

MAKING (MORE) HISTORY: WORLD HISTORY 1750 - PRESENT



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Making (More) History: World History 1750 - Present



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About the Book

Making (More) History

This textbook continues on the theme established in the previous textbook (Making History) of "history denying" as a concept to consider whenever studying the past. Scholar Irene Silverblatt, who explores colonialism and gender, argues that creating historical knowledge also involves – either inadvertently or deliberately – “history denying.” History has always been politicized – whether we want to acknowledge that fact or not. Silverblatt rightly asserts that multiple versions of a past event exist, and there are certain versions that function to reinforce and uphold prevailing beliefs that benefit the individuals overseeing institutions of power and other versions that directly challenge the traditional ideas and the existing power structures. Individuals are left with the task of figuring out which version they have been exposed to, and more importantly, why.

Therefore, this text takes the approach that history as a body of knowledge must be understood within Silverblatt's framework. History can be designed to deny, silence, or omit certain perspectives and experiences that will inevitably produce a narrow understanding of the past. When the omissions are deliberate, they are often meant to reinforce the prevailing ideas that benefit those who hold positions of power. However, when all voices and experiences are considered while studying the past, it provides us with a more complete and thorough understanding through which we can develop the most informed and accurate meaning of the historical moment.

While Silverblatt's commentary on history might not be that revolutionary to some, it is important to keep in mind because there are still individuals and institutions that benefit from “history denying.” Whenever people can be convinced that only one version of the past exists, it limits our understanding of a more honest and authentic history. One way to think about this idea is by looking at memorials honoring Christopher Columbus in places like Argentina. The people who devoted time and money to build statues of Columbus operated within a historical narrative that was Eurocentric: a perspective that prioritized the experiences of peoples and cultures on the European continent as the primary version of history.

Statues honoring the explorer were motivated in part by the belief that he had discovered something new. But, new for whom? The Americas were unknown to the Europeans just as Europeans were unknown to the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas, yet only one hemisphere was given the label “the New World.” By denying the concept of “new” to the Americas, it created only one perspective about the encounter: that Europeans had “discovered” something “new.” Therefore, Eurocentrism served as a historical force that led to the creation of statues and holidays celebrating Christopher Columbus. They were initiated and developed by those who benefited from framing his contribution to history as having “discovered” something “new.”

However, if we do not deny the history of those who were colonized by European powers and take into account their perspective and experiences, then a more complete picture and understanding of Columbus comes into focus. The Indigenous Peoples throughout North, Central, and South America who were exploited, terrorized, and slaughtered might not find anything to celebrate, honor, or memorialize in Columbus. He was a violent and brutal invader (even by “the standards” of his time), and their experiences present a counter narrative to the Eurocentric narrative that silenced the voices of Indigenous Peoples in order to create Columbus as a hero.

So, just as we can understand how and why statues of Christopher Columbus went up in places all throughout the Americas, we can also recognize the motivation of those who tore them down. Making good history is to not deny certain voices from the past because they make us “uncomfortable” or challenge an inherited understanding about the past. Making good history requires us to face all the perspectives of those involved and affected by the historical moments we seek to understand as a means to make sense of who we are and how our world looks today.

This textbook will attempt to bring forth histories that do not always align with more traditional, or Eurocentric, versions of the past. This does not imply that the history of Europe and its peoples are not important, and this also does not mean that this textbook is entirely devoid of Eurocentrism. European history is vital to understanding world history, but so are the histories of the peoples and regions from other parts of the world. Although this textbook is meant to present a much more diverse narrative, it has limitations. Trying to bring forth the varied experiences of different cultures and different regions from around the world throughout history will inevitably create gaps in the story, and will unfortunately require that some stories are left out in the pursuit of a succinct and consumable text for a survey-level course.

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About the Author

Dr. Lindsay John Bell

Dr. Lindsay Bell standing in front of the Roman Colosseum, with visitors, green lawns, and the historic structure in the background.

Figure 1: Dr. Lindsay Bell outside the Roman Colosseum in Rome, Italy.

I am a historian, educator, researcher, and writer. I seek to craft immersive and engaging history instruction that focuses on a bottom-up approach to the past to center the experiences of "ordinary individuals" acting and reacting to the forces that shaped their lives. I seek to help others understand that history is more than just a subject to study in school. History is a journey to uncover more about ourselves, the world around us, and an investigation into what makes us human. When we are able to see the humanity of those in the past, we can reveal it in our present.

I am currently a full-time Instructor of History at De Anza College. I earned my Ph.D. in History (R.A.T.E.) from Iowa State University (ISU) in May 2020.

Marx Gomez-Liendo



Figure 2: Marx Gomez-Liendo standing in a formal garden near civic buildings in Brussels, Belgium.

Marx Gomez-Liendo holds a bachelor's degree in sociology from the Central University of Venezuela (UCV) and a master's in social studies of science from the Venezuelan Institute of Scientific Research (IVIC). His teaching philosophy centers on education as an ongoing dialogue within a learning community where all participants learn from one another. With over 10 years of teaching experience in Venezuela and the United States, Marx integrates his professional expertise, activist experience, and advocacy for open access to knowledge, grounded in his belief that education is a fundamental human right. Beyond teaching, Marx has worked as a policy analyst and research associate, bringing a critical, policy-oriented approach to his pedagogy. His primary research interests span interdisciplinary fields and schools of thought, including political ecology, science and technology studies, and decolonial theory.

1: THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT AND REVOLUTIONS

Overview

The Age of Enlightenment allowed people all over the world to re-imagine the relationship between the people and the government. The ideas that emerged through the Enlightenment would inspire new political systems that would establish the foundation for the modern nation-state, and drastically alter the trajectory of human history.

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1.1: The Enlightenment

To Be "Enlightened"

The Age of Enlightenment encouraged a gradual shift from an understanding of political sovereignty as a gift of God (the Divine Right of Kings as expressed by absolute monarchs like Louis XIV) to ideas of popular sovereignty and government by consent of the governed or through a “social contract” between rulers and people. The Enlightenment blossomed when people discovered new knowledge through both exploration and science and began throwing off what they considered the superstitions of an earlier age, including the “divine right” of kings. Philosophers like John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau began reimagining the relationship between individuals and society, while popular writers like Thomas Paine began translating these ideas into pamphlets like *Common Sense* and into books like *The Rights of Man* and *The Age of Reason* that were read not only by other philosophers but also by hundreds of thousands of regular literate people.

Although much of world history focuses on events, concepts, and issues through the lens of European culture and society, we cannot deny that Europe had a significant impact on the Atlantic world, especially in their justification of expansion into areas already occupied as mentioned earlier. Much of what European philosophers espoused during the Age of Enlightenment had a dual effect as it moved throughout the world. To some powers, it was justification that what they were pursuing, either within their own countries or outside to expand, was right. Colonial powers, predominately European, moved out of some areas and into others in an attempt to regain raw materials and resources lost by these revolutions taking place in the earlier colonized regions of the world. The world was changing rapidly, with new concepts, ideas, and philosophies that would bring great change to existing structures, politically, socially, economically, religiously, and culturally.

We cannot reduce the Enlightenment to a single unifying philosophy or body of thought. But Enlightenment thinkers in intellectual circles in Asia, Europe, and the Americas were inspired by the seventeenth century’s emphasis on using reason to grapple with questions about human nature, the complexities of political power and the social order, and the principles of logic and scientific thinking.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the relationship between scientific developments and the Enlightenment
- Discuss major theories of natural rights
- Analyze Enlightenment ideas about the social contract and the consent of the governed

The Authority of Reason

Many of the components of Western science that, along with the ideas of the Italian Renaissance, inspired Enlightenment thought were built on scientific traditions developed in the Islamic world, which had absorbed ancient Greek and Indian systems of knowledge. In particular, Al-Andalus, the Muslim-ruled area of Spain and Portugal that rose to power in 711, began wielding significant influence on European intellectual activity in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. By preserving and translating the works of ancient Greek thinkers, such as Aristotle and Plato, that were not available in Europe at the time, Muslim scholars in Spain fueled both the European Renaissance of the twelfth century and the Italian Renaissance of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In addition to preserving seminal Greek texts, Muslim scholars in medieval Al-Andalus, such as the twelfth-century intellectual Averroes, also wrote and translated Arabic philosophical treatises that were widely read by scholars in Christian Europe.

Elsewhere in the Muslim world, Arabic, Indian, and Persian treatises on mathematics, medicine, and astronomy had long wielded significant influence on European science and philosophy. The contributions of medieval Persian mathematicians such as Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi and Omar Khayyam to the study of algebra, and the pivotal role of sixth-century Indian philosopher Aryabhata in the field of trigonometry, for example, provided scholars of the Scientific Revolution with the intellectual tools to develop novel theories about the cosmos and the nature of planetary motion. These advances, however, could not have occurred without the development of the decimal number system in classical India and the innovation of fractions in the Arabic numeral systems of North Africa by the tenth century. Scientists’ ability to calculate advanced mathematical formulas and

describe the subtleties of planetary motion not only spurred the Scientific Revolution but also substituted concrete information for superstition and firmly held religious beliefs. The Enlightenment was thus a result of cross-cultural networks of scholarship and knowledge exchange that facilitated the growth of science.

Among the principles that influenced Enlightenment perceptions of knowledge were the twin concepts of deductive and inductive reasoning. Inherited from the intellectual framework of the Scientific Revolution, these approaches represent different methods of organizing information and developing hypotheses. While inductive reasoning gathers specific examples and observations to arrive at a broad generalization, deductive reasoning, in contrast, begins with a general statement or theory and applies it to specific conclusions.

Deductive reasoning had its origins in the fourth century BCE in the teachings of the Greek philosopher Aristotle, but it became a vital component of the Scientific Revolution in the work of French philosopher René Descartes. Descartes combined deductive reasoning with empiricism, the acquisition of knowledge from sensory experiences, to establish the foundations of the scientific method. Inductive reasoning, on the other hand, played an important role in the work of the English natural philosopher Francis Bacon. Bacon asserted that whereas the deductive method began with a proposition and discarded evidence that did not support that premise, inductive reasoning reached a conclusion only after the collection of evidence. According to Bacon, only inductive reasoning enabled researchers to support observations with empirical data rather than conjecture.

Ultimately, both inductive and deductive reasoning influenced the intellectual context of the Enlightenment by providing two systematic means of drawing conclusions about the natural world from observations and evidence. Whichever method they adopted, Enlightenment thinkers embraced the scientific method as a means of applying reason and objectivity to the collection and analysis of information.

Natural Rights

The topic of natural rights, rights possessed by all human beings, such as the right to life and liberty, formed the focus of many philosophical treatises and conversations in the eighteenth century. Based on the premise that all people have fundamental and inalienable rights, rights that cannot be revoked or rescinded by human laws, the concept of natural rights originated not in the Enlightenment but in far older traditions of justice and natural law. In the ancient Persian tradition of Zoroastrianism, for example, the concept of *asha*, meaning “God’s will,” connoted the unchangeable law that emanates from the divine and governs the universe. Although many ancient religious and philosophical traditions developed interpretations of natural law, European Enlightenment thinkers transformed such ideas into a political system, which was novel at the time. The growing emphasis on reason and the desire to improve human life in the eighteenth century led Enlightenment philosophers to envision political systems based on natural rights, rather than the divine right of kings or traditional social hierarchies.

