

THE RISE OF NATIONALISM

A HISTORICAL ESSAY

Nationalism helps to explain much of the power of modern governments. A nation gives its people a historical tradition with which it can identify. It touches them daily as government agencies record and regulate their lives through birth registration, draft cards, tax collections, and welfare records. Through their vote citizens help to make the nation's laws. The citizens of a nation-state develop a sense of belonging to a group which creates a feeling of loyalty to that group.

Modern people give loyalty to their nation for some of the same reasons that people have always given loyalty to groups. Groups provide their members with a sense of identity and purpose. Just as people can identify with family groups, they can identify with a nation. Like community, social, and labor organizations, nations give people a sense of belonging and make them feel that they are serving a more important cause than their personal interests. Giving allegiance to the nation helps people to identify with a larger purpose.

Nationalism does not depend on family ties to define the group. Unlike community, social, or labor organizations, each of which promotes its own special interests, the nation serves the purposes of all its citizens. Unlike religions, which often include peoples of different countries, languages, customs, and histories, nationalism thrives best where people share a common territory, tongue, and tradition.

Nationalism developed in the West in comparatively modern times. In the ancient world people gave their loyalty to local political units. Athenians and Spartans, for example, were loyal to their city states, not to Greece. Roman soldiers marched to glorify the city of Rome rather than the empire. And the people of various backgrounds, languages, and customs who made up the Roman Empire thought of themselves as Egyptians or Greeks or some other group, not as Romans. All the ancient peoples, only the Hebrews came close to the idea of a nation. But for most of their history, they have lacked one of the basic requirements of nationhood—a homeland.

In medieval times, most men and women gave their loyalty to other persons. In theory, all people gave their spiritual loyalty to the Church, but loyalty to the Church as an institution was seldom as strong as loyalty to the local bishop or priest. The peasant and the knight gave their primary political loyalty to the local lord of the manor rather than to the king. The king had to depend on the personal loyalty of the barons and dukes who served him. Such personal relationships between lord and vassal were the cement of the medieval political system.

As the monarchs of the late Middle Ages strengthened their rule and won the loyalty of their subjects, national feeling began to develop. In England, for example, the feudal ancestors of the Tudors had slowly joined together their territories, extending their political power over them. The English state had existed for centuries, but the Tudors made the state into a nation. In the process, they won the allegiance of the English people.

Several factors helped the development of dynastic nationalism in Tudor England. The growth of commerce and a market economy created a new class of merchants who were not tied to the old feudal loyalties. Along with the growth of trade, the growth of cities led to the need for large-scale agriculture. Large landowners began to enclose their fields, forcing many small farmers to leave their land. As these small farmers lost their place in the old feudal system, they began to develop new loyalties to their nation.

The new class of merchants and commercial farmers found it in their interest to support monarchs who increased national power at the expense of the feudal lords, the Church, and foreign nations. To these merchants and farmers, feudalism had meant irregular taxes and almost constant warfare, both of which interfered with trade. They were willing to back Henry VIII in his break with the Church because Catholic doctrines opposed many of their economic practices. In 1588, when Spain threatened England's overseas trade, the merchants loaned their own ships to Queen Elizabeth's navy in order to defeat the Spanish Armada.

The Tudors began to recognize the value of a prosperous state and developed a partnership between the state and its economic interests. Mercantilism, as this partnership was called, benefited both sides. The state supported industry and commerce, increasing the profits of business people and commercial farmers. Increased profits meant greater wealth for the state in tax money. As a result of this economic partnership, industrial and commercial interests became identified with the nation itself.

Dynastic nationalism had two elements of modern nationalism: a strong centralized state and a powerful group that supported the nation above all other loyalties. But the nation did not have the support of all the people. In the manors and villages of agricultural Europe, many people remained loyal to their local lord, their church, and their village.

The French Revolution swept away many of these local loyalties. It destroyed many of the medieval institutions of French society and completed the nationalization of the French church. The revolutionary government extended the right to vote and passed laws making military service a duty. It added the idea of participation to the two elements of dynastic nationalism—the centralized state and loyalty to the nation. Under the revolutionary nation-state, the French people developed a sense of national consciousness based on the principle that all people were citizens and that all citizens were equal before the law. The example of this revolutionary French government with its new ideals soon kindled nationalist feelings in the people of other nations. Although Napoleon's troops marched under the banner of liberty, equality, and fraternity, they did not follow the ideals of the Revolution. As a result, the people who lived under French rule soon longed for their own national governments.

The diplomats who tried to bring order to Europe following the collapse of the Napoleonic Empire blamed liberalism and nationalism for the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. They were determined to prevent these forces from returning. But the industrialization of Europe produced conditions that encouraged liberalism and nationalism. Large numbers of people were forced to move, usually from the countryside into the cities. Social classes began to break down. In this rapidly changing society, the nation emerged as the main focus of people's loyalties.

At first, nationalism was linked with the principles of liberalism—the belief in the ability and goodness of people, in the importance of the rights of the individual, and in steady progress. Liberal nationalist beliefs inspired the revolutions of 1848. But the almost universal failure of these revolutions to build nations based on the principles of men like Mazzini dealt a serious blow to liberalism. One nation after another founded repressive governments. But despite the decline of liberalism, nationalism continued to grow.

Denied unity under liberal constitutions, Germans and Italians turned to powerful native monarchs to fulfill their nationalist ambitions. In Italy, the shrewd prime minister of Piedmont, Count Camillo di Cavour, brought about unification under the king of Piedmont. Otto von Bismarck, prime minister of Prussia, unified Germany under the Prussian king. In both cases, national unity depended on reducing the influence of foreign powers on the tiny duchies, principalities, and city-states in Italy and Germany. Therefore, diplomacy and war were essential for unification.

Nationalism proved to have a dividing as well as a unifying effect. Huge empires, such as Austria-Hungary, ruled many ethnic groups, each of which wanted its own independent state. These minorities rebelled many times during the last half of the nineteenth century. But most did not achieve their nationalist goals until the end of World War I.

In many countries today, a number of forces have acted together to produce a new sort of modern nationalism. The pictures on pages 278–279 illustrate some of these forces. Modern nationalism may have replaced religion as the major faith to which most people give their first allegiance. Citizens of a nation-state join together in common loyalty to a set of ideals, just as medieval Christians used to do. They use symbols such as flags, much as Jews use the Star of David or Christians use the cross. *God Save the Queen* or *The Star Spangled Banner* become the hymns of this new faith. Citizens visit national shrines such as Lenin's tomb or Kennedy's grave just as Moslems go on pilgrimages to Mecca. The nation's heroes—Mao, Garibaldi, or Lincoln—become the saints and martyrs of the new faith. And like religion used to do, modern nations call on people to sacrifice their property or lives. The late President John F. Kennedy made this point clearly when he said: "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."

Please answer the following questions, based on the reading "The Rise of Nationalism", in your notebook. You do not have to rewrite the questions but you should incorporate the question into your answer and please be complete.

1. For what reasons do people give loyalty to their nations?
2. What makes people's ties to nationalism different from those they have for other groups?
3. Why did nationalism in the modern sense not really begin to develop until the late Middle Ages? (where did loyalties tend to lie before this time period?)
4. For EACH of the following historical eras, identify by making a brief outline of bullet-pointed information, how each contributed to growth of nationalism in modern times.

- England (during the time of the Tudors)
- French Revolution
- Industrial Revolution
- Unifications of Italy and Germany

5. Using the Austria-Hungarian Empire as an example, identify under what conditions nationalism can actually be a dividing force among people