializing the conflict between the North and South (1861-1865), the outcome of which confirmed the unity of the Union, is a foundation of national memory. Today, attention is focused on positively highlighting the historical contributions of leaders from the Civil War era, such as Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses S. Grant, whose leadership ensured that the victory of the North became a confirmation of the unbreakable nature of the United States as a federation.

At the same time, according to Richard Haass, Chairman of the Council on Foreign Relations, any war is fought three times: when the decision is made about entering the war, during the war itself, and when the discourse about the lessons of the war begins (Haas, 2019, p. 54-55).

Historical reconciliation does not mean the absence of regional territorial-political versions of historical memory. Condoleezza Rice, the 66th U.S. Secretary of State from 2005 to 2009 under President George Bush, expressed the belief that the liberal approach toward former Confederates hindered the closure of this tragic chapter in history. Rice notes that after the Civil War, only one Confederate Army officer was

arrested, while others, including General Robert Lee, returned home. Similar leniency was shown toward civilian leaders of the Confederacy: none were brought to trial. Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, spent several months in prison but was released and remained a hero to the Confederacy for the rest of his life (Rice, 2011, p. 46). Rice emphasizes that Reconstruction suffered a setback, although it had some positive aspects. Military governors were appointed to enact new laws, measures were taken to educate African Americans, and freed individuals were granted positions in legislative bodies. The emotionally charged history of the Civil War, according to Rice, influenced her personal perception of history, as Confederate veterans from Tennessee founded the Ku Klux Klan in 1865, whose activities continued to affect her parents' lives (Rice, 2011, p. 47-48).

Reconstruction from 1865 to 1890 proceeded without conflicts over the interpretation of the Civil War. Citizens were encouraged to forget about the war to restore peace. After the ratification of the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1870, the rights of Confederate states were restored, which became part of the process of integrating Southern states. These states were incorporated into five military districts, where commanders had the authority to declare martial law to protect the rights of African American populations. The 15th Amendment guaranteed the right to vote to all citizens, regardless of race, color, or prior condition of servitude. African Americans gained the constitutional right to participate in political life. However, the struggle for the rights of non-white populations continued (Martynov, 2020, p. 15).

According to Condoleezza Rice, the first 100 years of U.S. history were marked by corruption, protectionism, and conspiracies by interested groups, which prevented citizens from trusting the institutions (Rice, 2018, p. 44). The goal of Reconstruction was to bridge the divisions between the North and the South, but after Andrew Jackson became the first President from the South in 1868, the second President from the South, Woodrow Wilson, was not elected until 1913.

Starting from the presidency of Woodrow Wilson, the concept of reconciliation became the foundation for compromise in the interpretation of history, where the South's defeat in the war was acknowledged, but the memory of the region's heroes was not subject to prohibition. The government adhered to this approach during the celebration of America's bicentennial in 1976 under President Gerald Ford (Faust, 2008). At the same time, it was not until 1924 that a federal law granting citizenship to Native Americans was passed, and it was only in the 1928 elections that the first African American representative, Oscar De Priest from Illinois, appeared in the House of Representatives. However, due to segregation, he dined in the Capitol's basement instead of with the white congressmen (Rice, 2011, p. 7). Even after the abolition of slavery and the passing of laws guaranteeing the political rights of African Americans, discrimination persisted. Instruments of disenfranchisement included literacy tests, poll taxes, and grandfather clauses, which allowed only those whose fathers or grandfathers had been eligible to vote before 1867 to vote. The Ku Klux Klan and other racist groups used terror to intimidate black voters. The struggle for equal voting rights continued throughout the 20th century, and it was not until the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that discriminatory practices were abolished. However, America did not become blind to skin color. As Rice points out, the injustice faced by non-white Americans is similar to that experienced by people in authoritarian regimes (Rice, 2018, p. 50).

History and Politics of Memory in the U.S. through the Lens of Racial and Political Debates

Racist political discourse and anti-liberal attitudes persist in the country. The critique of liberal philosophy is presented in the book *Against Democracy* by Georgetown University Vice-Provost Jason Brennan, where the author advocates for a transition from irrational democratic participation to epistocracy – rule by the knowledgeable, criticizing the recognition of the egalitarianism principle (Brennan, 2017, p. 204).