One of the first Enlightenment thinkers to tackle the issue of natural rights was the English philosopher John Locke, who argued that people have fundamental rights to life, liberty, and property. In his influential work of political philosophy, *Two Treatises of Government*, he argued that all people are born in a state of freedom and that government should exist only by their consent, a principle called popular sovereignty. Although Locke and his European contemporaries asserted the inherent equality of all humans, their interpretation of equality is somewhat paradoxical, since in practice they supported the unequal institutions of colonialism and the Atlantic slave trade that deprived all but White men of their natural rights.

Like Locke and his contemporaries in England, key figures of the French Enlightenment also debated the scope of natural rights. François-Marie d’Arouet, more commonly known by his pen name Voltaire, was an especially vigorous advocate of intrinsic rights and freedoms. An outspoken critic of the Catholic Church, the aristocracy, and the French monarchy, he was particularly focused on defending religious toleration, freedom of speech, and the innate utility of reason, which he did in such works as *Treatise on Tolerance* and *Republican Ideas*. In his most famous work, the 1759 satire *Candide*, Voltaire mocked both established religion and secular government. His contemporary Montesquieu also wrote extensively about the relationship between laws and rights. Montesquieu was principally concerned with the concept of political liberty and enforcing the separation of a state’s legislative, executive, and judicial powers as a means of keeping the government in check, which he discussed in his 1748 book *The Spirit of the Laws*.

The tension between state authority and the right of individuals to make decisions for themselves likewise inspired the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose contributions to Enlightenment philosophy included his influential treatise *The Social Contract*. Dating to the era of Plato and Socrates in the fourth and fifth centuries BCE and to the second-century BCE Buddhist text *The Mahāvastu*, the social contract is an idea centered on the belief that individuals surrender their natural rights to the state, which is then charged with the task of maintaining and protecting those rights. In his assessment of natural rights, Rousseau contends that the formation of human communities makes interdependence necessary and requires reconciling individual freedoms with

the sovereignty of the state. Individuals must be free to do as they choose, but the government must also be able to restrict people's actions in order to protect the rights of all. He also discussed the theory of the general will, a concept by which a state can be legitimate only if it is guided by the will of the people as a whole, rather than the whims of an elite minority.

Whereas Locke, Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Rousseau reinforced the distinction between inalienable rights and the authority of the state, some philosophers of the era, such as Jeremy Bentham and Edmund Burke, cast doubt on the very existence of natural rights. Bentham was an English lawyer known for his adoption of utilitarianism, a political philosophy that emphasized the goal of achieving the greatest good for the greatest number of people. He contended that rights came into being only as a creation of the state and did not exist outside the confines of civil society. Even if a government did not do what the general will wished or disregarded the supremacy of natural law, Bentham wrote, disputing its legitimacy could lead only to chaos and lawlessness.



Figure 1.1.1: A portrait of Edmund Burke. (CC BY 4.0; Joshua Reynolds via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

Like Bentham, the Irish philosopher Edmund Burke also rejected the concept of popular sovereignty. Although he did not dispute the existence of natural law, he argued that natural rights became irrelevant with the formation of civil society, since only people of virtue and good judgment should be permitted to exercise political power. They would serve in the best interests of the people, who, according to Burke, would naturally give up their selfish desires and individual will in the interests of the state.

Although the Enlightenment produced a wide range of opinions about the origins and meaning of natural rights, it also enabled people to think more critically about their relationship with the state and the legitimacy of revolution. While some thinkers such as Burke and Bentham defended the supremacy of the state over individual rights, others such as Locke and Voltaire championed the integrity of natural rights and believed that political liberty could not be interfered with. As the argument continued during the Enlightenment period, it expanded into discussions of social contract theory that focused more specifically on the ethics and legitimacy of law and the political order.

Social Contract Theory

At the core of Enlightenment debate about the relationship between state authority and natural rights was the fundamental character of the social contract. This implicit agreement, or “contract,” compels those living in a society to abide by its rules and regulations or suffer punishments for violating them. In essence, those who enter into the social contract implicitly surrender their natural rights to the state, which is then charged with the task of maintaining and protecting those rights. However, according to many social contract theorists like Rousseau, when a state fails to maintain the general will or protect natural rights, citizens may in turn withdraw their social and moral obligations to the state.

The ultimate goal of social contract theory was to demonstrate that the rules imposed by civil society could be rationally justified, and that in its ideal form, government would effectively serve the interests of the people and uphold the general will. As a result, stability and social order would prevail for all. The roles of justice and liberty in civil society thus formed the focus of much debate among philosophers and European rulers concerned with preserving the balance between individual rights and political authority.

The social contract is not the same thing as democracy. A democracy is a government in which the power to govern rests in the hands of the people. Under social contract theory, kings and queens could determine what was in the best interests of their people and take such actions as they believed best protected their subjects. The two parties to the contract were the people on the one hand and the monarch on the other. The people surrendered their rights to the monarch and allowed the monarch to govern them, and the king or queen protected the people's interests. As social contract theory and the concept of natural rights gained greater recognition in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, some absolute monarchs in Europe, such as Frederick the Great of Prussia and Catherine the Great of Russia, embraced the influence of the Enlightenment and became known as an enlightened despot. Although they maintained the absolute jurisdiction of their rule, enlightened despots differentiated themselves from other monarchs by claiming they received their power from the social contract to rule in the best interest of their subjects.

Public Debate and Dissent

In the medieval period in Europe, opportunities for social encounters and the exchange of ideas had generally been limited to the domestic sphere of private households, or to spaces in which monarchical or church authority could quash dissent or criticism. Over the course of Europe's seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, public spaces became a pervasive feature of its intellectual culture for the first time.

Coffeehouses, which became a staple of European cities by the end of the eighteenth century, had long been centers of intellectual exchange and informal socialization in cities of the Islamic world after the practice of roasting coffee beans and making them into a drink began in Yemen in the 1400s. After its subsequent adoption in Arabia, coffee drinking spread to Egypt, Persia, and the Ottoman Empire. By the mid-sixteenth century, coffeehouses had become a fixture of social life in many communities of the Islamic world, where people could participate in a wide variety of conversations. Istanbul's cosmopolitan district of Tahtakale, where merchants, artisans, sailors, tradespeople, and travelers congregated, was an especially fitting site for the development of such establishments. After the first cafés there gained a wide following, portable coffee stalls and neighborhood coffeehouses became popular throughout the Ottoman Empire.

In Europe, the first coffeehouse based on the Turkish model opened in the cosmopolitan port city of Venice in 1645. Coffee shops became especially popular in England after the first one appeared in London in 1652. By 1708, London had more than five hundred, and their appeal continued to soar. The first cafés opened in Paris in the 1670s and in cities such as Vienna, Hamburg, and Frankfurt by the end of the century. Although some monarchs, particularly Charles II of England, attempted to suppress coffeehouses on the grounds that they promoted dissent and anti-royalist sentiment, such efforts generally faced so much opposition that they fell flat. Because coffeehouses existed as public spaces under private ownership in the midst of a growing commercial economy, in most cases, monarchs and other state authorities had little control over them.

Coffeehouses occasionally acquired a reputation as centers of dissent and subversion, but they were not inherently anti-royalist in character. Rather, they became politicized spaces in which all manner of political debates and opinions were discussed. For those living on subsistence levels or at the lower end of the socioeconomic hierarchy, most days were consumed with work or labor, and finding leisure to visit coffeehouses was virtually impossible. But although not everyone had this luxury, such establishments provided a means of informal education for many. For the price of a cup of coffee, patrons, who were predominantly male, could engage in the rapid circulation of ideas and information that also facilitated the flourishing print culture of the era. For those who could not read or buy books, coffeehouse conversations thus allowed active participation in the intellectual culture of the Enlightenment.

Whereas coffeehouses were generally spaces in which people of all social backgrounds and statuses could mingle, salons in eighteenth-century France tended to cater to the intellectual endeavors of a more privileged sector of society. Situated in the homes of wealthy aristocrats, salons were informal gatherings of writers, philosophers, and in theory anyone else who wished to participate. In practice, however, only those with adequate wealth, leisure time, and social connections tended to do so, since attendance usually depended upon receiving an invitation from the salon's host.

Salons met on designated days and were typically hosted and managed by women, offering an important opportunity for them to take leadership roles in the cultural sphere. Hosts such as Marie-Thérèse Geoffrin, Julie de Lespinasse, and Suzanne Necker not only decided who could attend their salons, but they also managed the inclusive and back-and-forth nature of the conversations. Despite the prevailing sentiment among male philosophers that women were not as rational as men, elite women were nevertheless instrumental as benefactors and patrons of the salons, which served as essential venues for the exchange of Enlightenment ideas. Salons eventually evolved into hubs of literary discussion that fostered a culture of polite sociability and cohesion among aristocrats and propertied elites.

Academies, Universities, and Intellectuals

The salons, print shops, and coffeehouses of the public sphere existed alongside more formal educational institutions and academies that also contributed to the intellectual culture of the era. Universities and scientific societies played significant roles in advancing experimental science and philosophy, but they were far less accessible to the reading public than coffeehouses and even salons. Women, for example, attended salons, but they did not attend universities and generally did not belong to scientific societies. Likewise, working-class men, who could sometimes be found frequenting coffeehouses, had no access to universities or scientific societies. These institutions also tended to be somewhat conservative in outlook, given their religious foundations and traditional emphasis on a theologically based curriculum. Even as the curriculum of universities became less based on religion in the eighteenth century, they still largely fell under the wing of state and royal authorities rather than being autonomous.

Unlike modern research universities, those in the early modern era existed to train students—exclusively male and economically privileged—for careers in the civil service or to practice one of three professions: medicine, law, or theology. The curriculum was generally designed to uphold tradition rather than innovate. Nevertheless, being affiliated with prestigious universities like Oxford, Bologna, and Paris carried power and prestige that enabled academics to make connections with wealthy patrons in court and aristocratic circles. These connections, in turn, could be exploited to finance more innovative research and scholarship in settings outside the universities.

Scientific research thus generally took place in private laboratories with the assistance of a variety of academies and scientific societies. Their dependence on the economic support and protection of monarchs and princes meant that these institutions maintained ties to the state and lacked the full autonomy of the public sphere. One of the first was the Royal Society of London, which first met on November 28, 1660, and was formally chartered and recognized by King Charles II shortly thereafter. Francis Bacon's development of the scientific method was considered the inspiration for the society's founding. His emphasis on perfecting experimental techniques became a central focus of its principles and continued to influence scientists like Isaac Newton for many years after its founding. Newton was one of the group's most celebrated members. The machine-like view of the universe he developed, and the laws of planetary motion and gravity upholding it, were in turn a source of inspiration to French philosophers like Voltaire, who saw Newton's work as evidence of a rational universe.

Like the Royal Society of London, the Academy of Sciences in France operated with the support and protection of royalty, in this case Louis XIV, who founded it in 1666. Unlike its English counterpart, however, the French academy was well funded and tightly controlled by its royal patron, who sponsored scientists and their work with monetary allowances and pensions.

