

**The Logical Fallacies of Nationalism:
Critical Thinking in the World History Classroom
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Introduction: We often think uncritically about the nation, despite the fact that national identity is built into our popular culture. The Olympics, held every four years, attempts to foster a community of athletes (the "Olympic Village") while promoting "healthy competition" between nations by scrolling a rolling count on our television screens of which country has accumulated the most medals. The athletes wear national colors or some other symbol of their national identity, and we are meant to cheer "our" athletes as they represent "our" nation. Our automobile manufacturers change names of vehicles to "Liberty" or "Freestar" to appeal to a patriotic spirit. Both of these examples are visible symbols of the myths of self identity, and yet the ways in which they promote a glorification of national difference are all but ignored. One of the main goals I have for students in introductory world history courses is to demonstrate knowledge of the ways in which nationalism on a global scale is both a product of the modern world and a problem inherent to it. Part of this goal requires them to think critically about their own nationalist sentiments—sentiments that are sometimes developed unquestionably from family tradition or popular media.

I divide my modern world history course (1500 – present) into three components: the first is a foundational component, exploring the socio-economic changes throughout the world up to the beginning of the nineteenth century; the second component is a structural component beginning with a theoretical discussion of nationhood and how ideas of the nation changed during this period up to the end of the World Wars; the third component is largely cultural and explores the problems of connecting ideas of the nation to science, modernity, geography, and ideology. By the end of the term, students are in a position to examine critically the rhetoric of nationalism in a global context and explain similarities and differences between those who claim to speak for the nation. To get to this point, students will have gained a "reservoir of knowledge" about the basic economic, political, and social chronology of the modern world.

In particular, I am interested in the ways in which "self" (whether a religious, economic, or national identity) vis-à-vis an "other" is articulated in such a way both to construct and propel a mythic national identity. This teaching unit is designed as a lower-division college exercise, but the lessons and the class exercises can easily be modified for upper-division as well as high-school world-history instruction. Assessment 3 is specifically designed with upper-division students in mind; however, it will also be useful in critical-thinking classes and can be modified to work well both for advanced students in high school and for lower-division college students. At least three class periods should be devoted to the exercises, though if time is an issue, Assessments 2 (reading primary sources) and 4 (testing knowledge) can be used as the sole exercises. In a semester that includes 30 class sessions, I usually spend approximately 7 class periods to complete "preparatory" work. This includes my lectures on nationalism beginning with "The Nation-State: A Theoretical Discussion."

Students are evaluated in the following areas:

1. *content knowledge* – Students will articulate a basic understanding of the timeline of the modern nation state, accounting for changes in practice or ideology. Through examinations and essays, students will be able to articulate of the chronology of various components of nationhood from 1789 to the present (Assessment 4)
2. *critical thinking* – specifically, students will use skills learned regarding logical fallacies to apply them to readings of primary sources. In successfully accomplishing this skill set, students will also demonstrate knowledge of the ways in which world historians link various historical experiences. Students will also demonstrate the ability to read primary sources for bias, argument, and context (Assessments 1-4)
3. *oral presentation skills* – in groups of 2-4 (depending on class size) students will present their findings to the class, specifically articulating the types of rhetorical ploys nationalists use and why such elements of rhetoric fit into a "nationalist identity." Students also have the option of presenting a speech of their own, convincing their "nation" (ie: their classmates) that adopting a particular skill, attitude, or identity, is crucial in maintaining their "world-history identity." (Assessments 2 and 3)

This critical evaluation of the idea of the nation-state is relevant to world-history scholarship. In the last five years alone, there has been considerable discussion in *The Journal of World History (JWH)* about global history and how studies of national identity might seem to circumvent the larger goal of global history. Most recently, the debate between Jerry Bentley and Arif Dirlik (volume 16) and the continuation of that debate by Dominic Sachsenmaier and Heather Sutherland in the Forum "Debating the World History Project" (volume 18) suggest that the study of nationalism remains at the forefront of discussion of modern identity-formation. In particular, Bentley's discussion of "Myths, Wagers, and Some Moral Implications of World History" asks the question: "how might it be possible to move beyond historical scholarship that takes glorification of the national community or some other exclusive constituency as its political purpose?" I believe that in the world-history classroom, we can begin to move beyond that "glorification" by teaching students the ways in which logic is often misappropriated in the quest for defining "self" versus "other."