The Great Society, proclaimed by President Lyndon Johnson in 1964, was an ambitious program aimed at fighting racial discrimination and inequality in the U.S. After the U.S. victory in the Cold War, Johnson implemented his initiatives through the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

During President Bill Clinton's tenure (1993–2001), while the country faced racial unrest, such as the 1992 Los Angeles riots, the government attempted to reduce social inequality. The presidency of Barack Obama (2009–2017), the first African American in office, was historic. Obama avoided emphasizing racial issues, focusing instead on the values of the American Dream for all. However, after his election as President of the U.S., the use of the Confederate flag became a topic of debate, and issues concerning monuments, cities' and streets' names were brought to the forefront. While the first attempts to address monuments were made in 1992, during the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America

by Europeans, it was only since 2013 that activists from the African *American Black Lives Matter* (BLM) movement began demanding the removal of monuments to George Washington, the first U.S. president and a slave owner. The police had to protect the Washington Monument, built in 1888. In 2015, after the events at the Emanuel church in Charleston (South Carolina), where a white racist killed nine African Americans, attention to the Confederate flag heightened. As a result, several states banned the display of the flag on official buildings.

After Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 Presidential Election, the divide in society deepened. His conservative rhetoric resonated and became a catalyst for the campaign to remove monuments to Confederate figures and ban Confederate symbols. Protests against Trump, who was accused of discrimination, demonstrated the divide. At the same time, Newt Gingrich, one of the ideologues of Trump's campaign and former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives (1995-1999), believes that Trump managed to unite a diverse electorate around the idea of a new industrialization (Martynov, 2020, p. 14). In 2016, during a speech in Charlotte, North Carolina, Trump promised a new course for African Americans, emphasizing: In our veins flows the same red blood of patriots (Martynov, 2020, p. 11).

Madlen Albright, while criticizing Donald Trump's policies, described the situation of party division caused by disdain for the country's institutions (Albright & Vudvort, 2019, p. 282). Another critic, Professor of U.S. history at the University of California and editor of the left-wing weekly *The Nation*, J. Wiener, believes that Trump's electorate consists of undereducated white voters. In response, Trump accuses Democrats of supporting multiculturalism and denying the significance of the *melting pot*, the traditional assimilationist policy described by Israel Zangwill in his 1908 book *The Melting Pot*.

The 2020 police incident, in which African American George Floyd was killed, sparked the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in the *Rust Belt states* – industrial regions in the Northeast and Midwest of the U.S. – and ignited discourse surrounding representations of the past. The movement initiated the dismantling of monuments built between 1890 and 1950 to Confederate heroes, which numbered up to 700 in 31 states (Kosheliev, 2023, p. 22; National and Historical Memory, 2013, p. 224). Monuments to the seventh U.S. President (1829–1837), slave owner Andrew Jackson; Confederate States President Jefferson Davis; and Confederate Army commanders T.J. Jackson, R.E. Lee, and J.E. Johnston became the subject of the harshest criticism.

Meanwhile, the Civil War is studied differently across various U.S. states: in the Southern states, the focus is on states' rights as the cause of the war, using Confederate symbols, while in the Northern states, the emphasis is on the abolition of slavery, with the Confederate flag associated with racism. The electoral geography of the U.S. reflects the historical and political divide. The red states in the center and South support the conservative Republican Party with its strong anti-immigration rhetoric; the blue states, wealthier and more liberal, where the BLM movement thrives, are located on both coasts—west, northeast, and in the north of the U.S.; the purple states are divided. The largest purple states in electoral significance are Florida and Ohio (Martynov, 2020, p. 12).

Political debates about the consequences of the U.S. Civil War continue, especially in the context of the essence of the U.S. nation as one created by immigrants.

National Memory in the U.S. in the Context of Interventionist Foreign Policy

The Chicago School of Pan-Americanism, formed in the mid-19th century, presented the U.S. as a unique nation with a special way of life. Proponent of the concept of the predestined fate of the American race, Fiske, in his work *American Political Ideals* (1880), emphasized that American uniqueness was the result of the special conditions under which the democratic identity of citizens was formed, and that this way of life should serve as an example for other nations. Strong, in his work *Our Country and Its Possible Future* (1885), developed the concept of American messianism in Latin America, aiming to make the American way of life the foundation of stability in the region. J. Barges, in *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law* (1890), and Adam Brooks, in *Economic Domination of America* (1900) and *The New Empire* (1902), as supporters of the concepts of exclusivity and chosenness, emphasized the unique development of the U.S. as the most political nation, which made it a model for other countries. At the end of the 1990s, Fukuyama noted that one of the consequences of the Civil War was liberal democracy, which represented something more than just majority voting in elections—an intricate set of institutions whose functionality is oriented toward the eternal present, not the historically conflicted. In the late 1980s, Fukuyama considered the victory of this institutional model as the end of history (Fukuyama, 2018, p. 20).