Because of their connections to the court, members of scientific societies and academies were a small elite, but they also participated in public forums and salons of the Enlightenment and represented the beginning of scientific professionalization in the eighteenth century. Due to their connections with the salons, some scientific societies provided opportunities for women to engage in the practice of science. Although they were barred from university admission and formal membership in royal academies in England and France, some noble and aristocratic women, such as Maria Winkelmann of Germany and Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle in England, not only served as patrons of science but also actively participated in scientific research.

Deism

Introduced in the seventeenth century, Deism emerged as a religious aspect of Enlightenment philosophy. It was a more secular take on the popular Protestantism that allowed for more scientific reasoning to be applied to the natural world; whereas earlier, the exploration and discovery of the how's and why's of the natural world were discouraged by religion, in Deism it was not only permissible but encouraged. Deism employs what was called "The Watchmaker" theory, which explained that while the Christian God created the Earth and its inhabitants, he then stepped back from that creation after setting it in motion, much like a watchmaker does with the timepieces he creates.



Figure 1.1.2: The mechanical clock at Hampton Court in London. (CC BY 4.0; Man vii via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

This “crisis in religion” was one of the consequences of Newton’s physics and other Enlightenment ideas. Although Newton himself seems to have believed in a God of some type, the universe he described in his theories did not require a personal deity to be actively engaged in making things happen. Newton’s universe seemed more like one of the new mechanical clocks that were just becoming popular. Figure 1.2 is a photograph of a clock that was commissioned by King Henry VIII for his palace at Hampton Court in the mid sixteenth century. This clock not only looks like a work of art but shows the time, month, day of the month, position of the sun in the zodiac, the phase and age of the moon. Another unique feature of this clock is that it shows the time at which the moon would cross the meridian and therefore the time of high water at London Bridge, which King Henry used for travel to London by the Royal Barge. These complex machines might require a mechanical engineer or a watchmaker to design and build them, but once made and wound they could be left to themselves. Absorbing this watchmaker metaphor, many Enlightenment thinkers rejected the popular religious vision of an activist God who was involved in the day-to-day operation of the world, who rewarded the righteous and punished sinners, or who chose sides in history. The Protestant idea of predestination suggested that there was no free will, and that from God’s perspective time and chance did not really exist—Newton and other European scientists challenged that notion. Many also began to doubt traditional stories of the deity’s interference in history, including the Christian story of Jesus.

The Limits of Enlightenment Principles

Politically and culturally, Enlightenment thinking fostered beliefs in common humanity, the possibility of societal progress, the remaking of oneself, and the importance of one’s social and ecological environment—a four-pronged revolt against the hierarchies of the Old World. Yet, tension arose due to Enlightenment thinkers’ desire to classify and order the natural world. Carolus Linnaeus, Comte de Buffon, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, and others created connections between race and place as they divided the racial “types” of the world according to skin color, cranial measurements, and hair. They claimed that years under the hot sun and tropical climate of Africa darkened the skin and reconfigured the skulls of the African race, whereas the cold northern latitudes of Europe molded and sustained the “Caucasian” race. The environments endowed both races with respective characteristics, which accounted for differences in humankind tracing back to a common ancestry. A universal human nature, therefore, housed not fundamental differences but rather the “civilized” and the “primitive”—two poles on a scale of social progress.

Despite their adoption of a seemingly progressive vision of universal rights, however, the societies in which Enlightenment thinkers lived did not offer freedoms to all people, nor were their writings as inclusive as they appear. The advance of Enlightenment ideals did result in increased liberties for many—predominantly White men of the upper and middle classes in western Europe and what later became the United States—but most women, men at the lower end of the social hierarchy, and people of color were generally excluded from participating in the Enlightenment or benefiting from its ideals of social and political equality.

Some elite women, such as the French philosophers Émilie du Châtelet and Germaine de Staël, assumed leadership roles in the era’s vibrant intellectual debates and gained recognition for their contributions. Some Enlightenment thinkers, however, did

not consider women to be equal in status to their male counterparts. Rousseau, for example, described women as subordinate to men based on the assumption that they were weaker and less rational by nature. On this premise, Rousseau argued that women belonged in the domestic space of the home, while the public space of politics and business was the preserve of men. Other thinkers such as Locke supported women's increased access to education and participation in the public sphere, but they asserted that men should retain leadership roles within the household and in public life due to their greater strength and ability. Although a small number of women played important roles in the Enlightenment, most did not immediately benefit from its emphasis on ideals of equality and freedom.

In what later became the United States and in some European countries, Enlightenment theories coexisted with the institution of slavery, the appropriation of lands from Indigenous people, and access to political participation and the protections afforded by the state that were generally limited to White men of property. Social contract theorists generally justified such contradictions by asserting that because Indigenous peoples resided in a nonpolitical state, and because they were believed to lack the capacity to reason, they were not entitled to the rights and protections afforded to other peoples. Enlightenment lawyers, moreover, used social contract theory to defend slavery, on the grounds that either it was a justifiable consequence of conquest or Black people were incapable of governing themselves without the protection of White owners. Although social contract theory ultimately formed the foundations of seminal documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, the ideals of rights and freedoms it espoused coexisted with engrained racial injustices that formed the foundation of slavery and colonialism.

As the intellectual ferment of the Enlightenment continued over the course of the eighteenth century, new ideas about religion, political power, and the human condition proliferated alongside a growing revolutionary spirit. Helping to spread these ideas was the emergence of the public sphere, spaces beyond the home and under the control of neither the church nor the state, such as coffeehouses and taverns where people could engage in free and open intellectual exchange, without fear of retribution.

Before the late seventeenth century, public forums had been relatively uncommon in Europe outside England. But in the urban centers of the Islamic world and the trade centers of East Asia, informal spaces for conversation and political discussion, such as the many Turkish coffeehouses and the Confucian academies in Korea, were prominent features of social life. As international trade and cultural exchange increased between Europe and its Eastern neighbors during the Enlightenment, these autonomous secular spaces had a profound influence on the development of the public sphere in Europe.

1.2: Revolutions in the Americas

The Revolutionary Movement Begins

The first English explorers arrived on the North American continent at a couple of different points in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. These explorers would encounter the indigenous populations who occupied the various areas along the eastern seaboard of North America, labeling them “savages” and “barbarians”. Although some English colonizers would attempt to convert to Christianity the local populations, as well as pushing them into forced servitude, most dismissed the natives as unworthy of anything but exploitation, as outlined in the first chapter. Instead, these settlers would rely on indentured servants to take on the labor needed to grow the colonies. Eventually, the indentured servitude died out, replaced by African slaves brought through the triangular trading system. While many in England itself claimed to abhor slavery, they were certainly aware of it, as it continued to perpetuate the mercantilist economic system that allowed the slave-based economy of the colonies to enrich the mother country.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- What made this revolution so...revolutionary? How and why was it unique?
- How did it affect the continued development of the Atlantic world?
- Explain how European political developments affected Haiti and the Spanish American colonies

England's colonies experienced a number of different types of government oversight during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The early forms under the Stuart kings and queens involved more commercial engagement, such as the Virginia Company, founded in 1606 with the support of King James I of England (VI of Scotland). But England would face their own internal conflict with the English Civil War lasting from 1642 to 1651. The king, Charles I, attempted to force the Church of England created by the English king and Queen Elizabeth's father Henry VIII onto Calvinist Scotland. This resulted in a revolt against the king's authority in that region. Charles then turned to Parliament to demand the money to pay to defend that authority, and Parliament denied him. In anger, Charles dissolved Parliament, effectively claiming sole authority over the governing of England. This resulted in fighting between the authority of the English crown and that of Parliament, with those supporting the monarchy called Royalists and those supporting Parliament called Parliamentarians. Many in the British colonies on the American continents attempted to remain neutral, but in many ways the war found its way across the ocean, forcing certain colonies, such as Virginia, to take sides. The war would end with the execution of Charles I, much to the dismay and disgust of other European powers. One Flemish artist, John Weesop, refused to return to England after painting the king's execution because he couldn't stomach being in a place where they chopped off a monarch's head.

A number of issues arose within the colonies forcing more British intervention. Conflicts between colonists and local indigenous populations, such as the Pequot War, the Mystic massacre, King Philip's War, the Susquehannock War, Bacon's Rebellion, and the Pueblo Revolt, showed Britain the vulnerability of their colonies, especially under self-government. Bacon's rebellion was particularly harsh, as it not only involved colonists and the local indigenous peoples but led to the colonial governor's arrest and imprisonment at the hands of colonists. But it would be wars in Europe that expanded into their American colonies that would become the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. For thirty-seven of the eighty-seven years between the Glorious Revolution in 1688 (when Parliament secured the right to name and limit the role of the monarch) and the American Revolution, Britain had been at war with other European powers, mainly France. Much of these conflicts while rooted in Europe, took place on the American continent. In 1754, tensions between the French Catholic and British Protestant colonies erupted into what would become known as the Seven Years' War, or the French and Indian War. This led to further economic pressure on Britain's colonies on the American continent.

The Seven Years' War (1756-63) had been an expensive drain on Britain's treasury, and Parliament believed the American colonists ought to pay their fair share of the cost of their defense. Britain instituted a number of taxes including the Sugar Act (1764), the Stamp Act (1765), the Townshend Act (1767), and the Tea Act (1773) to pay for the defense of the colonies against other empires and indigenous peoples. Boycotts and protests by the colonists soon began, including the famous Boston Tea Party in 1773, during which enraged patriots boarded a British cargo ship and dumped tea from India into Boston harbor, rather than pay the hated

new tax.

Although the colonists found these taxes oppressive and obnoxious, to a great extent they were luxury taxes or excises on trade rather than direct taxes on personal income. Still, imposing new taxes on the colonists was a miscalculation by Parliament because the merchants and the wealthy most affected by the taxes had the means and the motivation to organize a resistance movement. And they did.

American colonists also objected to the Quartering Act (1765) that forced them to provide housing and food for British troops. Again, this may have seemed fair to the legislators back in London who had sent an army to defend the colonies against the French and Indians in the recently concluded war; this was the reason given for this act specifically. But it was a big expense for the Americans and was an issue that cut across class boundaries more than the luxury taxes and unified opposition.

Another major cause of American resentment against the British after the Seven Years' War was the Royal Proclamation of 1763 which established a western boundary to the colonies roughly along the ridgeline of the Appalachian Mountains. The support of Native Americans from the trans-Appalachian region had been critically important to the British war effort in North America. Tribes such as the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Confederacy) were powerful allies, and their leaders complained about the increasing numbers of settlers leaving the coastal colonies to make farms in places like upstate New York, western Pennsylvania, and the Ohio River Valley. The British created an Indian Reserve beyond the Appalachians, including western Virginia and Pennsylvania west of Pittsburgh, which had been a French fort captured in the war. This angered both colonists who looked west for new lands to settle and land speculators who had planned on getting rich by buying and selling the western territory.

