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Nationalism

After the September 11 attacks, the United States experienced a resurgence of patriotic feelings and nationalistic pride. While the United States has always had a strong sense of patriotism around election times, the Fourth of July, and numerous military engagements and situations, with the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the United States began to feel an unprecedented nationalistic and patriotic surge throughout the citizenry.

Nationalism can be defined as a “belief that the shared characteristics of the nation are valuable and need to be preserved.” (Baycroft, 1998, 4) Nationalism is more than patriotism. While patriotism is loyalty and sentiment to the nation that a person belongs to, nationalism takes it one step further. Nationalism includes the belief that perceived threats or enemies to the nation be eliminated, destroyed, or defeated. (Baycroft, 1998, 4) Nationalism goes hand in hand with the formation of a nation. A nation can be defined as a “group of people identified as sharing any number of real or perceived characteristics.” (Baycroft, 1998, 3) For instance, a common ancestry, language, religion, culture, historical traditions and territory are factors taken into account for a group to will desire to remain together and form a political unit. (Baycroft, 1998, 3) Of course not every nation will have the same items that define it and not every nation will have the same things in common. For instance, France identifies itself with territory and language, Belgium with religion and Germany by ancestry. However, it is important and necessary for the citizens to be aware of what links them together as a nation; this gives them their national identity and nationalistic pride. (Baycroft, 1998, 3) If there is no desire on the part of the citizens to remain a nation, many common characteristics will not be enough to form a nation. (Baycroft, 1998, 3)

There is also another side to nationalism. It is politically and territorial based. Nationalism can be considered one of the most “geographical of all political movements.” (Taylor and Flint, 2000, 192) The idea of a “homeland” and territory is rooted in the significance of nationalism. (Taylor and Flint, 2000, 192) A state then becomes the “nation-state” because of the political will of the people and their expression of nationalism. (Taylor and Flint, 2000, 192) It is in this instance of nationalism relating to territory that the campaign fought by the Palestinian organizations have a high degree of nationalistic pride. They seek to have their own nation-state in which to live, preferably in the land that is Israel.

The ideas of nationalism are particularly noticeable during times of war and conflict. There are many ways that nationalism and the idea that one belongs to a specific nation are imbedded in societies. For instance, the use of words like “we” and “us” are constantly used in advertisements and news reports to remind us that there is the notion of the “other.” (Taylor and Flint, 2000, 193) This is present in the everyday feelings of Islamic Fundamentalism in which the “other” can be determined to be the “West” or more specifically the United States. The ideas preached by Osama Bin Laden can also be characterized as nationalistic. Bin Laden teaches his followers that the United States is the infidel and thus must be destroyed. Going back to the beginning this ties into the definition of nationalism that is posed. While most would agree that the actions of Bin Laden and his followers are that of terrorism, they are in fact nationalistic to their “nation.” They feel threaten by the ideals of modernization, democracy, and that of the United States. Bin Laden and his followers are not the only ones experiencing nationalistic attitudes recently. There has been a large resurgence of nationalistic pride with in the United States in response to the September 11th attacks.

The United States while it in many views has the right to defend itself against terrorism of any kind, the nationalistic feeling that spread can have a devastating effect for what the United States stands for. After the attacks, the increase in nationalism in the United States is evident in the actions taken in the “war on terror.” It is also evident in anti-Islam feelings that were sounded throughout the country. Nationalism can threaten the very ideals that the United States has fought for throughout the world. When the United States turns patriotism and nationalism in to hatred of other cultures, it threatens the very diversity, freedom, and civil rights that it protects.

Works Cited:

Baycroft, Timothy (1998). *Nationalism in Europe 1789-1945*. Cambridge University Press. United Kingdom.

Taylor, Peter J. and Colin Flint (2000). *Political Geography: world-economy, nation-state and locality*. Pearson Education Limited. United Kingdom.