In the mid-19th century, Turner, through the concept of the frontier thesis, influenced the development of the idea of American uniqueness, emphasizing the importance of the experience of settling new territories in the formation of national identity. Other representatives of the school, such as Ritter and Apter, explored the influence of American institutions on the development of Latin America. Later, at the turn of the 21st century, Huntington, updating the discourse on tectonic shifts in American collective consciousness, in his work *Who Are We: The Challenges to America's National Identity stated: America becomes the world. The world becomes America. America remains America* (Huntington, 2005, p. 572).

Subsequently, the ideas of active U.S. involvement in regional wars with the aim of democratization, supporting democratic regimes, and protecting U.S. national interests became the justification for the country's foreign policy strategy. This is reflected in the history of interventions in Latin America and the Caribbean, such as the Mexican-American War of 1846–1848; the Spanish-American War of 1898, which resulted in U.S. control over Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam; the War in Panama in 1903, which led to Panama's separation from Colombia and the creation of the Panama Canal; the intervention in the Dominican Republic from 1916 to 1924 to stabilize the political situation; the intervention in Nicaragua from 1912 to 1933 to support pro-U.S. governments and protect American investments; as well as other U.S. military actions, including the Bay of Pigs Invasion, where the U.S. attempted to support forces seeking to overthrow Fidel Castro's regime; the invasion of Grenada in 1983, or Operation Shield of the Caribbean, and later participation in wars in Korea (1950–1953), Vietnam (1964–1972), and other regions of the world.

The U.S. Vision of Active Involvement in Global Processes as the World's Policeman

The idea of active U.S. involvement in global processes as the *world's policeman* became a central tool of foreign policy strategy, beginning with Theodore Roosevelt, the 26th president of the United States (1901–1909). Roosevelt, adhering to the principle of *Speak softly and carry a big stick*, won the Nobel Peace Prize for his mediation in peace negotiations between Japan and Russia. This active global role continued, at least, with Franklin Roosevelt, who saved the U.S. from decline during the Great Depression and ensured victory in World War II. The discourse surrounding victory in World War II solidified the concept of American global leadership. Memorials dedicated to World War II heroes, veterans of the Korean War, veterans of the Vietnam War, the military memorial in the District of Columbia, and the *Franklin Roosevelt Memorial* are the most famous national sites of memory, which reinforce the image of global leadership (Tolstov, 2017, p. 156).

The myth of *exceptionalism* shaped the image of the U.S. as the *arsenal of democracy* against totalitarian regimes. Technological achievements such as the launch of the first artificial Earth satellite and the first man on the Moon became symbols of the U.S. as a missionary state. At the same time, during the Cold War, U.S. national memory became an object of self-criticism. U.S. interventions in other countries' affairs and military operations, including regime-change policies, began to appear increasingly controversial, as did the unethical medical experiments on African Americans in Tuskegee, the development of biological weapons, and more. This discourse raised questions about the blind spots in national narratives. On one hand, the idealization of victory in World War II defined the U.S.'s role as the global policeman, while, on the other hand, there was criticism of U.S. actions in global politics. A crisis of trust in the government was provoked by undisclosed secrets from American history, such as the Vietnam War, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Senator Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., the Watergate scandal, and others.

In the 1990s, the U.S. was recognized as the world's hegemon. At the same time, a process of rethinking the history of the new empire and reconstructing national memory began, especially after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, when the U.S. had to reconceptualize both its foreign and domestic policies. The reconstruction of U.S. memory politics reached a new level. Memory politics became a reflection of the fight against terrorism and raised questions about a police-state model. Interventions in the Middle East, mass surveillance of citizens through programs like PRISM, and open human rights violations during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan called into question the moral exceptionalism of the U.S. and its claims to global leadership and the duty of active involvement in the democratization of countries around the world.