In addition to the famous “all men are created equal” and “consent of the governed” parts of the colonists' Declaration of Independence, the 1776 document included a laundry list of complaints against the British Crown including the charge that the king had “endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions,” meaning the indigenous populations already living in places where colonists wished to expand. The founders understood that independence would mean taking land from these indigenous peoples, using the excuse of “savagery” by the tribes attempting to protect their territories to justify this action. Although the Declaration echoed the Enlightenment ideals of contractual government and representation, at the time these ideals only applied to white male landowners, and certainly not to the indigenous populations already occupying the space.



Figure 1.2.1: John Trumbull's painting, Declaration of Independence, depicting drafting committee presenting their work to the Congress. (CC BY 4.0; John Trumbull via Wikimedia Commons).

The American Revolution

Great Britain pursued a policy of law and order when dealing with the crises in the colonies in the late 1760s and 1770s. Relations between the British and many American colonists worsened over the decade, culminating in an unruly mob destroying a fortune in tea by dumping it into Boston Harbor in December 1773 as a protest against British tax laws. The harsh British response to this act in 1774, which included sending British troops to Boston and closing Boston Harbor, caused tensions and resentments to

escalate further. The British tried to disarm the insurgents in Massachusetts by confiscating their weapons and ammunition and arresting the leaders of the movement. However, this effort faltered on April 19, when Massachusetts militias and British troops fired on each other as British troops marched to Lexington and Concord, an event immortalized by poet Ralph Waldo Emerson as the “shot heard round the world.” The American Revolution had begun.

After the British quit Boston, they slowly adopted a strategy to isolate New England from the rest of the colonies and force the insurgents in that region into submission, believing that doing so would end the conflict. At first, British forces focused on taking the principal colonial centers. They began by easily capturing New York City in 1776. The following year, they took over the American capital of Philadelphia. The larger British effort to isolate New England was implemented in 1777. That effort ultimately failed when the British surrendered a force of over five thousand to the Americans in the fall of 1777 at the Battle of Saratoga.

Not everyone agreed with the idea of separating from Britain, and until towards the end of the Revolution when the French arrived to support the colonists, the population was divided into three different groups. The first group called themselves Patriots; these folks were responsible for the majority of the rebellion against British authority in the colonies. They felt they could govern themselves more effectively than the British government since they had been from the period of salutary neglect discussed earlier in this chapter. To the Patriots, Britain represented an oppressive power that Enlightenment philosophers such as John Locke and Thomas Paine had rejected in favor of the concept of democracy and representation by and for the people. Patriots felt the British Parliament lacked any colonial representation and the only way to overcome this oppression was to declare their freedom from Britain.

The second group became known as Loyalists due to their continued loyalty to Britain and the crown. Loyalists considered themselves British citizens, and while they may not have agreed with Parliament’s taxes, there were other, legal ways to address their concerns. Historians have estimated the number of loyalists at 15-20% of the total colonial population, or about 400,000 people. Most of these loyalists stayed and became U.S. citizens after the war, but about 70,000 left for other parts of the British empire due to the severe backlash against those known with loyalist tendencies. Many of those in the north went to Canada and settled New Brunswick while southerners went to Florida, which had remained loyal under British rule, or to the British islands in the Caribbean.

The third group had no official name, but rather simply decided not to join one specific side. This group encompassed much of the population, particularly at the early stages of the war. Reasons for remaining neutral ranged from not feeling strongly one way or the other to still feeling the effects of the Seven Years’ War, which had still been fought within 15 years of the Declaration of Independence, and remembered that much like the Seven Years’ War, this would be a conflict fought in their backyards.

These divisions found their way into general society, separating families and friends with different beliefs about what was happening, making the American Revolution a civil war as well. An example of this can be found in one of the American “Founding Fathers” own family. Benjamin Franklin’s son William remained a staunch Loyalist throughout the war, causing a rift between father and son that would never be healed in either of their lifetimes. The Franklin family wasn’t the only family to split over these ideals and the war. A number of people would find themselves on opposite sides of the war as it continued.

By 1778, the war had turned into a stalemate. Although some in Britain, including Prime Minister Lord North, wanted peace, King George III demanded that the colonies be brought to obedience. To break the deadlock, the British revised their strategy and turned their attention to the southern colonies, where they could expect more support from Loyalists. The southern colonies soon became the center of the fighting. The southern strategy brought the British success at first, but thanks the crucial assistance of French forces as well as the leadership of George Washington and General Nathanael Greene, the Continental Army defeated the British at Yorktown, effectively ending further large-scale operations during the war.

The 1783 treaties that ended the American Revolutionary War recognized the territorial claims of the US, but did not mention, let alone recognize, the territorial rights of Native Americans. Poor Americans were often left wondering what they had fought for. Taxes were high and farmers couldn’t pay them because the “Continental” currency printed by the rebel government to pay the troops was worthless. Western Massachusetts farmers who felt the new government in Boston did not represent them revolted in 1786 in Shays’s Rebellion, which was put down by government troops. This fight and others forced leaders of the Confederate states to reconsider how a federal government should be organized, and they called a Constitutional Convention to meet in Philadelphia, with the Thirteen States sending representatives.

The United States Constitution that formed the new government began with the words “We the People.” It acknowledged the Enlightenment concept that political power comes from the consent of the governed. The final document was influenced by the framers’ studies of earlier republics and by negotiations over various state constitutions that had favored the idea of three branches of government, the legislative, executive, and judicial, along with a system of checks and balances that made no one branch superior to the others. For instance, the President could veto laws passed by Congress, while Congress could, with a 2/3

majority, override the veto. And the Supreme Court could interpret a law as being unconstitutional, checking both the President and Congress.

In spite of these checks and balances, when the Constitutional Convention sent the newly drafted US Constitution to all the states for ratification, many New England towns either rejected the document outright or provisionally approved it with modifications they sent back to the authorities. In most cases, their provisional approvals were marked as simple YES votes and the carefully worked-out modifications were “filed”. But dissatisfaction with the original Constitution was so strong, in spite of the series of promotional articles published about it that has become known as the Federalist Papers, that the convention was forced to write the first 10 Amendments (the Bill of Rights) and issue them at the same time. Without the Bill of Rights, the Constitution would be a much different document.

The Haitian Revolution

Named Saint Domingue by the French, what would be renamed Haiti after the revolution was a colony in the Caribbean. Their main economy involved the processing of sugar since the climate was conducive to growing this labor-intensive and highly sought-after commodity. France was not the only European country to have sugar plantations in this area either; both Britain and the Netherlands also maintained a strong presence there to feed the Afro-Eurasian appetite for this product. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, sugar had been exclusive to the upper classes in Europe, used by royalty and nobility to showcase power through the culinary arts. However, colonization and updated growing techniques made it available to all classes, which in turn promoted the growth of these plantations. Slave labor was therefore an integral part of the success of this particular commodity since the work was difficult at best and shortened life spans at worst.

Due to the nature of the work on a sugar plantation, an enslaved person's life expectancy was very short. The days tended to be long, hot, and humid, and the work exhausting, so the majority of the labor force was made up of men. Sugarcane is a member of the bamboo family, and thus difficult to work with. The stalks grew thick and became tough to harvest, and the sap within the poles needed to be forcefully removed by hand in order to be cooked down into the crystals of sugar. Sugarcane also did not have specific planting and harvesting seasons like cash crops further north – it often grew at different points throughout the year depending on weather and once grown, would have to be harvested quickly in order to get the best product.

As a result, slaves often dropped dead from exhaustion within three years of arrival on the plantation. The weather remained hot and humid at night, so the enslaved people had little recovery time in the sparse sleeping quarters they were allotted. During heavy harvests, enslaved people often worked for several days in a row with little, if any, rest. Some enslaved people with special skills in sugar, molasses, or rum production could find themselves in marginally better situations, but the majority of the enslaved people were only used for their labor until they could work no more. Plantation owners could have changed their practices, but the reduced profits would have exceeded the replacement costs of the enslaved people, so planters chose to work their enslaved people to death quickly and buy more. This caused the enslaved people to resent not only the plantation owners but also the European governments who allowed this treatment in the name of profit.

Encouraged by the French Revolution, enslaved people on sugar plantations in French San Domingue rebelled in 1791 and overthrew the predominately white French European government of the island. The rebellion was violent and bloody, with the enslaved people taking out their anger and resentment on their mainly white and free owners, the owners' families, and government officials. Port cities in the United States were flooded with news, along with those fleeing the violence; slaveholding “refugees” from Haiti arrived in Virginia with their enslaved laborers after July 1793. Although the new country attempted to keep news of the revolution quiet, word still spread quickly, especially through the enslaved people's ranks in slave-holding states and regions.

Slavery in French colonies was abolished by the revolutionary Jacobins in 1793, and an army of former enslaved people fought a British invasion to a standstill in a five-year war ending in 1798. But after declaring himself Emperor of the French, Napoleon reinstituted slavery and sent troops to retake the island for France. This would end up a mistake by Napoleon, who would find his troops and money running out as a result of this attempt. This led to the sale of the French territories of Louisiana in 1803 to the fledgling United States for more money to continue his takeover of Europe, until his disastrous march into Russia in 1812.



Figure 1.2.2: Toussaint Louverture, a leader of the Haitian Revolution that led to Haitian independence. (CC BY 4.0; Alexandre-François-Louis, comte de Girardin via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

In spite of the decrees of Napoleon in far away France, with François-Dominique Toussaint Louverture, a military leader and formerly enslaved man, at the helm, many reforms were brought to the island of Hispaniola, which included Saint-Domingue and the Dominican Republic. Louverture freed the enslaved people in both colonies in 1801. He then promoted a constitution for the new nation of Haiti, which he nevertheless maintained was still part of the French Empire. The constitution was based on principles of natural rights and social contract theory similar to those that had guided the French and American Revolutions, but it also made Louverture governor-general of Haiti for life, gave him extensive powers, and allowed him to select his successor in office. Louverture also forced the formerly enslaved Haitian peasants to work in the sugarcane fields. Despite Louverture's forced labor policy, Haiti, unlike the United States or France, directly addressed the issue of racial inequality, granted rights to all citizens regardless of race or social class, and extended citizenship to all Black, Indigenous, and mixed-raced people who had resided in the nation for at least one year. However, although political rights were extended to all male citizens, Haitian women had to wait until the twentieth century before receiving the right to vote, as did women in France and the United States.

As the leader of the Haitian Revolution, Louverture was a target of French antagonism. Despite a brief cessation of hostilities, he was arrested in 1802 when Napoléon attempted to reclaim control of Saint-Domingue. After being deported to France, Louverture spent the brief remainder of his life in a French prison, writing his memoirs to defend himself against charges of treason. Napoleon's army, which outnumbered Haitian forces two to one, captured Toussaint Louverture and transported him to a French prison where he died, but the revolution continued under Louverture lieutenant Jean-Jacques Dessalines. The formerly enslaved people defeated the French and established the Republic of Haiti in 1804. Thomas Jefferson was President of the United States when Haiti became the first ever nation created by formerly enslaved people who gained their freedom in armed rebellion and only the second American republic to free itself from European colonialism. However, the author of the Declaration refused to recognize Haiti's independence. The slavery-supporting South actually blocked recognition of Haiti by the U.S. government until the Civil War, when a North-only Congress and President Lincoln finally established diplomatic relations in 1862.

