

Defining Nationalism Student Page

Introduction:

The English word “nation” comes from the Latin root *natio*, or “being born.” What does “birth” have to do with “nation”? These ideas are connected in the concept of “nationalism,” the political belief that what bonds people together in a country is a fundamental connection to one another, similar to the connection that binds individual people together in a family. In this lesson, you will study two documents in which the authors talk about this idea of a bond between people that, in their opinion, should be the political basis for a country. As you study these documents, think about the *kind* of bond that connects people in a nation, and how this bond might be created.

All Web links for this lesson can be found at:

<http://www.socialstudies.com/worldlinks.html>.

Directions:

Johann Gottlieb Fichte: “To the German Nation,” 1806

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1806fichte.html>

Johann Gottlieb Fichte wrote these words when the French Emperor Napoleon had led his armies north to Germany and was in possession of Berlin. Answer the following questions based on this text:

1. What does Fichte say are the “first, original, and truly natural boundaries of states”?
2. What are two ways in which Fichte says a common language binds people together?
3. According to Fichte, what will happen if people who speak a common language “absorb and mingle” people of “different descent and language”?
4. Fichte writes, “it is not because men dwell [live] between certain mountains and rivers that they are a people...” Why then does he think that “men” dwell together?
5. Read ahead to the paragraph that begins “Now, at last, let us be bold enough...” What is the “deceptive vision” that Fichte discusses in this paragraph? What does Fichte think of this “vision”?
6. When and how does Fichte believe the “manifestation of divinity appear[s] in its true mirror”?
7. According to Fichte, where can one find “the guarantee of [a nation’s] present and future worth, virtue, and merit”?
8. Based on your reading of this document, why might Fichte have *not* wanted the German people to be mingled together with other Europeans in a multicultural

empire? Explain your answer.

J.V. Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*

<http://www.marx2mao.org/Stalin/MNQ12.html>

Start reading at “I. The Nation.”

9. How does Stalin define a nation? How does he explain his view that the community is “not racial, nor is it tribal”? (A “historically constituted community of people” refers to the idea that communities of people are created through historical circumstances.)

10. Why does Stalin say the empires of Cyrus (of Persia) and Alexander the Great were not nations?

11. What stable communities are not nations, according to Stalin? How does Stalin distinguish a national community from a state community?

12. What else does Stalin say is a characteristic feature of a nation?

13. What else does Stalin claim is essential for a nation? Why does he consider this important?

14. According to Stalin, why are England, America, and Ireland three separate nations, even though they share the same language?

Read ahead to the section that begins “We have now exhausted the characteristic features of a nation.”

15. Copy Stalin’s complete definition of a nation: “A nation is...”

16. “Nationalism” is patriotic love for one’s nation, and loyalty to it. Based on your reading of Fichte and Stalin, explain why people often feel so intensely for their nation that they are willing to die in war for it.