Deconstruction of Colonial Monuments: New Voices in U.S. History

Another cornerstone around which national discourse developed is the concept of social and, later, ethnic-racial equality among people. The elite divide, linked to the breakdown of the compromise in the assessment of the colonial history of the U.S., led to socio-political complications as demographic

and cultural preferences in U.S. metropolitan areas changed (Hartman, 1997, p. 234). The anti-colonial discourse even led to criticism of the commemoration of Christopher Columbus, whose actions led to the destruction of Native American civilizations. The critique of Columbus's memory became an element of the debate about racial and colonial heritage, as well as understanding history through the lens of contemporary ethical norms. Critics of traditional history argue that Columbus's expeditions marked the beginning of the destruction of millennia-old cultures of indigenous peoples of the Americas, exploitation, slavery, violence, and expansion. Following the rise of movements for the rights of African Americans and Native Americans, criticism of Columbus's role in history grew. Activists questioned the appropriateness of celebrating October 12 as Columbus Day, replacing it with Indigenous Peoples' Day, honoring those harmed by colonization.

Activists of the Black Lives Matter movement and other anti-racist campaigns began demanding the dismantling of Columbus monuments in cities such as Chicago, Boston, Miami, Los Angeles, and other monuments associated with colonialism and racism. However, opponents of changing Columbus's status argue that history must be understood in the context of the time when these events occurred, and that we cannot judge the actions of people by modern moral standards. They emphasize that the task of history is to understand what the conditions and motivations of people were in the era in which they acted.

A symbol of the fight for African American civil rights was the march to the Lincoln Memorial led by Martin Luther King Jr. on August 28, 1963. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the liberal immigration legislation of 1965 radically changed the discourse of memory politics (The King Center, n.d.). The assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968, in Memphis transformed him into a sacred figure – a symbol of the fight against colonial narratives in history (Carson, 2001, p. 11). His memory was honored with the first memorial to an African American in Washington, D.C., opened in 2011 on the 48th anniversary of his famous *I Have a Dream* speech (National Park Service, n.d.).

Native American and African American groups propose honoring new heroes whose actions were marked by the fight for rights and freedom: Sitting Bull (2023), the Dakota leader who became a symbol of resistance to American expansion; Red Cloud, who successfully negotiated with the U.S. government during conflicts on the Great Plains (Red Cloud, 2025); Tecumseh, who attempted to unite tribes to fight against American expansion (Tecumseh, 2023); Wilma Mankiller, the first female chief of the Cherokee Nation, who fought for the rights of Native American communities (Life Story: Wilma Mankiller, 2023); Frederick Douglass (Douglass, 2025) and Harriet Tubman (Clinton, 2005), who fought for the abolition of slavery and freedom for African Americans; Rosa Parks, who became a symbol of resistance to racism through acts of civil disobedience (Parks, 2025). These new heroes symbolize the fight for the rights of marginalized groups. Their memory is proposed as an alternative to the heroes of the past, whose actions are associated with colonialism and racism. This new memorial movement is promoted by Tania Pariona (2025), who advocates for the preservation of indigenous rights; Ta-Nehisi Coates (Pondiscio, 2016), an African American writer whose influence on the understanding of racism and the history of African Americans in the U.S. has been immense through his work *Between the World and Me*.

Thus, since the late 20th century, criticism of national memory has increased through postmodern approaches to history, which emphasized the other voices – those of minorities, women, and indigenous peoples – and which initiated a new wave of memory politics aimed at deconstructing traditional narratives.

America First: Between Isolationism and Imperialism. The Controversial Goals of Donald Trump's National Memory Policy

The 2020 and 2024 presidential campaigns in the United States became a battleground between isolationists, represented by Donald Trump, and ultra-globalists, supporters of a stateless electronic netocracy. Trump opposes U.S. participation in transatlantic and trans-Pacific free trade zones and advocates for a review of U.S. relations with international organizations. Meanwhile, ultra-globalists are creating a world without distinctions, severing the connection between the past and the present, and turning political correctness into a tool for marginalizing opponents of the liberal elite (Martynov, 2020, p. 14).

In his work *The Origins of Political Order*, Francis Fukuyama stated that "countries... are bound to their past..., and everything that has happened continues to affect the nature and character of their politics" (Fukuyama, 2018, p. 10). After Trump's second inauguration as the 47th President of the United States from the Republican Party on January 20, 2025, radical changes in both domestic and foreign policy in the U.S. became evident.