The Haitian Revolution inspired free and enslaved black Americans and terrified white Americans. Free people of color embraced the revolution, understanding it as a call for full abolition and the rights of citizenship denied in the United States. Over the next several decades, Black Americans continually looked to Haiti as an inspiration in their struggle for freedom. For example, in 1829 David Walker, a Black abolitionist in Boston, wrote an *Appeal* that called for resistance to slavery and racism. Walker called Haiti the "glory of the [B]lacks and terror of the tyrants" and said that Haitians, "according to their word, are bound to protect and comfort us." Haiti also proved that, given equal opportunities, people of color could achieve as much as Whites.

In 1826 the third college graduate of color in the United States, John Russwurm, gave a commencement address at Bowdoin College, noting that, "Haytiens have adopted the republican form of government . . . [and] in no country are the rights and privileges of citizens and foreigners more respected, and crimes less frequent." In 1838 the *Colored American*, an early Black newspaper, professed that "no one who reads, with an unprejudiced mind, the history of Hayti . . . can doubt the capacity of colored men, nor the propriety of removing all their disabilities." Haiti, and the activism it inspired, sent the message that enslaved and free Black people could not be omitted from conversations about the meaning of liberty and equality. Their words and actions—on plantations, streets, and the printed page—left an indelible mark on early national political culture.

The Black activism inspired by Haiti's revolution was so powerful that anxious white leaders scrambled to use the violence of the Haitian revolt to reinforce white supremacy and pro-slavery views by limiting the social and political lives of people of color. White publications mocked Black Americans as buffoons, ridiculing calls for abolition and equal rights. The most (in)famous of these, the "Bobalition" broadsides, published in Boston in the 1810s, crudely caricatured Black and African Americans. Widely distributed materials like these became a basis for racist ideas that thrived in the nineteenth century. But such ridicule also implied that Black Americans' presence in the political conversation was significant enough to require it. The need to reinforce such an obvious difference between Whiteness and Blackness implied that the differences might not be so obvious after all.

The effects of the Haitian Revolution would last for decades after it took place, inspiring a number of other revolts and rebellions not only in the United States but also in other Latin American and Caribbean countries where slavery was still present. The Haitian Revolution represented hope for freedom from oppression for enslaved people everywhere, particularly Black and African slaves, although there is evidence that it also offered a similar opportunity to indigenous peoples to rise up against the colonizers and those taking their land.

Latin American Revolutions

By the end of the eighteenth century, Latin American societies had become rigidly stratified. Status was dependent on a number of social markers including education, family and professional ties, race, religion, and wealth. Color was the most obvious and most complicated noneconomic factor that affected social position. Whiteness was more than a mark of economic superiority. It indicated European ancestry, which in turn denoted status as a Christian and thus a degree of presumed social and moral superiority. Furthermore, European males born in the Iberian Peninsula (the peninsula on which Spain and Portugal are located), called *peninsulares* in Spanish America and *reinóis* in Portuguese America, considered themselves superior to males of European descent born in the Americas, who were called creoles in Spanish America. In the first centuries of colonization, those born in Europe tended to monopolize the highest positions in church and state as well as the means of production, whereas most of the landed elite (miners, plantation owners) were creoles.

In the decades leading to the movement toward independence, however, Europeans and their descendants in the Americas were struggling to maintain their position at the top of the social pyramid. They had to face the reality that they had imposed an unequal system in which a small group of Europeans and their descendants held power over a much larger group of American Indians and enslaved Africans, as well as a vast contingent of mixed-race people or *castas* consisting of *mestizos* (literally "mixed" in Spanish and used mainly for people of White European and Indian descent) and *pardos* ("brown" in Spanish for someone of part-African descent). This ethnically mixed population dominated urban areas, often working as shoemakers, tailors, and other types of artisans; some *mestizo* and *pardo* men served in the lower ranks of the colonial militias.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the Kingdom of Spain, which had been led by the House of Bourbon since 1700, reorganized its American colonies into four large parts. These were New Spain (in existence since 1521), Peru (in existence since 1542), New Granada (created in 1717 and roughly equivalent to the countries of Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, and Venezuela today), and Río de la Plata (created in 1776 with territory corresponding to modern-day Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay). As before, the ruler of each of these viceroyalty units represented the Spanish king. Now, however, local governments within each of the viceroyalties were in the hands of governors, or *intendants*.

It was during this Bourbon Era that Enlightenment ideas spread across the Atlantic world, including to the Spanish colonies in North and South America. These ideas were rooted in the principle that all people were entitled to take part in their government, and they influenced creoles in Latin America to demand the right to participate more fully in politics and the economy, which was largely controlled by Spain. The aims were revolutionary, but they stopped short of radically changing the social order. The colonial creole elite originally petitioned only that authority be extended to White males of Spanish descent. Native populations and African and mixed-race populations were excluded. The White male creole elites pointed to the hypocrisy of the egalitarian rhetoric of Europeans and questioned the universal ideals linked to the new rights of citizens, but they did so with only themselves in mind.

Along with changing the political and military life in its colonies, in 1767 Spain followed the example of Portugal and expelled the Jesuit missionaries from its American empire, angering people at both ends of the social ladder. Not only did the Jesuits have a reputation as the most humane managers of American Indian forced laborers, but they had also educated many of the creole elite, and many young creole men had joined the Jesuit order.

Finally, the Bourbons imposed economic reforms, and these were often unpopular as well. The purpose of colonies was to enrich and strengthen the parent country, so the Spanish monarchs wished to make their American possessions as profitable as possible by, for example, more efficiently collecting taxes from the residents and improving "free" trade. Essentially, this meant Spanish

manufacturers were free to sell their goods in the colonies, where they competed with local producers and merchants and often drove them out of business. At the same time, colonial producers were still not free to sell their goods to either French or British buyers. A number of monopolies remained in force. For example, the Crown controlled all tobacco production and sale.

Unlike the political reforms that affected primarily the creoles, the economic changes affected people at all levels of Spanish American society, who sometimes reacted violently. Two such insurrections, sparked by an increase in the colonial sales tax, were the massive 1780–1781 Inca rebellion near Cuzco in the Viceroyalty of Peru, and the 1781 Comunero (“commoner”) Revolt in New Granada (Colombia). In both these viceroyalties, the basis of Spanish economic activity had evolved from the payment of tribute to the enforcement of systematic forms of labor such as debt servitude. The Great Inca Rebellion was led by José Gabriel Condorcanqui Noguera, a respected local mixed-race leader. Noguera opposed the forced labor the Spanish demanded from American Indians, and to move Indigenous people to rebel, he claimed descent from the last Inca ruler, Túpac Amaru, and called himself Túpac Amaru II. Threatened by his mobilization of some forty thousand people from among the Viceroyalty of Peru’s Indian majority, outnumbered creoles joined the Spanish and brutally crushed the revolt, which had threatened to become a rebellion against White, not simply Spanish, rule. Túpac Amaru II and tens of thousands of others were killed.



Figure 1.2.3: Túpac Amaru II, Indigenous leader of the 1780 rebellion against Spanish colonial rule in Peru. (CC BY 4.0; Unknown via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

Between 1807 and 1810 in the judicial district of Caracas, Venezuela (in the Viceroyalty of New Granada), royalists and patriot creoles from the upper-class elite struggled to create a self-governing body. Then, on April 19, 1810, the creoles of Caracas deposed the Spanish administrative officers and created a *junta* to govern in the name of Fernando VII. The *junta*, whose authority was recognized by other cities in the Viceroyalty of New Granada, then called for the creation of a congress, which met for the first time in March 1811.

Not all in the congress favored governing in the name of the King of Spain who was then held as a French prisoner. On July 5, 1811, patriot members who believed the body should instead govern on behalf of the people of New Granada officially declared the independence of Venezuela, making it the first South American republic. Royalists struck back. They received support among Venezuela’s large African and *pardo* population, whose interests had been advanced when the Spanish government gave them the opportunity to purchase White status with the *cédula real*. White creoles, like the patriots in the Venezuelan congress, had opposed greater rights for people who were not of European ancestry. Cities in the western part of New Granada had not recognized the authority of the Caracas *junta* or sent representatives to the Venezuelan congress, and they also proclaimed their loyalty to the king.

The royalists received unexpected additional support for their cause when, on the Thursday before Easter in 1812, a massive earthquake hit Caracas, killing thousands. The Catholic clergy, who supported the royalist cause, convinced the lower social classes that God had punished Caracas because of its disregard for the king’s authority, which had been granted by God. The royalist members of the government reinstituted the district’s previous political links to Spain, and a bitter civil war between royalists and republicans ensued.

Simón José Antonio de la Santísima Trinidad Bolívar y Palacios, part of the creole elite and impassioned about the new ideas of

the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, entered the fight in 1811 as an appointed colonel of the rebel republican army. After his first defeat, he took refuge on the island of Curaçao and then fled to the city of Cartagena (in modern-day Colombia). From this new base, he was able to launch a successful campaign to invade Caracas in 1813 and reestablish the republic.

Bolívar's success in battle was based on his commitment to fighting to the last soldier, in what became known as "war to the death" (*guerra a muerte*). This strategy aimed at radicalizing the conflict and reducing support for the royalist cause. For example, all Spaniards who did not actively support the movement for independence were sentenced to death. Bolívar's dramatic military plan left entire provinces depopulated and kept his army almost constantly in battle. His success was short-lived, however. In 1814, defeated in Venezuela, Bolívar returned to Cartagena.

In 1815 after Napoléon Bonaparte's fall, the newly restored Spanish king Fernando VII sent military forces to South America to restore his authority. These Spanish forces were able to restore colonial power and defeat Bolívar and his patriot troops. Once again ousted, Bolívar sought shelter in the British colony of Jamaica, where he penned his "Letter from Jamaica" to a newspaper. In this candid document, he outlined his vision of a unified Spanish America and reiterated his defense of independence and conviction that it would triumph.

The most prescient part of the document was Bolívar's extended analysis of the past, present, and future of Spanish America. The letter reveals his creole bias in its argument that the lower social classes were not equal to the task of gaining independence. Bolívar stressed that the mixed-race people of the Americas were condemned to civic ignorance, oppression, and vice because the Spanish colonial system had acted as a tyrannical father and deprived them of liberty, equality, property, and security. They were forced onto the lowest social rungs, where they were unable to participate in the sociopolitical and economic affairs of their country.

Bolívar's emphasis on his country's lack of preparation for self-government was used to reinforce his claim that Spanish Americans in general needed firm guidance and a powerful executive in their newly independent nations. Unlike many others who simply advocated for independence from Spain, Bolívar focused on the need for a strong central government rather than the federal system eventually adopted by Mexico in its Constitution of 1824, in which power rested primarily with local authorities. Bolívar was also a promoter of Spanish American unity, and he expressed hope for a league of American nations whose representatives would regularly meet and assist each other.

From Jamaica, Bolívar went to Haiti, where he received asylum and economic assistance from President Alexandre Pétion. Though there was a clear bond of sympathy between them, their relationship had its problems. Pétion's regime was genuinely liberal, but there were schisms within its ranks, and the international situation was shaky—neither France nor the United States had yet recognized Haiti as a nation. Pétion's assistance was therefore discreet. Bolívar received hard cash, armaments, and a recruited Black military force under one condition: Put an end to slavery in the newly independent nations.

