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# Nationalism

By Ernest Gellner

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## Nationalism By Ernest Gellner

A defining force in world history, nationalism remains an inescapable feature of a modern condition. It has underpinned the emergence of many states, and the conflict it has often generated has caused enormous suffering, both directly and indirectly. Nationalism remains a powerful influence today; in the former Yugoslavia and the successor states of the Soviet Union it has instigated great violence and atrocity.

In this incisive and provocative book, completed just before his death, Ernest Gellner - described as "one of the last of the great central European polymath intellectuals" by the *Financial Times* - explores the phenomenon of nationalism, tracing its emergence and roots in the modern industrialized nation state, its links with romanticism and its creation of national myths. He investigates its various manifestations and reveals how in long established states such as France, it has been relatively benign, while in Eastern Europe in particular - where nationalist feeling preceded the emergence of modern states - its influence has been far more problematic, and at times disastrous. Finally, the book explores the prospects of minimizing the influence of nationalist feeling and cautiously anticipates the possibility of its decline in this decade of continuing atrocities and "ethnic cleansing."

Lucid and direct, Gellner's work combines politics, history, philosophy, and anthropology with the multidisciplinary flair for which he was renowned. As nationalism continues to inform contemporary politics, often with vicious and tragic results, Gellner's last words on the subject are essential reading.

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### Editorial Review

About the Author

**Ernest Gellner** was Professor of Philosophy at the London School of Economics from 1962 to 1984, when he became Professor of Social Anthropology at Cambridge University. Before his death in 1995, he was Research Professor and Director of the Center for the Study of Nationalism at the Central European University in Prague. His many books include *Words and Things*, *Thoughts and Change*, *Saints of the Atlas*, *Nations and Nationalism*, *Culture, Identity and Politics*, *Plough, Sword, and Book*, and *Conditions of Liberty*

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