Trump's first executive orders address: ending government censorship of free speech, the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, increasing oil and fossil fuel extraction, weakening the regulatory powers of the federal bureaucracy, dismantling the Environmental Protection Agency, exiting the World Health Organization, declaring a state of emergency on the border with Mexico, mass deportation of illegal immigrants, halting immigration programs, recognizing the existence of only two genders, banning changes to gender in federal documents, and rebuilding traditional family values. Trump also dismantled the Department of Education and reduced federal funding for any school or program that imposes critical race theory, gender ideology, or other unacceptable racial, sexual, or political content on children (Smith, 2024).

An important step in restoring historical memory was Trump's executive order to declassify documents related to the assassinations of President John Kennedy, Senator Robert Kennedy, and civil rights activist Martin Luther King. The order states that the families of the deceased and the American people "deserve transparency and truth" and that it is in the national interest to "immediately release records related to these assassinations" (Liszova, 2025).

Trump's main demands regarding foreign countries can be viewed through the lens of an interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine, rethinking national identity through the aggressive promotion of American national interests, reducing U.S. economic dependence on other countries, particularly those to the south of the border (Latin America), as well as China and Europe.

In the Context of the Monroe Doctrine: Reasserting U.S. Control over its "Backyard"

In the context of the Monroe Doctrine, this can be interpreted as a revival of the principle that the United States should control economic processes in its backyard, which now includes Latin America, Canada, Greenland (which was previously part of the Danish realm), and several other territories. As early as the end of his first term, President Trump proposed consultations with the Danish government regarding the purchase of Greenland. However, after his victory in the 2024 election, Trump reiterated that the U.S. should acquire the island for national security and freedom around the world (Hrenlandiia nasha, 2025). Trump also expressed his goal of annexing Canada: "You will get rid of this artificially drawn line ... and it will also be much better for national security," Trump stated during a press conference in Florida at Mar-a-Lago on January 7, 2025. He referred to Canada's Prime Minister as Governor Trudeau, a title usually given to leaders of U.S. states (Levinson King, 2025). Additionally, the newly elected 47th President of the United States called for a review of trade agreements, such as NAFTA (which was later replaced by the USMCA), and imposed tariffs on countries that, in his view, unfairly profited from trade with the U.S.

Protectionism, isolationism, limiting external obligations, the demand for a reduction of the U.S. military presence abroad, and America First are seen as a modern interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine. In late January 2025, the Trump administration froze foreign aid for 90 days while conducting an audit to ensure that grants provided by foreign organizations aligned with the America First foreign policy. Trump also announced plans to merge the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) with the State Department, stripping the agency of its autonomy. But on February 2, 2025, Elon Musk, who led the initiative to reduce the size of the federal government in Trump's administration, proposed closing USAID altogether. Musk called USAID a web of worms that supports radically left-wing causes around the world, including anti-American ones (Klubok khrobakiv i kupka bozhevilnykh, 2025). Trump declared his intent to reduce U.S. involvement in international conflicts, particularly in regions where U.S. interests were not a priority, reduce intervention in the politics of neighboring countries, and cut support for foreign governments that did not align with the U.S.'s strategic interests.

One of the MAGA movement's key goals under Trump is the fight against drug trafficking, drug cartels, and illegal immigration, which are seen as central to the development of transnational criminal activity, a recognized threat to U.S. security. The Monroe Doctrine, formulated in 1823, proclaimed political autonomy for the Americas from European powers and emphasized the U.S.'s desire to maintain hegemony in the Western Hemisphere. Trump adapted these principles to modern times, where Mexican drug cartels like Sinaloa, Jalisco New Generation (CJNG), Tijuana, Los Zetas, and Gulf, which operate in the U.S., Canada, and Latin American countries, became some of the greatest threats to U.S. domestic security. To weaken these cartels, Trump announced heightened border security along the U.S.-Mexico border, the construction of a wall, measures against illegal immigration, financial sanctions, the designation of cartels as terrorist organizations, and increased anti-terrorism and anti-drug operations. MAGA's demands reflect a desire to reconsider trade agreements in the context of restoring the imperial greatness of the U.S.