With the help of those forces, Bolívar sailed back to the Orinoco River delta in Venezuela and turned the tide in favor of the republican army. He was able to do so, however, only after gaining the support of the mixed-race cowboys, the *llaneros*, who dominated much of the region, and of their chieftain José Antonio Páez. Thousands of *llaneros* joined Bolívar's army at this critical juncture. A key reason for his success was likely his ability to enlist both the marginalized mixed-race and Black populations and the creole elites in his cause. It was only after he allowed the common people to join his army that he was able to consistently win the wars of independence, whose decisive victory came at Boyacá, Colombia, in August 1819. After liberating Venezuela, Bolívar took the rest of New Granada. Bogotá fell only after he had led an army of twenty-five hundred men up to the Orinoco River, climbed over the Andes Mountains, crossed flooded rivers and plains in the midst of the rainy season, with Bolívar carrying soldiers who had become too weak to stand, and descended on the enemy.

In 1819, Bolívar established the Congress of Angostura (in modern-day Ciudad Bolívar in Venezuela), which approved the creation of the nation of Colombia (encompassing modern Venezuela, Colombia, and Ecuador). The congress vested Bolívar with dictatorial powers. He rejected monarchy, with its potential to lead to dictatorship, but he also warned against federalism and popular democracy, for which he felt Spanish Americans were unprepared. He advocated a republican form of government anchored in a powerful hereditary senate. The senate—formed by educated and suitable individuals—was to be a sound intermediary between the people and the government. In his Angostura Address, Bolívar outlined his ideas about how to balance freedom and order as well as how to navigate sensitive race relations. Military brilliance does not necessarily signal political skill, however, and neither Bolívar's fledgling dream of a representative republican system nor his ideal of pan-American unity were shared by others in the region. With time, it became clear those ideas were not to succeed.

In an 1821 gathering in the city of Cúcuta (in present-day Colombia), representatives from Venezuela and New Granada (also present-day Colombia) decided on the unification of the former territories of the Viceroyalty of New Granada (Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Panama) into one federative nation called Gran Colombia. Bolívar put Francisco de Paula Santander in

charge of New Granada's regional administration. The revolutionary Cúcuta Congress outlined a liberal program of reforms and adopted a centralized constitution and the gradual granting of citizenship rights to all.

The most pressing issue was slavery. Enslaved and mixed-race people demanded emancipation, which had been promised in the rhetoric of national liberation and which Bolívar had assured Pétion he would accomplish. In 1820, he ordered Santander to promise emancipation and recruit an army of five thousand willing enslaved people. Afraid of alienating the region's mine and landowners, who depended on slave labor, Santander limited the recruitment to three thousand and instructed the rest to return to their masters.

Bolívar's position—already presented in his Jamaica letter's critique of Spanish colonial control—was clearly reflected in the constitution. Accordingly, the Republic of New Granada, the first to grant its citizens the responsibilities of self-government, limited voting rights to male property owners. Minorities (women, poor White people, and people of African descent) still yearned for freedom and equality. The Abolition of Slavery Law, enacted by the Cúcuta Congress, delegated a gradual and complicated process to committees of local notables, which simply prolonged the institution of slavery.

Like the port town of Caracas in the north, the port of Buenos Aires in the south reaped significant benefits from the eighteenth-century reforms aimed at developing the Spanish Empire's outskirts. Formerly subject to the authority of the Spanish Viceroyalty of Peru, in 1776 Buenos Aires became the seat of the newly created Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata (modern-day Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay). The port was the principal outlet from which silver from Bolivia and animal hides and tallow from the vast plains of Argentina and Uruguay reached markets abroad. The town's residents, known as *Porteños*, also enjoyed abundant opportunities for trading in contraband with the British and Portuguese.

The population of Buenos Aires quadrupled in the last half of the eighteenth century (it was almost forty thousand by 1800), and merchants and civic leaders took pride in their growing prosperity. Accordingly, rising fortunes in Río de la Plata created a newly favorable environment for those who preferred rupture to reform. There was a ripe international market for South American products like sugar, hides, cacao, tobacco, and silver, and the creole elite were eager to open their ports to British, Dutch, and French merchants. And with their easy access to Atlantic foreign merchants, Argentine elites in Buenos Aires also had much to gain from greater autonomy.

Following Napoléon's invasion of Spain in 1808, the creole militia officers in Argentina formed a new governing *junta* that proclaimed support for King Fernando VII. However, after almost two years, radical changes within the majority of the *junta* led them to repudiate Spanish authority, silence local opposition, and proclaim Argentina's revolutionary movement on May 25, 1810. Not all regions of Río de la Plata, however, recognized the authority of the *junta*, which was based in Buenos Aires. Successful military campaigns in the central part of Argentina soon brought this area under the control of the *junta*, but its troops were not able to secure Uruguay and Paraguay, which rejected control by Buenos Aires.

In March 1816, Argentina's conservative local leaders invoked a congress in Tucumán. The congress declared the independence of the United Provinces of the Río de la Plata on July 9, 1816 (now Independence Day in Argentina), less as a sign of revolutionary militancy than as a practical recognition of their political situation. Resistance came not from faraway Spain but from the neighboring royalist provinces, Uruguay and Paraguay, when Argentina attempted once again to extend its authority there.

Paraguayans had already declared their independence from both Spain and the Argentine government in 1811. The new country quickly devolved into a dictatorship under José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia, a lawyer who had briefly taught theology at a seminary in Paraguay. He was chosen one of Paraguay's ruling consuls by the country's Congress on October 1, 1813. (In imitation of the Roman Republic, Paraguay had two consuls, chief executives who each also controlled one-half of the country's army.)

In March 1814, Francia, who was an advocate for the common man, passed a law requiring racial intermarriage; White Europeans could marry only people of African, Indigenous, or *mestizo* ancestry. A few months later, Paraguay's congress made Francia the country's only consul and gave him absolute power for three years. In 1816, congress made him dictator of Paraguay for life. Intent on realizing the ideals of the French Revolution and influenced by the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Francia, while continuing to support the Catholic Church by building new churches and funding religious festivals, attempted to improve the lives of the poor by abolishing tithes and giving the Paraguayan government control over institutions such as hospitals and orphanages that had been run by the Church. He instituted measures to modernize agriculture and established national industries. Focused solely on reforming society and determined to make Paraguay self-sufficient, Francia ended foreign trade, prevented river traffic between Argentina and Paraguay, and adopted a position of neutrality in foreign policy. Paraguay was thus isolated from the revolutionary turmoil that gripped the rest of South America.

Just as the people of Paraguay charted their own path to independence, the inhabitants of the eastern province of Montevideo (modern-day Uruguay) resisted threats from La Plata and Brazil and built their own movement, under José Gervasio

Artigas. Montevideo remained in Spanish hands until 1814 when it fell to the Argentines, who ignored Artigas's demands for autonomy. Creole republicans had the upper hand all over Spanish South America. The only exception was the Viceroyalty of Peru, the most solid bulwark of Spanish power in South America, where royalist armies were stationed and most creoles remained steadfastly royalist. Peru was a constant threat to republicanism, and control of it was vital.

By 1817, the Argentine general José Francisco de San Martín y Matorras, who had fought against Napoléon in Spain in 1812, had set up a plan to isolate and attack royalists in Peru, the Spanish stronghold. He organized an army camp at the base of the Andes, and under his command, Argentine forces scored great successes. In January 1817, after careful preparation, he led his five thousand soldiers through the Andean mountains, where altitudes approached more than ten thousand feet above sea level, and over six different passes into Chile.

Chile had already broken from the Viceroyalty of Peru when creole Spanish Americans there had established their own *junta* in 1810; however, the region had been plagued by fighting between royalists and various pro-independence factions who supported differing degrees of autonomy. When royalists gained the upper hand, the leader of one of those factions, Bernardo O'Higgins, found himself exiled to Argentina. There he met San Martín, and together they planned an assault on Spanish royalist forces in Chile. San Martín's assistance secured a decisive victory, and O'Higgins declared Chile's independence in 1818.

1.3: The French Revolution

The Origins of the French Revolution

The growing emphasis the Enlightenment placed on natural rights, the autonomy of the wealthy middle class, and the cross-cultural encounters of the burgeoning global economy generated many social and political transformations in the eighteenth century. In particular, the entrenched privileges of the nobility, the traditional dominance of the Catholic Church, and arbitrary royal entitlements were common targets of criticism among those who could participate in the public sphere of the era. As fiscal crises developed and tensions exploded between European kingdoms and their Atlantic colonies, the rhetoric of the Enlightenment fused with a series of popular uprisings and created revolutionary conditions not only in the Americas, but in France as well.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the causes, ideological framing, and consequences of the French Revolution
- Analyze the similarities and differences among the American, French, and Haitian Revolutions

Inspired by the success of their North American counterparts, critics of absolute monarchical power and entrenched aristocratic privilege in France began agitating for change. They found themselves in the midst of a significant economic crisis brought on by a combination of the king's extravagant spending and (ironically) France's support of the American Revolutionary War.

Like the battle for independence in the North American colonies, the revolutionary movement in France reflected a complex web of causes and consequences. After a series of poor harvests and the near-bankruptcy of the French Crown left many peasants and urban poor on to suffer hardship in the 1770s, resentment of the regime's inability to provide relief led to extensive unrest and rioting. The Crown's subsequent attempt to institute a land tax on aristocrats, who had previously been exempt from such assessments, resulted in broad resistance from social elites reluctant to surrender their traditional privileges. Meanwhile, the growing middle class, resentful of its exclusion from political power, agitated for change inspired by the Enlightenment rhetoric of rights and liberties. Demands for the reform of an antiquated system of government and social hierarchy reached a point of no return in the mid-1780s.

Whereas the American Revolutionary War resulted in the birth of an independent new nation, the French Revolution radically restructured long-standing political systems and reshaped the balance of power in Europe. Although the revolt's radical rejection of authoritarian rule, which enforced obedience to government authority and limited individual freedom, ultimately faltered, the social and political reforms it inspired heavily influenced the character of modern nations.

At the core of revolutionary fervor in France was the traditional division of French society into three estates—clergy, aristocracy, and commoners—that reinforced the wealth and political power of the aristocracy and the church. In this system, which had emerged in the Middle Ages, the First Estate consisted of the Catholic clergy, who made up less than 1 percent of the population but held roughly 10 percent of French lands. Virtually exempt from taxes, the church derived substantial wealth from tithes (taxes of one-tenth of annual income) and fees imposed on the general population. The nobility, who were the Second Estate, represented roughly 3–4 percent of the population but held upward of 30 percent of the country's lands. They also dominated the most prestigious administrative, military, and judicial positions in the royal bureaucracy by virtue of their aristocratic status and were exempt from taxes as well. The burden of paying taxes fell largely on the shoulders of the Third Estate, the remaining 95 percent of the French population consisting of peasants, the urban poor, the wealthy bourgeoisie or urban middle class who made a living largely through commerce and the professions, and everyone else who did not fall within the other two estates.

