

The Debate Prep



Figure 1: A quiet library study table at dusk, lit by a single desk lamp, covered with open history textbooks, handwritten notes, a world map showing

The library was nearly empty by dusk, just a single desk lamp glowing over a table piled with history textbooks, handwritten notes, and a world map. Marcus and Priya had been assigned to argue opposite sides of a debate on nationalism, and neither wanted to lose.

"Nation as identity, or nation as interest. That's the whole debate," Marcus said, tapping his pen against an open textbook.

"My grandpa still talks about the internments during the war," he went on. "Families were locked up just because of where their ancestors came from. Says nationalism can turn ugly fast when a country decides who counts and who doesn't."

"Right, but think about the sovereignty movement in Quebec," Priya said. "For decades, many Quebecois have wanted the right to govern themselves and protect their language and culture. That's people wanting self-determination, not conquest."

"And First Nations self-government isn't the same thing as Napoleon rebuilding Europe, either," Marcus added. "Napoleon spread nationalism by force, redrawing borders and imposing his rule. First Nations communities are asking to govern their own affairs on their own land."

"So which loyalty wins, when they clash?" Priya asked.

Marcus shrugged. "Maybe reconciling them matters more than picking a winner."

Priya wrote that down. "That's our thesis."

They packed up their notes as the librarian dimmed the lights, already arguing over which examples would open their presentation. Neither noticed how late it had gotten.

Words to know

- **Nationalism:** A shared identity or collective consciousness felt by a people, often tied to nation, land, or culture
- **Ultranationalism:** Extreme nationalism, often linked to conflict and exclusion of others, seen in events like the World Wars
- **Self-determination:** The right of a people to govern themselves and decide their own political status
- **Reconciling contending loyalties:** Balancing competing national or cultural identities within one country, such as Canadian, Quebecois, and Indigenous nationalisms

Check your understanding

1. What historical example does Marcus use to show how nationalism can turn ugly?
2. How does Priya's example of Quebec sovereignty differ from Napoleon's nationalism?
3. Why does Marcus say First Nations self-government is different from Napoleon "rebuilding Europe"?
4. What thesis do Marcus and Priya settle on, and why might reconciling loyalties matter more than "picking a winner"?

Answer key

1. Marcus refers to wartime internments, where people were confined based on their ancestry, showing how nationalism can exclude and harm those seen as outsiders.
2. Quebec's sovereignty movement is about a people seeking self-determination within their own country, while Napoleon's nationalism involved conquering and redrawing other nations' borders by force.
3. First Nations self-government is about a people governing their own affairs on their own land, not imposing rule over others, unlike Napoleon's expansion across Europe.
4. Their thesis is that reconciling contending nationalist loyalties matters more than deciding which loyalty should win, since competing identities—like Canadian, Quebecois, and Indigenous nationalisms—can coexist within one country.

Curriculum link: [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#), [Outcome](#)

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