The rampage of violence in the former Yugoslavia, the ethnic tensions throughout Eastern Europe, and the reemergence of neo-Nazi activity in Germany, France, and other Western European countries are but the latest indications that nationalism and ethnic particularism will be the critical factors in the international politics of the post-Cold War era.

The concept of nation corresponds to the human need for belonging, group formation, and group identity, particularly under the conditions of an emerging global community. But the concept is also marred by the assumption that only one nation should exist under the roof of one state and that this state must dominate, to the tune of its national anthem, all other nations, both within as well as outside its borders.

This unit is designed to help students better understand one of the strongest group sentiments in the world today, nationalism, and the tremendous potential nationalism has had—and continues to have—to act both as a positive or a negative, inclusionary or exclusionary force throughout Europe and the world.

The unit focuses on the basic concepts of nationalism and identity by drawing upon historic and contemporary examples. Students will develop working definitions of nation, state, nation-state, sovereignty, and identity—individual, group, national, ethnic, and civic. The changing geography of Europe as influenced by national and ethnic interests will be used as a vehicle to explore these concepts. Students will trace the development of the concept of nationalism and its relationship to the rise of democratic ideas, in particular to the concepts of sovereignty and political legitimacy that occurred during and after the Enlightenment. The idea that sovereignty resides in and a government's legitimacy derives from "the people" provided the basis for eventually arguing that every nation has a right to its own state, as expressed in Woodrow Wilson's principles which asserted a nation's right to have its own state. Finally, students will explore and look for effective strategies for managing competing ethnic, national, and state-centered interests.

About the Concept of Nationalism

The concept of nationalism is filled with enormous complexities—with inconsistencies, contradictions, and paradoxes. The varied meanings given to the word only begin the difficulties students might face when they study nationalism. Nationalism is a sentiment filled with emotional overtones, and definitions of nationalism are as numerous as the individuals who have attempted definitions. There is even a complete encyclopedia just on this one concept.

Not only do people begin with different assumptions about nationalism and reach different conclusions, but nationalism itself has varied with time, place, and circumstances, and is continually changing. Nationalism works in a multiplicity of forms, some sharp and undisguised, some vague and hidden, some directed to cultural integrations, others to political ends, some democratic in character, others tending towards authoritarianism or dictatorship. Nationalism has a tremendous potential to act both as a positive or negative force. It can be a force for unity, or a force for disruption and division. The nationalism of each group or nation is different from the nationalism of every other group or nation. If there is any agreement on any aspect of nationalism, it is this: nationalisms differ and change.

Other terms that are closely connected to the concept of nationalism can be equally confusing: nation, nationality, ethnic group, and ethnicity. Throughout the unit, you will find background information designed to help you and your students understand the context or some of the common elements in the definitions of these concepts and terms. Rather than focusing on one definition over another, it is important that students understand that the concept of nationalism varies and evolves.
In this curriculum unit, special efforts have been made to present major concepts and political, social, and ethical questions through flexible, innovative teaching methods and through the use of varied instructional materials that are engaging to students.

**Unit Goals**

- to compare the concept of personal and group identity to the concept of national identity
- to define, relate, and distinguish key terms needed for understanding the concept of nationalism, such as nation, state, country, nation-state, ethnic group, ethnicity, nationalism, sovereignty, and autonomy.
- to become aware of the conflicts resulting from the discrepancy existing in many European countries between state boundaries and national, ethnic, linguistic and/or religious identities
- to learn about the major changes that have taken place recently in the political geography of Europe
- to increase awareness of the fact that most European States are multi-ethnic and multinational
- to explore the reasons for national and ethnic conflicts firsthand and examine and develop approaches to channel different nationalities away from conflict and toward cooperation

**Parent Publications**

*Identity - "Us" Versus "Them"*

(1993) $