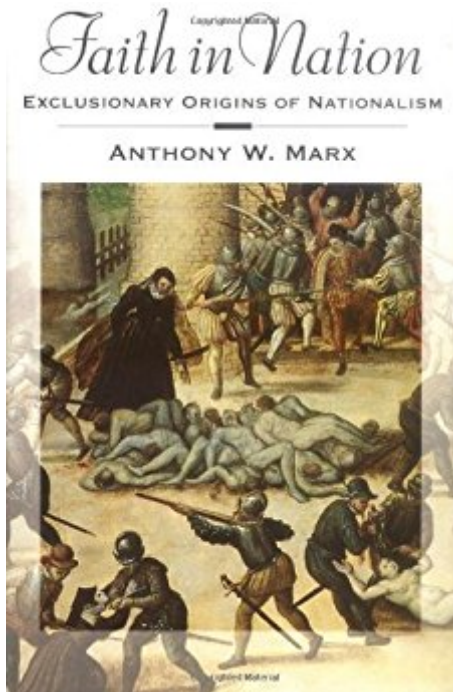


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Faith In Nation: Exclusionary Origins Of Nationalism



Synopsis

Common wisdom has long held that the ascent of the modern nation coincided with the flowering of Enlightenment democracy and the decline of religion, ringing in an age of tolerant, inclusive, liberal states. Not so, demonstrates Anthony W. Marx in this landmark work of revisionist political history and analysis. In a startling departure from a historical consensus that has dominated views of nationalism for the past quarter century, Marx argues that European nationalism emerged two centuries earlier, in the early modern era, as a form of mass political engagement based on religious conflict, intolerance, and exclusion. Challenging the self-congratulatory genealogy of civic Western nationalism, Marx shows how state-builders attempted to create a sense of national solidarity to support their burgeoning authority. Key to this process was the transfer of power from local to central rulers; the most suitable vehicle for effecting this transfer was religion and fanatical passions. Religious intolerance--specifically the exclusion of religious minorities from the nascent state--provided the glue that bonded the remaining populations together. Out of this often violent religious intolerance grew popular nationalist sentiment. Only after a core and exclusive nationality was formed in England and France, and less successfully in Spain, did these countries move into the "enlightened" 19th century, all the while continuing to export intolerance and exclusion to overseas colonies. Providing an explicitly political theory of early nation-building, rather than an account emphasizing economic imperatives or literary imaginings, Marx reveals that liberal, secular Western political traditions were founded on the basis of illiberal, intolerant origins. His provocative account also suggests that present-day exclusive and violent nation-building, or efforts to form solidarity through cultural or religious antagonisms, are not fundamentally different from the West's own earlier experiences.

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Customer Reviews

Anthony Marx, who was recently appointed president of Amherst College, exposes the clay feet of Western nationalism in his 2003 work, FAITH IN NATION. In this ground breaking work of revisionist political history and analysis, Marx rejects the traditionally held assumptions regarding the origins of Western nationalism. Marx goes about systematically challenging traditional scholarship that places the roots of nationalism in 18th and 19th century political engagement, allegiance to the secular power of emerging states, liberalism, tolerance and inclusiveness. According to Marx, nationalism was not a product of the Enlightenment. Its birth did not coincide with the rights and toleration of England's constitutional monarchy and it was not epitomized by the motto of the French Revolution, "liberty, equality and fraternity." Through the use of a comparative study of the three great Atlantic seaboard powers of early modern Western Europe, Spain, France and England, Marx shows that the origins of nationalism are in fact sinister, illiberal rather than liberal. Going back two centuries earlier than traditional thought and relying on original sources and the analysis of current day scholars, he reveals the dirty little secret that Western nationalism evolved through a process of exclusion rather than inclusion and from internal discord over religion, usually in the form of religious fanaticism. He shows the church as a tool to facilitate the exclusion of Jews in Spain, the oppression of religious sects in England and France, and sometimes murder so that like minded people could feel a sense of commonality outside the local community and for an allegiance to a central government.

In Faith in Nation, Anthony Marx delivers a spirited rebuttal of the "literary trope" (p 15) about a liberal, inclusive Western nationalism. Instead, he argues that even the "truest" brand of Western nationalism—that of England and France—came to being only after brutal fratricide of massive scale. His entire theory is based on a central position that nationalism developed much earlier than is

popularly believed today. This leads one to question why does he insist on such a position? Has he made the case for it? What happens to his theory if the position turns out to be wrong? I will argue that the definition of the state, or the lack thereof, is key to answering all of the above questions. Only by implicitly loosening the definition of the state, can Marx trace the genesis of Western nationalism back to as early as the 16th century, thus cementing the linkage between Western nationalism and religious violence. However, the liberal adaptation of the concept of the state puts Marx's entire theory on shaky ground. According to Marx, the state is the *raison d'être* of nationalism: for nationalism to become a historical force, it "must ... refer to a state as an existing structure or potential object of engagement" (p 8). Although he declares early and clearly what nationalism is (p 4), he never spells out his definition of a state. In fact, what we would think of as a modern state today can hardly be found in 16th century Europe. Only when the definition of a state is sufficiently loosened, can Marx backdate nationalism to the 16th century, when most of the political authorities at the time existed in the form of royal courts. Only after he pushes back the genesis of nationalism, can Marx connect the religious violence of the 16th century to nationalism.

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