Lesson 36
The Revolutions of 1848: A Case Study in Nationalism

Objective

- To understand elements of nineteenth-century nationalism in the Habsburg state

Notes to the Teacher

The 1848 revolutions were liberal, bourgeois, and urban in character. In part, rebels aimed to achieve goals for a liberal society that both the radical republicans and the reactionary Metternich thwarted. Behind this desire lay stirrings of nationalistic fervor. The Metternich era had seen the rise of a strong nationalistic movement throughout Germany and the Habsburg domains. The Romantic movement, based on strong emotional currents, promoted sentiments for a united Germany among the middle class, intellectuals, professionals, and students. Nationalism in the multinational dynastic state of the Habsburgs served as a volatile and potentially destructive force. To satisfy the national aspiration of the variety of peoples in this domain required dismemberment of the Empire and the creation of numerous national states. For a moment, it appeared that the liberals would succeed. Liberals in Vienna, Prague, and Budapest wrote constitutions based on liberal principles. However, the liberals remained a minority, fought amongst themselves, refused to extend national representation to other minorities, and had no military power to defend themselves. The Austrian conservatives, in control of the army and with the assistance of Tsar Nicholas I of Russia, crushed the disunified liberals and restored the Austrian monarchy, thus reducing nationalism for a time to the world of fantasy.

In this lesson, students prepare for class by completing a chart and interpreting a map. In class, they read several selections on nationalism to extract the ingredients of nationalism. Then they contrast their list with that of a recognized historian and conclude the lesson by discussing a series of questions on the role and fate of nationalism in the Austrian Empire.
# The Revolutions of 1848: A Case Study in Nationalism

Part A. Complete the following chart surveying the Habsburg Empire.

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<th>REGION</th>
<th>LANGUAGE</th>
<th>ECONOMY</th>
<th>RELIGION</th>
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</table>
1. How many nationalities were present in the Habsburg Empire?

2. Which nationality appears to occupy the largest amount of territory?

3. Which nationality appears to be scattered over the widest area?

4. Which nationalities would be more content in a bordering state?

5. With only two cities noted on the map, what would this suggest about the economy?

6. According to the map, where could the suggested center of the Empire be located?

7. What was the capital city of the Empire?
Part C. Read the following selections and compile a list of factors that contribute to nationalism.

"An avowed advocate of the cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment, he (Metternich) regarded nationalism as a divisive force that separated one European people from another."

"The diversity of the empire soon became a characteristic of the revolutionary movement, as the various nationalities divided among themselves."

By stressing the past, the unique, the emotional, and the individual aspects of life, the romantic movement paved the way for the rise of the fragmenting force of modern nationalism. By emphasizing the right of the individual to define his own standards instead of adhering to accepted eighteenth-century principles, the romantics contributed to the new political pressures that would be felt during the nineteenth century.


By emphasizing research into the past and the picturesque to find their own roots, the romantics helped give birth to one of the nineteenth century's most potent movements—nationalism. They investigated their own history, folklore, linguistic backgrounds, and myths in the attempt to define their uniqueness. They saw the world not as a cosmopolitan and rational unit, but as a place of natural variety.

Ibid., p. 543.

The liberal believed that freedom could be achieved only by those nationalities who governed themselves. Each people should therefore have its own country, and no state should attempt to rule other peoples. The tie between nationality, liberty, and government was aptly stated by J. S. Mill when he wrote that "it is in general a necessary condition of free institutions that the boundaries of governments should coincide in the main with those of nationalities."


Historians published great collections of documents and wrote long accounts of their countries’ past. Where written records failed, myths and ballads were collected to reveal national character. The search for folklore was best exemplified by the efforts of Jacob Grimm (1785–1863) to gather together the fairy tales that Germans had passed on from one generation to another. To aid in this work, scholarly societies were founded, newspapers and magazines were published in the native languages, and schools were established to teach pupils their cultural heritage. Poets, novelists, and composers based many of their works on historical and legendary subjects. In this way, the romantic's love of the past combined with the nationalist's search for traditions, culture, and the spirit of a people.

Major, *Western World*, p. 536.
The most famous of the liberal nationalists was Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872). In 1831, he founded Young Italy, an association of young men dedicated to the establishment of a free, united republic of Italy. Soon, there were 60,000 members. Mazzini believed that “The nation is the God-appointed instrument for the welfare of the human race, and in this alone its moral essence lies. . . . Fatherlands are but the workshops of humanity.” Each nation had the duty to train its members “in the light of the moral law” so that they could make their unique contribution to mankind as a whole. Mazzini, like other liberal nationalists, rejected the idea that the Italians should ever rule other peoples. Indeed, he organized a Young Europe movement and was instrumental in establishing a Young Poland, a Young Hungary, a Young Germany, and a Young Ireland, to agitate for the independence or unity of these peoples.

Ibid., p. 537.

In Budapest, the zealous liberal and fiery nationalist Louis Kossuth (1802–1894) gave a memorable speech as he castigated the “stagnant bureaucratic system” and spoke of the “pestilential air blowing from the Vienna charnel house and its deadening effect upon all phases of Hungarian life.”


By the summer the mood suddenly shifted, as the German and Czech nationalists began to quarrel and the Magyars began to oppress the Slavic nationalities after they demanded their own political independence.

Ibid.