Preparation:

1. Students will view a power point presentation and participate in discussions about the histories and theories of modern nationalism;
2. Students will participate in instructor-led lectures and discussions of case studies of national identity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Case studies might include discussions of the following nations (neither a rubric nor all-inclusive): Russia, Zimbabwe, Great Britain, Yugoslavia, Iran, Algeria, Japan, Vietnam, Indonesia, Kenya, or any other countries of the instructor's choosing;
3. Students will watch the video *The Road to Nowhere* and explore Michael Ignatieff's argument about the inconsistencies inherent in nationalist rhetoric. They will then respond to various questions, such as (but not limited to):

What started the Yugoslavian civil war?

How do Serbs and Croats differentiate each other?

Do Serbs and Croats hate each other? If so, why? Are there examples in the film that suggest the hate is more rhetorical than "real"?

How likely is it that these two groups will achieve exactly what they demand?

Assessment One: Group Exercise on Thinking Critically with Primary Sources, I

Students will be assigned groups randomly to read specific passages by nineteenth-century authors and juxtapose the arguments made by each. In this exercise, students will demonstrate an understanding of how nationalists defined the "nation" and how these concepts were manifested in different historical and geographic contexts. Further, they will be able to display their knowledge of the network of ideas prevalent globally in the nineteenth century, such as science, economics, and politics. Students most likely will read extended excerpts from DF Sarmiento, Liang Qichao, Yukichi Fukuzawa, Joseph Chamberlain, or Jules Verne.

Assessment Two: Group Exercise on Thinking Critically with Primary Sources, II

Students will be assigned groups randomly to read a specific speech by national leaders and explore the logical fallacies in the document (see Appendix B for complete information on the assignment and Assessment 3 for examples of logical fallacies and rhetorical ploys). Speech excerpts may include (but are not limited to):

Josef Stalin, "Industrialization of the Country"

John F. Kennedy, "The Lesson of Cuba"

Fidel Castro, "On the Export of Revolutions"

Golda Meir, "Attainment of Peace"

Indira Gandhi, "Democracy in India"

Ruhollah Khomeini, "Uprising of Khurdad 15, 1979"

Ronald Reagan, "Evil Empire Speech"

Margaret Thatcher, "Christianity and Wealth"

Slobodan Milošević, "Gazimestan Speech"

Assessment Three: Thinking Like Nationalists

PART I: Students may choose to work in pairs or alone to write a brief speech using the main rhetorical ploys encountered by our nationalists. The speech should be no longer than 2 minutes and should be based on a **fictional** country. They do not have to be a leader of their "nation," but could also choose to be a grassroots organizer, a revolutionary, or a "regular person" expressing their views of their country. The goal of this exercise is to determine how well the students have interpreted the bias and arguments at work in the primary sources. Rhetorical ploys and fallacies should include at least two of the following:

- either / or fallacy (or black / white) fallacy – putting ideas into stark terms with no middle ground;
- hasty generalization – or jumping to conclusions. In this exercise it may mean using evidence from another country to jump to conclusions about the country's intentions;
- pathos – the use of emotional appeals;
- ethos – establishing one's right / authority to speak for the group, in this case, the nation;
- ad hominem – attacking the opponent, not the issue; in this case, it can be a leader of another country or the country's ideals;

- us / them – the classic rhetoric of the nationalist used to establish identity and maintain allegiance (sometimes used in connection with the either / or fallacy, but the two should not be conflated)

PART II: When students give their speech to the audience, the class will critically analyze the speech for its logical flaws in the same way they analyzed the documents in Assessment 2. Students must be made aware, even when they purposefully construct them, of the problems of creating a mythistory built around difference. Instructors must carefully monitor students as they work on this assignment to keep it clearly focused and should not adopt this exercise unless there is enough time to devote both to Parts I and II.

Assessment Four: Retaining Chronological Knowledge

Students will be tested in two ways under timed conditions. First, they will be asked to identify and explain an excerpt from a primary source in relation to the main themes of the exercises. Primary-source analysis strengthens their critical-thinking skills. Second, they will be required to write an analytic essay exploring the definitions of nationalism and their consequences for state development.

Appendix A: *Journal of World History* References and Primary Source Material

Bentley, Jerry H. "Myths, Wagers, and Some Moral Implications of World History." *Journal of World History* 16/1 (2005): 51-82.

