

Patriotism and the Global World View

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Growing up most places in the United States, we have been able to get along with just the English language - so Americans who did not happen to grow up in bilingual homes did not have to learn *foreign* languages. From World War I until quite recently, the world beat an economic path to *our* door and did business on *our* terms - so we did not have to learn much about other systems. I suppose every culture thinks of itself as the best, most natural, and transparently obvious culture. The bigger the state and the stronger its economy and military, the more history conspires to reinforce that belief in cultural superiority. Such a conspiracy has given the U. S. A. a cultural conceit of substantial heft, rivalling Ming dynasty China and Rudyard Kipling's England. At this juncture in world history it is a liability Americans can ill afford, negating many of our traditional strengths and virtues. Nationalism in many respects seems to be the chief enemy of a global world view. Is there any tenable middle ground between a narrow, jingoistic, *my country right or wrong* patriotism and a vague, naive internationalism? Here is one historian's answer.

Patriotism (when we have it) or nationalism (when it is somebody else's) is a fairly modern kind of group loyalty, about as recent as the French Revolution which celebrates its bicentennial this year. The French Revolution was rough on nobles, churchmen, kings and queens and such, but - for a time at least - gave the

experiment (combine compounds A & B; slowly heat to 410 degrees . . .). The following progression usually yields a red-hot nationalism and eventually a proud independent state:

Step One: You must begin with an identifiable group. Language is usually the best single group identifier; religion is a close second. Skin color will do, or occupation, or dress styles - although these minor things usually simply reflect a shared history. The point is, the more things that make this cultural group different from its neighbors, the better nationalism you can expect in the future.

Step Two: To the group must be applied a negative stimulus. This is academic language for saying something bad must happen to the whole group: conquest, repeatedly threatened invasion, or any variety of being treated as second class or without civil rights. This is the only complicated step in the process. The negative stimulus can not be so great that the group is either physically wiped out or totally assimilated into some other culture; obviously there would be no group left to create nationalism and a state. On the other hand, the negative stimulus needs to be sharp enough to make every member of the group unpleasantly aware of being a member of the group. This is necessary to generate step three.

Step Three: Cultural nationalism. A handful of intellectuals of the oppressed group react to the scorn of the oppressing group by saying, "We are not inferior, just different. In fact we are a unique culture and ought to be proud of that uniqueness!" If language makes the group unique, they revive it; if it is religion, there is religious revival with political overtones. Historians of the group become intensely interested in early eras of greatness; folklorists collect its folktales, legends and folk music; artists use these themes in modern works.

Step Four: Political nationalism. As long as cultural nationalism is confined to a handful of people, they are considered harmless eccentrics. When it spreads to a substantial minority or even a majority of the group, however, it gains political clout. It makes possible all sorts of political, economic and military activity - from boycotts to strikes to terrorism to guerrilla and even conventional war.

Step Five: National hubris. Having gotten hyped up on its own cultural richness and having created its own independent state through heroic exertions, the cultural group now tends to be deaf to the aspirations of other cultural groups inside its own boundary. And most nation-states aspire to the boundaries of the greatest historical epoch of their cultural group, guaranteeing lots of overlap with existing states and lots of new oppressed minorities within the state. It makes for a tumultuous United Nations, a bewildering variety of guerrilla wars, and in general a complicated world.

Historians of modern industrial states, well along toward step five of the progression, are generally fairly negative about nationalism. This was Hitler's primary tool, after all, and Mussolini's and the 1930 Japanese army's. Historians of developing countries, to the contrary, are much more positive. The states they study *need* nationalism as a group mobilizer. Not many single African tribes, for example, could form a modern nation large and self-sufficient enough to survive; nationalism serves here, to steal a phrase from the dean of historians of nationalism, Carlton J. H. Hayes, to create *a new and artificially expanded tribe* .

Perhaps both groups of historians are right: early forms of nationalism may be not only necessary for survival in the modern world but ethically positive; later forms may lead to useless wars and be ethically negative.

Early in most group's national development appear visionaries who want respect for their own group's culture and perhaps even political independence, but who do not claim anything for their own group that they do not claim for all others. Herder (d. 1803) was such a cosmopolitan nationalist for a fragmented Germany. To the end of his life he adamantly argued that there was no Favoritvolk in history - no group with innate superiority. Germans had an important role to play in world civilization, but so did all other peoples. Reason was not enough to give you insight into other cultures; you had to empathize yourself into their histories and societies. A. D. Gordon was a figure in the second pioneer wave of Russian Jews who settled in Palestine, hoping to create an Israeli state. A white collar worker over forty years old in 1904, he went to Palestine, plunged into manual labor and made a redemptive philosophy out of work. A member of growing European Jewish minority, he strongly argued that the rights and culture of the native Palestinian Arabs be untouched.

These two and parallel characters in other cultural groups shared the vision that their own ethnic group fulfill itself, that other ethnic groups fulfill themselves, and that each respect the other and help the world become a shining mosaic of mature cultures.

Late in many cultures' national development appear groups who demand special favors for their own. Many of Herder's countrymen later called for a special *Place in the Sun* and *Lebensraum*. Not a few of Gordon's today call for evicting all Arabs from Eretz Yisrael, the land of Israel, David and Solomon. Nationalism in its later, superlogical stages begins to replace religion and any other standard of ethical behavior. Sometimes it is justified by racial theories of superiority; sometimes it is camouflaged by socialist

theories of a future utopia and an *ends justifies the means* philosophy; sometimes it is explained by scriptural predictions as interpreted by nationalists. Whenever it demands things for itself that it will not allow to others, it has crossed the ethical line.

To sum up, let me argue that patriotism is a necessary component of modern life, helping build states large enough and motivated enough to survive. More than this, in healthy nationalism there is a warmth and concern even for people you do not personally know that is an absolute good; a brother and sisterhood formerly reserved for clan and village unites me with 220 million Americans. U. S. nationalism, too, is unusual in that it is not built on any single ethnic group. One of the great good things about our history has been our embrace - although sometimes reluctant - of non-English speaking immigrants. On the other hand, there is clear evidence that patriotism can go too far. We need to keep it from influencing our religious and ethical standards, and to develop that empathy for other cultures and states that Herder talked about a couple of hundred years ago. Dag Hammarskjold, Secretary General of the United Nations, wrote this before his death in 1961:

"You can only hope to find a lasting solution to a conflict if you have learned to see the other objectively, but at the same time to experience his difficulties subjectively." (Markings, p. 102)

One of the most important things I can do in my World History survey courses is to show a student the patterns unfolding and to stress the need for empathy as well as objectivity in understanding any people's experience. I find that there is still a lot of value in those early visions of nationalism. Cosmopolitan nationalism is not incompatible with a global view.