



Nations and Nationalism (New Perspectives on the Past)

Ernest Gellner

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Nationalism is one of the most powerful forces in the modern world, yet it is surprisingly little studied and only imperfectly understood, either by its adherents or its opponents. Its irruption into the modern world is often explained as a resurgence of primitive, atavistic instincts, or as a delusion fostered by a few theoreticians, politicians or propagandists. The present volume interprets nationalism in terms of its social roots, which it locates in industrial social organization. A society that aims for affluence and economic growth, Professor Gellner argues, depends on innovation, occupational mobility, mass media, universal literacy, and education in a shared, standard idiom. Taken together these transform the relationship between culture and the state. The functioning of the society depends on an all-embracing educational system, tied to one culture and protected by a state identified with that culture. The principle one state, one culture makes itself felt, and political units which do not conform to it feel the strain in the form of nationalist activity.



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