On November 9, 2024, journalists from The Guardian referred to Trump as the American Caesar who had risen from the dead, and predicted that Trump's Golden Age of America would manifest as an unstoppable imperial presidency (Smith, 2024). Similar predictions were made by The Economist, which called Trump the first Imperialist President in a century in its article "America Has an Imperial Presidency" (The Economist, 2025). The Guardian journalist D. Smith wrote: "At 2:25 AM, Donald Trump looked at his joyful supporters wearing 'Make America Great Again' hats. He was surrounded by his wife ... and children, stars, and giant banners proclaiming: 'Dream Again of Greatness' and 'Trump Will Fix Everything!'" (Smith, 2024). "We will help our country heal," Trump remarked. "We have a country that needs help, and it desperately needs help. We're going to fix our borders, we're going to fix everything in our country, and today we've made history for a reason, and that reason will be this" (Smith, 2024). K. Bardella, a strategist from the Democratic Party and former aide in Congress from the Republican Party, said, "We will have an imperial presidency. This will probably be the most powerful presidential power in terms of centralization ... since F.D. Roosevelt" (Smith, 2024). J. Walsh, a former Republican congressman, said, "This will be a revenge tour on steroids. I don't think people realize what will happen" (Smith, 2024).

Memory politics in the U.S. encompass issues of national identity, historical narratives, and symbols. The MAGA policy demonstrates a desire for national self-sufficiency, a reconstruction of national identity, and a return to traditional values: 1) restoring national identity through traditional values; 2) protectionism, defending values under the slogan America First by protecting against foreign influences – whether through immigration or economic expansion by other states; 3) preserving American autonomy through isolationism, withdrawing from multilateral international agreements, and reducing the U.S.'s international presence to alleviate financial burdens; 4) protecting national borders through appeals to memory politics, defending American identity from external threats.

Conclusions

The evolution of American national memory through the lens of political processes demonstrates a complex transformation of the internal discourse about national unity, which is intrinsically linked to the foundations of political consciousness within American society. This discourse is rooted in a complex of ideas that shape the uniqueness of the country's political consciousness. First, the key concept is the notion of the state's foundation on the tradition of democratic governance, which became the basis for national identity following the American Revolution and the War of Independence. These events laid the foundation for democratic principles that greatly influenced the further development of the United States. They became a model for the formation of political institutions based on citizen self-organization and mutual consent within a unified state.

Second, the concept of the necessity of memorializing the Civil War period is crucial, as it not only solidified the unity of the nation but also significantly increased the power of the federal government, strengthening the country's system. The memory of these events and the preservation of national symbols from that era reflect efforts to reinforce internal unity and stability amid political disputes and territorial differences.

Third, the concept of the active role of the United States in international affairs – particularly in regional wars – is an important component of national political consciousness, which includes the desire to spread democratic ideals and defend national interests on the world stage. This reflects the United States' transition from isolationism to global political and economic presence, actively developing in the 20th century.

Fourth, an important element is the concept of equality for all citizens before the law, reflecting progress in class and ethnic-racial equality, which gradually became significant through the abolition of slavery and the effort to secure equal rights for all citizens, regardless of race or gender. This is also reflected in the memorialization of the history of the struggle for minority rights.

A crucial component is the idea of imperial grandeur and global leadership of the United States, defined as a natural stage in the country's development, oriented toward the defense and promotion of its interests on the global political arena. The concept of *exceptionalism* strengthens internal unity and shapes the unique image of the country on the international stage. Together, these ideas form the political consciousness of American society, reflecting the diversity of political orientations, and the discourse allows for the rethinking of national unity. These ideas retain controversial definitions in the current political discourse regarding the role of the United States in the world, as a state embodying democratic governance (first among equals) or a state embodying imperial global leadership (dominance in the hierarchical system of global subordination).

In the context of this evolution, an important idea emerges from the political discourse of the present in the rhetoric and program of the MAGA movement under newly elected President Donald Trump, demonstrating deep controversy and ambivalence regarding the country's political philosophy, between isolationism and imperialism. The attempt to return to *America's golden age*, combined with the aspiration for global leadership and external intervention, creates tension in society, where traditional notions of American exceptionalism and democratic values collide with new challenges.

Memorial policy, reflecting these processes, becomes an arena for the formation of conflicting narratives, in which society is forced to adapt to changes in the country's political orientation. At the same time, national memory, as a tool of politics, contributes to the formation of a new image of America, where the desire for imperial greatness and global leadership coexist with the preservation of traditional appeals to the misleading images of democratic governance from the past.

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