Although persistent wealth inequality became a significant sore point for the French masses, particularly in the midst of a national economic crisis, exclusion from political power was another issue leading up to the revolution. The Enlightenment's emphasis on public opinion, natural rights, and freedom from tyranny also resonated with many educated commoners and aristocrats, who believed that political and economic reforms were desperately needed in France. However, the Estates General, a general assembly made up of representatives of the nobles, clergy, and commoners that was France's closest approximation to a constitutional body, had not been convened by a French monarch since 1614. Equally problematic was the voting structure of

this body, which gave each estate one vote. Since the clergy and nobility generally shared common interests, their votes typically defeated any initiatives the Third Estate might propose.

The Revolution Takes Form

In 1789, in an act of desperation, King Louis XVI summoned the Estates General to propose a radical reform of the economy and the creation of new taxes. But the Third Estate refused to participate until the king reformed the voting system. After a period of stalemate, the Third Estate gained the support of many members of the clergy and met separately as a National Assembly. This act of political rebellion reinforced the sovereignty of the people, to which the king responded by amassing military forces with the goal of subduing the people by force. His plan backfired, however, when a series of popular uprisings in Paris and throughout the country resulted in the commoners' seizure of sites associated with royal authority, such as the Bastille, a fortress in Paris, land redistribution, and refusal to pay taxes.

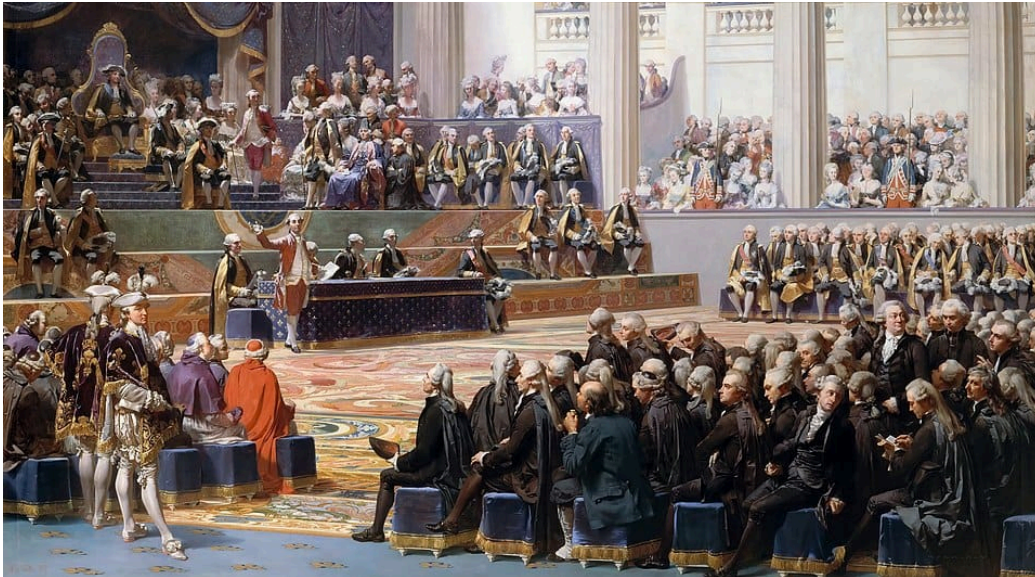


Figure 1.3.1: A painting of the opening session of the General Assembly, 5 May 1789. (CC BY 4.0; Auguste Couder via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

In a position of strength, the National Assembly then issued the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, which upheld natural rights such as liberty and property also mandated the adoption of representative government, equality before the law, and freedom of expression. As a means of reducing monarchical power and enforcing the mandates of the Declaration, the National Assembly created a new constitution in 1791 and charged a newly formed Legislative Assembly with governing France as a constitutional monarchy and developing legislative reform.

Despite its progressive reforms, the Declaration faced opposition from critics such as French playwright Olympe de Gouges for failing to address women's rights. In 1791, Gouges published her Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen, which emphasized women's equality with men and asserted that women should experience the same rights of citizenship as their male counterparts.

Meanwhile, France's economic situation continued to worsen, and a group of women struggling to feed their families organized a crowd of thousands to confront the king and demand action. Also instrumental in building revolutionary momentum against the king and the nation's profound wealth inequality were the *sans-culottes*, radicals from the lower and working classes who could not afford the *culottes*, or fashionable short pants, that were worn by the aristocracy and indicated one did not have to perform manual labor for a living (*sans* is French for "without"). After the angry mob captured the royal family, the king lost all remaining popular support when he and his wife, Queen Marie-Antoinette, attempted to escape.

The newly formed Legislative Assembly suspended the king and created a representative body known as the National Convention, which convicted Louis of treason. The National Convention was composed of a number of different groups of revolutionaries with conflicting opinions regarding what the government of France and French society should be like. A variety of political clubs and organizations expressed a range of ideas about the goals of the revolution and the best course of action to achieve them. Founded in 1789, the Jacobins quickly became the most influential of these clubs. The Jacobins sought to end the reign of King Louis XVI and establish a republic to replace the French monarchy. However, disagreements between their radical and moderate

factions made consensus difficult to achieve. Whereas the Girondins, a moderate faction of the Jacobins, some of whom hailed from the Gironde region of southwestern France, opposed executing the king, the radical Jacobin faction the Mountain, so named because its members sat on the highest benches of the National Convention, supported sentencing him to death. After the Convention held a trial for the king, the Mountain ultimately prevailed, and the king was executed in January 1793.

Until June of 1791, the National Assembly tried to build a constitutional monarchy, even as it faced increasing hostility among the great powers of Europe, all of which were monarchies, along with problems with inflation and hunger in the countryside. In June of 1791, the king and his family fled Paris, but were caught on the border (supposedly by a postal worker who recognized the king from his portrait on coins). It was soon discovered that the royal family had been corresponding with foreign monarchs and nobles, hoping to inspire an invasion from abroad to restore the king to the throne and to end the Revolution by force. The situation rapidly radicalized as the prestige of the king was destroyed overnight; even as the new French Constitution was formally passed in October of 1791, making France a constitutional monarchy, the king himself was under house arrest.

The latter situation prompted the kings of Austria and Prussia to call upon the monarchs of Europe to fully restore Louis XVI to control of his country, although they did not yet declare war on France. Radical elements of the National Assembly, however, anticipated war and convinced the Assembly to declare a preemptive war on Austria in April of 1792; Prussia soon joined in an alliance with Austria against France. The Assembly dispatched the new National Guard and a hastily-assembled army, many of whom were former soldiers of the royal army, against the forces of Austria and Prussia along the French border.

In September of 1792, as the war began in earnest and the king languished in prison, a new constitution was instituted that formally abolished the monarchy and made France into a republic with universal manhood suffrage. This was the first time in the history of Europe that every adult male was allowed the right to vote regardless of wealth or status. In just over three years, France had gone from an absolute monarchy to the first major experiment in democracy since the days of the Roman Republic nearly two thousand years earlier.

Revolutionary Terror

In January of 1793, Louis XVI was executed as a traitor to the republic after heated debate and a close vote in the Assembly. The war grew as Britain and the Dutch Republic joined with Prussia and Austria against France, further increasing the military pressure on the French borders. The middle part of 1793 saw fear of foreign invasion and food shortages, along with royalist uprisings in parts of France itself. The result was the appointment of a dictatorial emergency committee, the Committee for Public Safety, headed by twelve of the most radical members of the republican government.

The twelve members of this committee would rule France from September 1793 to July 1794 as a dictatorial council, charged with defending the Revolution from both its external enemies and internal rebels. It was extremely successful in the former regard, issuing a *levée en masse*, or total mobilization for war, which swelled the ranks of the French forces and held the Austrian and Prussian armies in check. Meanwhile, the Revolutionary government set up a subsistence committee to develop and elaborate a system of price controls, requisitions, and currency regulation, backed by police power. The committee restored order to rebellious areas by sending its members on missions with instructions for ruthless repression, again backed by violence.

Thus, just five years after the Revolution had begun, control was now in the hands of a small committee of radicals who used violent repression to hold the nation together, continue the war against almost all of Europe, and soon, to pass even more radical measures. They made extensive use of the guillotine, a new “humane” technology of execution named after the medical doctor who invented it, and their leader was the (in)famous Maximilien Robespierre, whom his followers called “the Incorruptible” for his single-minded focus on seeing the Revolution succeed.

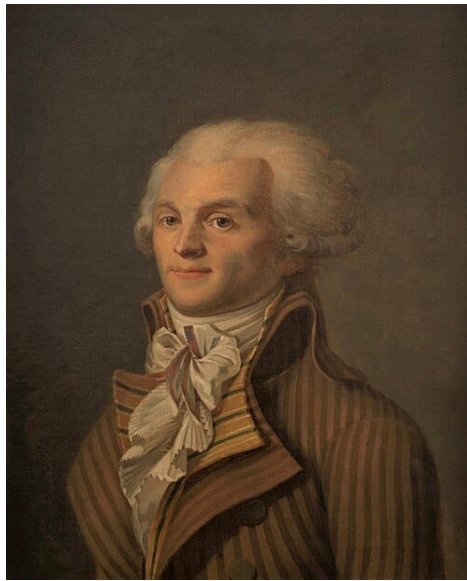


Figure 1.3.2: A portrait of Maximilien de Robespierre (1758-1794). (CC BY 4.0; Unknown via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

Under Robespierre's leadership, the Committee for Public Safety attempted to reorganize and "rationalize" French society as a whole, not just win wars. The Revolutionary government passed a number of radical measures under Robespierre's leadership. First, it sponsored the creation of the metric system. From a unsystematic smattering of different standards of weights and measures across France, the Revolutionary government oversaw the invention and use of a simple, unified system based on increments of ten (i.e. 100 centimeters is equal to 1 meter, 1,000 meters is equal to one kilometer, 1,000 grams is equal to 1 kilogram, etc.). Of all the changes instituted by the Revolutionary government during its radical phase, this was to be the most successful and long-lasting.

Since the members of the committee believed that not just France, but the world was on the threshold of a new era, they proclaimed the creation of a new calendar that began on September 22, 1792 (Day 1, Year 1), the day that the republic had been declared. All of history was to follow from that first day. Likewise, new ten-day weeks were introduced, with new four-week months named after their weather rather than arbitrary historical figures (e.g. the month of August, named after Augustus Caesar, was renamed "Thermidor," which means "hot." February became "Brumaire," which means "foggy," and April became "Prairial," meaning "springlike.") Year-end celebrations were planned to pay tribute to the Revolution itself in quasi-religious ceremonies presided over by republican officials.

In perhaps the most astonishing campaign, the Revolutionary state launched a major attempt to "de-Christianize" the nation, removing crosses from buildings and graveyards and renaming churches "temples to reason." The cathedral of Notre Dame in the center of Paris was stripped of its Christian iconography, and Robespierre oversaw new ceremonies meant to worship a (newly invented) supreme being of reason. This was the culmination of the anticlerical measures that had begun in first year of the Revolution, with the seizure of church lands and property, but it now aimed at nothing less than the suspension of Christianity itself in France. In something of a symbolic parallel, the committee also had the bodies of dead French kings disinterred and dumped into a common grave (the corpse of Louis XIV landed on that of his grandfather, Henry IV).