Dirlik, Arif. "Performing the World: Reality and Representation in the Making of World Histor(ies)." 16/4 (2005): 391 – 410.

Sachsenmaier, Dominic. "World History as Ecumenical History?" *Journal of World History* 18/4 (2007): 465-490.

Strayer, Robert. "Decolonization, Democratization, and Communist Reform: The Soviet Collapse in Comparative Perspective." *Journal of World History* 12/2 (2001): 375–406.

Sutherland, Heather. "The Problematic Authority of (World) History." *Journal of World History* 18/4 (2007): 491 – 522.

Many of the **primary sources** are readily available online. Specifically, the following websites might be explored:

Paul Halsall's *Modern History Sourcebook* – a website of selected primary documents with citations.

<<<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/modsbook.html>>>

European Navigator (or ENA) – a website on the history of the European Union

<<<http://www.ena.lu/>>>

Cold War International History Project – a website connected to the Wilson Center that houses a digital library of documents relating to the Cold War. Many documents very specifically deal with nationalism.

<<http://wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=topics.home>>

Tamilnation – a website primarily devoted to Tamil history. Nevertheless, it dedicates several pages to defining nationalism and ideas of nationhood:

<<<http://www.tamilnation.org/nation.htm>>>

Appendix B: Example of Group Exercise

Group Exercise #3: Nationalism and Argumentation

Members of Group _____

Directions: In your group, read the document and then answer the following questions. You will have 45 minutes to complete this form (write on another sheet of paper or on the back) and we will reconvene as a group to discuss your findings. You should also to use the supplied butcher paper to outline your responses for the class.

1. Who is the author/speaker? What is her/his title? What country is the speaker from? Who is the intended audience?

2. Does the speaker make comments about the nation? How? In what form?

3. Does the speaker make any allusions to other nations? What are these allusions? How do you think the audience is supposed to react to these comments?

4. What forms of argumentation does the speaker use (appeals to emotions, recognition of counterargument, appeal to authority of the speaker, etc.)?

5. What is the argument being made in this piece? Can you pinpoint a "thesis statement"? Summarize the main argument (your OWN words) in one or two sentences.

6. Can you pull out the bias in the argument? You should also pinpoint logical fallacies used by the speaker (either / or, ad hominem, overuse of pathos, etc.).

7. Compare your reading to the statements Michael Ignatieff made about nationalism in *The Road to Nowhere*. Are there similarities between your reading and some of the people Ignatieff interviews? Explain.

Appendix C: Student Reflection

I generally solicit student reflections on the effectiveness of group assignments after the semester. The following response is from a student who took my class in Spring, 2007.

What, in your view, was the primary goal of the exercise?

The primary goal of this exercise was to recognize and analyze the bias that was present in different country's [sic] nationalistic arguments. By recognizing this bias, we could begin to speculate the reasons, goals, and motives for such arguments.

How were all of these documents related to each other?

All of these documents and films were related to each other in that they all focused on nationalist rhetoric and bias. They all contained a specific language and tone, and used carefully selected images, words, or phrases to either mask or embellish their arguments with pathos specific to their targeted audience.

What did you learn about nationalism?

I learned that nationalism can be both a unifying and dividing factor and that bias and prejudice often affect the way other nations and peoples view each other.

Based on the lesson, did you realize that you had preconceived ideas about the nation that you never really contemplated before? If so, what and why?

This lesson made me realize that I had preconceived ideas about how the United States was viewed around the world. Based on American media from the 1980s Cold War period, one would believe that the United States was viewed as liberators spreading democracy to people that were begging for our help, when in reality, it may only have been the United States desire for this image.

Did the exercise make you think about the world around you any differently? If so, how? If not, why not?

This exercise made me think more critically about the language and bias that is present in nationalistic rhetoric, especially that of the United States. It is often easier to analyze argument of another nation or people, yet it is harder to do so with your own country as it more common place and trite. This exercise made me view and analyze both my own country and others countries [sic] nationalistic arguments more critically.

General Comments on usefulness of the exercise:

This exercise is very useful, it forces students to think and analyze argument critically and not accept everything at face value. The use of nationalism as a medium for critical analysis is both engaging and informative, especially with the use of both foreign and domestic examples.