**Considering Nationalism:**

**Part I: The Birth of Nationalism**

The French Revolution helped to give impetus to the movement called “nationalism”. By introducing conscription the French had raised a massive army that was truly national in character, its members being drawn from all sections and classes in the country. Slogans, symbols, and songs inspired citizens to acquire intense patriotic feelings. The citizens of France were developing feelings of attachment to their whole nation and began to identify with national goals and objectives. As France built an empire through Napoleon’s ambitious military campaigns, revolutionary ideals such as rights and freedoms, political self-determination, and dreams of breaking the tyranny of absolute monarchs were carried to foreign lands. The movement of nationalism spread across the European continent. Rather than identifying themselves with their monarch, people began to consider themselves as citizens or members of a nation whose purpose was to advance the interests of their country. Entire populations were tied together by a common identity and language, and sought self-determination and independence from oppressors.

An example of how populations of common people were inspired to take action can be found in the words of Abbé Sieyes, who moved the petty bourgeoisie and common people of France (the “Third Estate”) to revolution in 1789: *What is the Third Estate*? Everything. *What has it been in the political order up to the present*? Nothing. *What does it demand*? To become something. *What is the Third Estate*? It is like a strong and robust man whose arms are still in chains. If the privileged order were removed, the nation would not be something less but something more. So, what is the Third Estate? Everything, but an “everything” shackled and oppressed. What would it be without the privileged order? Everything, but an “everything” free and flourishing. The people of the Third Estate were galvanized into action upon hearing Sieyes’ words and reading them in pamphlets that were widely distributed. The message of Sieyes encouraged the French people to declare a National Assembly and to take the country into their own hands.

**Liberalism + Nationalism = Revolts for National Independence**

Early nationalist revolts occurred after territories were redistributed and consigned to the powerful monarchies at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. The conservative resurgence of the Holy Alliance, especially the powerful reach of Metternich, snuffed out these early nationalist displays. In Germany, university students rallied in protest, but Metternich’s Carlsbad Decrees (1819) disallowed public meetings and forced censorship on the press. Metternich effectively - if only temporarily - stamped out nationalism. In 1822, France’s troops under the direction of King Louis XVIII entered Spain to stamp out a growing movement of liberalism and nationalism there. In the New World, the Spanish American Wars of Independence successfully fought for self-determination during the 1820s. Mexico became independent in 1821 and other colonies in South America followed suit under the leadership of nationalist military heroes like Simon Bolivar and José de San Martin. During this time, Britain lost interest in crushing liberal and nationalist revolts, choosing to withdraw from the Great Powers alliance established at the Congress of Vienna. Beginning in the 1880s, there was a nationalist movement – called Zionism - for a Jewish homeland led by Theodor Herzl. Division over nationhood and state control led to chaos in the Balkans at the end of the nineteenth century. Control over regions changed hands frequently and the Serbian Black Hand Society fought to throw off the oppressor (Austria-Hungary) and to create a Pan-Slavic state. In 1830, after years of fighting, Greece was the first nation to win independence from the Ottoman Empire. There were other nationalist revolts that surfaced that year in Italy, Germany, Poland, and Belgium. By 1839, Belgium was granted independence from the Netherlands. In 1848, revolts broke out again across Europe. Nationalist writers such as Johann Fichte and Giuseppe Mazzini followed in the footsteps of Abbé Sieyes, and their writings stirred people to follow those who were state building in the 1860s. Examine the primary source documents below to learn more about how writers inspired populations of people to identify with national goals and objectives:

Johann Fichte wrote this “Addresses to the German Nation” during 1807-1808 as a reaction to France’s occupation under Napoleon. As you read the passage, consider how these words could stir the German nationalist spirit again in World War I and World War II:

“This is then the meaning of the word a people, taken in a higher sense and regarded from the standpoint of a spiritual world, namely: that whole body of men living together in society, reproducing themselves from themselves both physically and spiritually, which whole body stands together under certain special laws of the development of the divine part thereof...

As in the case of the Greeks in old time, so here in the case of the Germans the State and the nation were separated from each other, and each was presented for itself, the former in the various distinct German kingdoms and principalities, the latter visibly in the imperial union, and invisibly, not according to a written constitution but a fundamental law living in the hearts and minds of all, in a multitude of customs and institutions. As far as the German tongue was spoken, so far could every once upon whom the light dawned within that radius regard himself in a twofold aspect as a citizen: on account of his birthplace, to whose care he was first committed, and on account of the entire common fatherland of the German nation. It was permitted each one to obtain for himself over the entire surface of the fatherland that culture which had the greatest affinity with his spirit, or that field of work which was most appropriate to him, and his talent did not grow in its place as a tree grows, but was permitted him to seek it.

