

# The identity american english

Countries, United States



The Identity American English What makes you an individual and an American? The idea of what qualifies a person as an American is very vague. Eric Foner, in his article " Who is an American? " describes the idea of what qualifies a person as an American has changed over the years. There once was a time where the only people who were American citizen were white males that later became that all people living in the United States had the qualification of becoming a citizen. There are several factors, including both underlying and overt, that affect idea who qualifies as a citizen. Overt factors such as if you are here legally or if you have your citizenship certificate to more underlying factors like what you look like or if you can speak English. James Baldwin in his essay " If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is" explains how the English he and his people speak is what qualifies them as individuals. Going on to say that, with out the language that they used to communicate with each other their survival would not have been possible. Both Eric Foner and James Baldwin talk about individuality and identity in their articles and arguing that the identity of a person is what gives the person their freedom and liberty. Eric Foner states: Americans' debates about the bases of our national identity reflect a larger contradiction in the Western traditions itself. For if the West, as we are frequently reminded, created the idea of ' liberty' as a universal human right, [West] also invented the concept of ' race' and ascribed to it predictive powers about human behavior (Foner 141). Foner implies America, as a whole, is a diverse country; the thought of each of all American belonging to a single, included group, is somewhat illogical. All American have different need and wants, different goals and ambitions, and can't all enjoy the same " liberty"

because of their “ race”. Baldwin agrees with that saying, “ The brutal truth is that the bulk of the white people in America never had any interest in educating black people, except as this could serve white purposes. (Baldwin 3)” Baldwin gives a specific example of how a race oppressed another race and how the race alone was a factor of why there wasn’t equality in the freedom received by the people. The identity that Baldwin shows here is of a young black child who has lived to tough times in life. The only way he will be able to obtain the same freedom as a white child is through the education, that the black child can only receive from white adults, who only want to use the black child for their own benefit. Even with the freedom the child was promised through the education he would still be a slave to someone or something else. Foner and Baldwin also agree on the fact that African American always excluded from the citizens of the eras. Foner stating, “ Slavery helped to shape the identity, the sense of self, of all Americans, giving nationhood... a powerful exclusionary dimension” (Foner 142). Slaves never had the same treatments as the owners. They were always the left out party who didn’t get the same “ liberty, equality, and democracy” which are the main ideologies that a person needs to be an American (142). If all you need to be an American and enjoy the same liberty and freedom as all other people was to believe in liberty, equality, and democracy “...slavery could never have lasted as long as it did” (Baldwin 2). The fact that slavery lasted as long as it did show that the freedom one person get is not the same amount as someone else. Foner and Baldwin do not specifically talk about the rights of people and how unfairly they are shared in their article, but both do have an underlying implication of the

rights of people. Baldwin, for the majority of his article, talks about the way language is spoken by the Blacks and then in the end states that an uneducated country with so many impurities cannot teach anything to its people. Foner, unlike Baldwin, talks about identity and correlates it with the idea of freedom and equality. In his conclusion stating the just like our identities are changing our belief of freedom and equality will always change. For Baldwin language had the connotation of freedom and equality while Foner used identity to connote the same thing. Both articles were written in the late 1900s, and the political and social struggle mentioned in both the articles still exists; the changed asked by both authors still needs to be implanted. Baldwin, James. " If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is? " Readings for Analytical Writing. Third ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011. Foner, Eric. " Who Is an American?" Readings for Analytical Writing. Third ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011.