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#### Writing Assignment 4

The United States, for all its flaws, is a juggernaut on the world stage. It holds great sway over the happenings of the world and has the potential to incite massive change. However, like any other nation, it faces threats that can and will cause irreparable damage if not addressed. Overarching threats like climate change threaten humanity as a whole and are not limited only to the United States. Belligerent nations pose large external threats even to the U.S if nuclear weapons are involved. However, in accordance with many hundreds of empires and nations throughout human history, the greatest threats to the United States come from within. As Jared Diamond identifies, there are four major threats to the American way of governance: the declining of political compromise, increasing voting restrictions, growing wealth disparity, and the declining governmental investment in public purposes such as education and infrastructure (186-188). Diamond's first listed threat in particular is but a symptom of a much larger problem that could shatter the United States like tempered glass if left unaddressed. The greatest threat to the United States as it stands today is a fractured identity; indeed, the internal alienation that has occurred as a result of increasing political, ethnic, and ideological discrepancies demonstrates a rising lack of attentiveness to the wellbeing of others and has created a substantial rift in the American subconscious.

A country tends to erode in the rivers of time unless the views and desires of its people are properly reflected in its governmental structure, and the United States is not exempt from this idea; as

such, it is alarming that political rifts and disconnects between the public and those in power have become more commonplace as of late. As Evans states in his update on his previously published polarization study, Americans are becoming increasingly polarized along the bipartisan boundary between Republican and Democrat (85). Evans also points out that both sides are becoming increasingly internally polarized on matters of sexual morality, and that issues such as women's role in society as well as aid for minorities have the potential to cause conflict both within and between sides (86). Disagreements on issues such as these have led to a breakdown in political compromise and a greatly hampered system of lawmaking, seen in the dropping of the number of laws passed to its lowest point in many years (Diamond 186). Bipartisan combativeness is not a cut-and-dry phenomenon, however; were one to delve deeper into the issue, they would notice that the crevices between and within the parties are expansive and incredibly divisive. For example, according to Michael, the candidacy and election of Donald Trump in 2016 enabled "a disparate collection of groups, which included white nationalists, to coalesce in what has come to be known as the alt-right," a very loud-spoken and fanatical conservative faction in the United States (14). Michael even goes as far to claim that Trump's election has been likened by certain left-leaning groups to "Kristallnacht," the Night of Broken Glass, in its level of danger to the nation's identity and people (14). Though exaggerations of threat levels exist on both sides, it is true that individuals such as those who presently identify with the alt-right have demonstrated dangerous ideologies that decimate the political landscape of the United States and are but one example of the current political strife that contributes to a fractured national identity.

Another symptom of the nation's damaged identity is ethnic discrepancies. As Devos points out, ethnic minorities are often implicitly excluded from the mention of the national identity when compared to European Americans (749). As such, large portions of the American population are excluded from being part of the nation state (Devos 750). This is primarily due to a phenomenon that Devos dubs "America = White," which describes a physiological difficulty assigning the American identity to ethnic

minorities that is present in the minds of both European Americans and ethnic Americans (740). Such a difficulty has been exacerbated by political strife and the rise of groups and individuals within government that may not be entirely overjoyed by the ethnic presence in the United States, as seen with members of the far-right and alt-right. Furthermore, it is a relatively common experience for members of ethnic minorities to have to contend with reactions implying or assuming that they are not American, such as responding to questions regarding their origin or place of birth (qtd. in Devos 749). With the rate at which the United States' population is diversifying, the existence of an "America = White" ideology is incredibly damaging to the levels of patriotism and identification with the nation's identity present in ethnic minorities. This damages the national identity as a whole, and though differences between ethnicities are very nearly unavoidable due to America's status as a multicultural nation of immigrants, it does nothing to help minimize the differences – as such, it contributes directly to a fractured nation.

A third contributor to the cracks in the nation's identity is a growing rift between the secular and the religious. According to Wilkins-Laflamme, the western United States had the lowest probabilities of an individual being religiously committed (36.1 percent) in 2010, and the Southern United States had the highest at 51.2 percent (293). Alongside this, Wilkins-Laflamme states that a trend toward lowered rates of religion existed in all four U.S Census regions that same year (293). Perhaps in response to such a trend, it can be generally stated that religiously-motivated individuals in governmental positions have become increasingly vocal and have garnered support in trending towards religiously motivated decisions in government. For example, the recent leak of the Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* can be argued to be religiously motivated, and such an argument has been made by many that are furious with the Republican-aligned members of the Court that are in favor of such a ruling (Gerstein). The explosive public reaction and the immense division that has occurred as a result of the

Court's decision on the matter of Roe v. Wade is a prime example of the rift between the secular and the religious and is wholly indicative of a fractured national identity.

The issues that stem from political, ethnic, and ideological discrepancies are not likely to be resolved soon in any regard, as doing so would require a leader with full and unchanging understanding of the constantly changing American societal landscape as well as a properly unified nation. However, this does not change the fact that a lack of a distinguishable national identity is dangerous for the stability of the nation. If the people of the United States cannot stand united and find themselves without the ability to compromise in favor of their fellow citizens in the face of internal issues, then it is only a matter of time until the external issues posed by the world beyond the nation's borders become too heavy to bear for its foundations. As such, it is in the best interest of the nation's people to educate themselves on these issues and elect governmental leaders and representatives that are truly capable of making real change. It is simply unfortunate that such an important interest for the people to have is also a demand of immense proportion, difficulty, and nuance.

## Works Cited

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