These orations have attempted, by the only means remaining after others have been tried in vain, to prevent this annihilation of every noble action that may in the future arise among us, and this degradation of our entire nation. They have attempted to implant in your minds the deep and immovable foundations of the true and almighty love of the fatherland, in the conception of our nation as eternal and the people as citizens of our own eternity through the education of all hearts and minds.”

**Summary:**

Fichte was telling the German people that they belong together as a united nation in one state.

**Historical Significance:**

The growing conviction that the German nation should become a German state would lead to the unification of Germany under Bismarck in 1871 and to German empire building in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Ultimately the belief in German Lebensraum (living room or space for all Germanic people) would be used to justify Hitler’s takeover of German territories, denied by the Treaty of Versailles at the end of WWI - and leading to World War II.

Giuseppe Mazzini wrote “Nationality: Some Ideas on a National Constitution” in 1835:

“The essential characteristics of a nationality are common ideas, common purpose. A nation is an association of all those who are brought together by language, by given geographical conditions or by the role assigned them by history, who acknowledge the same principles and who march together to the conquest of a single goal under the rule of a uniform body of law...

To us these principles seem so self-evident, so much a part of the very nature of any association of men, that we see no need to prove them. The very history before our eyes teaches that whenever men lack ties of association and common purpose, nationality is just a meaningless word; it also teaches us that whenever a people does not live by the principles which gave it birth, it perishes.

Nationality depends for its very existence upon the sacredness within and beyond its frontiers.

If nationality is to be inviolable for all, friends and foes alike, it must be regarded inside the country as holy, like a religion, and outside a country as a grave mission. It is necessary too that the ideas arising within a country grow steadily, as part of the general law of humanity, which is the source of all nationality. It is necessary that these ideas be shown to other lands in their beauty and purity, free from any alien admixture, from any slavish fears, from any skeptical hesitancy, strong and active, embracing in their evolution every aspect and manifestation of the life of the nation. These ideas, a necessary component in the order of universal destiny, must retain their originality even as they enter harmoniously into mankind’s general progress...

The people must be the *basis* of nationality; its logically derived and vigorously applied principles its *means*; the strength of all its *strength*; the improvement of the life of all and then happiness of the greatest possible number its results; and the accomplishment of the task assigned to it by God its *goal*.”

**Summary:**

Mazzini developed the ideas of nationalism, expressing the importance of the rights and responsibilities of the individual in the nation. In this work, “Some Ideas on a National Constitution”, Mazzini combined liberalism and nationalism to create a model for nationalist leaders to follow.

**Historical Significance:**

Mazzini’s thoughts led other statesmen and revolutionary leaders, such as Count Camillo Benso di Cavour and Giuseppe Garibaldi, to bring together the Italian states and unify the country under the constitutional monarchy of Victor Emmanuel II, the king of Piedmont in 1870.

**German Unification: Blood and Iron**

Perhaps the most significant political event to occur during the late nineteenth century was the emergence of the “new” German empire through the union of roughly 300 small, formerly separate, German states. The driving force behind German unification was accomplished by one of history’s “Great Men” named Otto von Bismarck. Beginning in 1862, Bismarck was an advisor to King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia. Bismarck employed a method called ***Realpolitik*** (or “practical politics”), using whatever means were necessary to achieve goals and a slogan of “Blood and Iron” to achieve German unification. The final hurdle to achieving full German unification was war with a foreign power. In 1870, Bismarck’s Prussia provoked the French into declaring war. This action would result in all 39 German states politically unifying and German quickly emerging as the most powerful nation state on the European continent. In the ensuing years, Bismarck would promote increased military expansion and industrialization. His strategy to build a unified Germany into a continental power also included many liberal reforms. He gave one of the most generous social security programs in Europe (accident, health and old-age insurance for industrial employees) to German workers to win their support for his government.

When Bismarck came to power he shrewdly perceived “...not with speeches and majority decisions will the great problems of the day be decided – that was the great mistake of 1848 and 1849 – but with blood and iron”.

**Blood** - Bismarck provoked wars with Denmark, Austria-Hungary and then France in order to rally the German people to unite. From each of these wars, Bismarck gained provinces where some, or all, of the local inhabitants spoke German. France was especially enraged at the loss of Alsace and Lorraine in 1870.

**Iron** – German industrialization began to catch up to British development and output by the second half of the century. By 1840, over twenty German states belonged to the *Zollverein*, which was a German-speaking trade pact that enhanced local productivity and markets. Through this and other aggressive industrializing practices, Germany would eventually narrow the gap between itself and Britain as Europe’s greatest industrial producer. This rivalry between Germany and Britain was an important long-term cause of World War I.

**Consider and Prepare to Discuss:**

1. How do citizens in the modern world express feelings of nationalism? How does this compare and contrast with eighteenth century nationalism?
2. Agree or disagree with the following statement: “nationalism is the most destructive force unleashed upon humanity.”