



Nations today seem to be a self-evident reality. The nation is the core unit of political legitimacy for a sovereign state, while the “United Nations” is the platform for humanity’s cooperative decision-making. Yet nations are neither ancient nor self-evident entities; they are modern constructions that compete with other forms of community and identities for legitimacy and loyalty. Even the basic question, “what is a nation,” brings no uniform answer. Nation-states and nationalism can bond communities, but they are also sources of violent conflict and oppression and have facilitated some of the most barbaric acts in human history. This seminar will explore the origins and development of nations and nationalism, comparing various versions of the phenomenon and consider what all of this means for us today, as Americans at a time of heightened nationalist feelings and growing awareness of racial oppression. The course will raise basic questions about identity, community, religion, ethnicity, and the human condition.