To enforce its will and ensure "security," the Committee for Public Safety oversaw what was later dubbed "The Terror," as suspected traitors were arrested, interrogated, and confronted with the possibility of imprisonment or execution. While estimates vary considerably, somewhere between 35,000 - 55,000 accused enemies of the Revolution were executed or died in prison during the Terror, which was further intensified by widespread imprisonment (totaling half a million people, 3% of the adult population). To impose its policies on grain procurement and prices, the government had to rely largely on local organizations of militants who often terrorized the very peasants they were supposed to represent.

In fact, the bloodiest repression seen during the Terror happened far from Paris, and did not involve any guillotines. A western region of France, the Vendée, had been the site of the largest royalist insurrection against the Revolution in early 1793, featuring a rebel army of conservative peasants. It took until the summer for the royalists to be defeated, and in the aftermath of that defeat the revolutionary army inflicted a form of revenge against the people of the region that came close to outright genocide. Men and women were slaughtered regardless of whether or not they had participated in the uprising, villages were burned to the ground, and the death toll exceeded 100,000 people (some estimates place the number far higher).

Against the backdrop of the Terror, many members of the Revolutionary government itself began to fear for their lives. Likewise, the mandate for the committee's very existence - protecting the Revolution against its foreign and domestic enemies - was made somewhat obsolete when French forces won major victories against Prussia and Austria in the summer of 1794. Robespierre inspired revulsion and fear among even some of his erstwhile supporters because of his fanatical devotion to the Revolutionary cause and his overt attachment to using terror to achieve his ends. Thus, in July of 1794 a conspiracy of worried Revolutionaries succeeded in arresting, briefly trying, and then executing Robespierre as a tyrant. The Committee of Public Safety was dissolved.

After the fall of Robespierre the Revolution began to slide away from its most radical positions. A government of property owners took over under a new "Directory" in 1795, which rescinded price controls and ended the abortive attempt to de-Christianize the nation. A wave of reprisals against former radicals known as the "white terror" saw tens of thousands murdered (as many died in the white terror as had under the Committee of Public Safety's campaigns of persecution). France remained at war with most of the rest of the Europe, even as royalist uprisings continued in areas across the nation itself. It was in this context of violence and insecurity that, In October of 1795, a young, accomplished general named Napoleon Bonaparte put down a royalist insurrection in Paris and came to the attention of ambitious politicians within the Directory.

The Revolution's End and Rise of Napoleon

Following the Terror's failure, the revolution took a more conservative turn, and the idealism of the French Revolution came to an end. The modern democratic tradition emerging in France then transformed into popular authoritarianism when Napoléon seized control. Although he safeguarded some revolutionary gains, Napoléon also reinstated slavery in France's colonies and declared himself emperor in 1804. At the height of his power, he ruled over a massive empire.

Following a series of failed military campaigns stemming from his desire to dominate Europe, however, including a disastrous attempted invasion of Russia, Napoléon abdicated his throne in 1814. He then returned and led France again until his defeat by the British and Prussians at Waterloo (Belgium) in 1815. After this loss, Napoléon was ultimately banished from France and forced to spend the rest of his days in exile.

Napoleon first came to the attention of the revolutionary government when he put down a royalist insurrection in Paris in 1795. He went on in 1796 and 1797 to lead French armies to major victories in Northern Italy against the Austrians. He also led an attack on Ottoman Turkish forces in Egypt in 1797, where he was initially victorious, only to have the French fleet sunk behind him by the British (he was later recalled to France, leaving behind most of his army in the process). Even in defeat, however, Napoleon proved brilliant at crafting a legend of his exploits, quickly becoming the most famous of France's revolutionary generals thanks in large part to a propaganda campaign he helped finance.

In 1799, Napoleon was hand-picked to join a new three-man conspiracy that succeeded in seizing power in a coup d'état; the new government was called the Consulate, its members "consuls" after the most powerful politicians in the ancient Roman Republic. Soon, it became apparent that Napoleon was dominating the other two members completely, and in 1802 he was declared (by his compliant government) Consul for Life, assuming total power. In 1804, as his forces pushed well beyond the French borders, he crowned himself (the first ever) emperor of France. He thought of himself as the spiritual heir to Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar, declaring that, a member of the "best race of the Caesars," he was a founder of empires.

With the final defeat of Napoleon, the French Revolution appeared to some to have come full circle with the restoration of the French monarchy in 1814-1815. However, Louis XVIII, the restored French king, could not rule as an absolute monarch and had to recognize his subjects' new constitutional rights to participate in government and regulate the king's power. Notwithstanding Napoléon's brief autocratic reign, the French Revolution successfully dismantled the nobility's and clergy's disproportionate share of power and defeated the strongest absolute monarchy in Europe.

The Napoleonic Wars

Napoleon liked to think that he was a genius in everything. Where he was *actually* a genius was in his powers of memory, his tireless focus, and his mastery of military logistics: the movement of troops and supplies in war. He memorized things like the movement speed of his armies, the amount of and type of supplies needed by his forces, the rate at which they would lose men to injury, desertion, and disease, and how much ammunition they needed to have on hand. He was so skilled at map-reading that he could coordinate multiple army corps to march separately, miles apart, and then converge at a key moment to catch his enemies by surprise. He was indifferent to luxury and worked relentlessly, often sleeping only four or five hours a night, and his intellectual gifts (astonishing powers of memory foremost among them) were such that he was capable of effectively micro-managing his entire empire through written directives to underlings.



Figure 1.3.3: A portrait of Napoléon during his coronation at Notre Dame. (CC BY 4.0; Jacques-Louis David via Wikimedia Commons).

Unlike past revolutionary leaders, Napoleon faced no dissent from within his government or his forces, especially the army. Simply put, Napoleon was always able to rely on the loyalty of his troops. He took his first step toward independent authority in the spring of 1796, when he announced that his army would be paid in silver rather than the paper money issued by the French Republic that had lost almost all of its value. Napoleon led his men personally in most of the most important battles, and because he lived like a soldier like them, most of his men came to adore him. His victories kept morale high both among his troops and among the French populace, as did the constant stream of pro-Napoleonic propaganda that he promoted through imperial censorship.

Napoleon's military record matched his ambition: he fought sixty battles in the two decades he was in power, winning all but eight (the ones he lost were mostly toward the end of his reign). His victories were not just because of his own command of battlefield tactics, but because of the changes introduced by the French Revolution earlier. The elimination of noble privilege enabled the French government to impose conscription and to increase the size and flexibility of its armies. It also turned the officer corps into a true meritocracy: now, a capable soldier could rise to command regardless of his social background. Mass conscription allowed the French to develop permanent divisions and corps, each combining infantry, cavalry, artillery, and support services. On campaign these large units of ten to twenty thousand men usually moved on separate roads, each responsible for extracting supplies from its own area, but capable of mutual support. This kind of organization multiplied Napoleon's operational choices, facilitating the strategies of dispersal and concentration that bewildered his opponents.

In some ways, however, his strengths came with related weaknesses. In hindsight, it seems clear that his greatest problem was that he could never stop: he always seemed to need one more victory. While supremely arrogant, he was also self-aware and savvy enough to recognize that his rule depended on continued conquests. For the first several years of his rule, Napoleon appeared to his subjects as a reformer and a leader who, while protecting France's borders, had ended the war with the other European powers and imposed peace settlements with the Austrians and the British which were favorable to France. By 1805, however, it was clear to just about everyone that he intended to create a huge empire far beyond the original borders of France.

Napoleon's Downfall

Unable to invade Britain after the French naval defeat at the Battle of Trafalgar, Napoleon tried to economically strangle Britain with a European boycott of British goods, creating what he hoped would be a self-sustaining internal European economy: the "Continental System." By late 1807 all continental European nations, except Denmark, Sweden, and Portugal, had closed their ports to British commerce. But far from buckling under the strain of the Continental System, Britain was getting richer, seizing the remains of the French Empire in the Caribbean and smuggling cheap but high-quality manufactured goods into Europe. Napoleon's own quartermasters (i.e. the officers who purchased supplies) bought the French army's uniforms from the British!

Napoleon demanded that Denmark and Portugal comply with his Continental System. Britain countered by bombarding Copenhagen and seizing the Danish fleet, an example that encouraged the Portuguese to defy Napoleon and to protect their profitable commerce with Britain. Napoleon responded with an invasion of the Iberian peninsula in 1808 (initially an ally of the Spanish monarchy, Napoleon summarily removed the king from his throne and installed his own brother Joseph as the new

monarch), which in turn sparked an insurrection in deeply conservative Spain. The British sent a small but effective expeditionary force under the Duke of Wellington to support the insurrection, and Napoleon found himself tied down in a guerrilla war - the term "*guerrilla*," meaning "little war," was invented by the Spanish during the conflict.

Napoleon's forces ended up trapped in this new kind of war, one without major battles or a clear enemy army. The financial costs of the invasion and occupation were enormous, and over the next seven years almost 200,000 French soldiers lost their lives in Spain. Even as Napoleon envisioned the further expansion of his empire, most of his best soldiers were stuck in Spain. Napoleon came to refer to the occupation as his "Spanish ulcer," a wound in his empire that would not stop bleeding.

The problem for the French forces was that they had consistently defeated enemies who opposed them in large open battles, but those kind of battles were in short supply in Spain. Instead, the *guerrillas* mastered the art of what is now called "asymmetrical warfare," in which a weaker but determined force defeats a stronger one by whittling them down over time. The French controlled the cities and most of the towns, but even a few feet beyond the outskirts of a French camp they could fall victim to a sudden ambush. French soldiers were picked off piecemeal as the years went on despite the fact that the Spanish did not field an army against them. In turn, the French massacred villagers suspected of collaborating with the guerrillas, but all the massacres did was turn more Spanish peasants against them. Napoleon poured hundreds of thousands of men into Spain in a vain attempt to turn the tide and pacify it; instead, he found his best troops caught in a war that refused to play by his rules.

Meanwhile, while the Spanish ulcer continued to fester, Napoleon faced other setbacks of his own design. In 1810, he divorced his wife (who had not produced a male heir) and married a princess of the Habsburg dynasty, Marie-Louise. This prompted suspicion, muted protest, and military desertion since it appeared to be an open betrayal of anti-monarchist revolutionary principles: instead of defying the kings of Europe, he was trying to create his own royal line by marrying into one. In the same year, Napoleon annexed the Papal States in central Italy, prompting Pope Pius VII to excommunicate him. Predictably, this alienated many of his Catholic subjects.

The French revolutionaries failed to fully establish the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity that had long inspired the movement. They sought to replace royal and aristocratic privilege with sweeping reforms rooted in ideals of natural rights and protection from tyrannical government. Yet in practice, and regardless of the instrumental roles they played in the revolution, women in France did not receive many of the rights extended to their male counterparts. In fact, France was the last of the major Western powers to extend voting rights to women, in 1944.

Perhaps even more paradoxical was the contradiction between Enlightenment ideals of liberty that fueled the revolution on one hand and France's ongoing colonialism, exploitation of slave labor, and discrimination against free people of color on the other. Except for a brief period during the Reign of Terror, France continued to uphold the institution of slavery in its colonies. In particular, in the colony of Saint-Domingue, now known as Haiti, few if any rights were extended to enslaved or free people of color in the wake of the French Revolution. Ultimately, then, the legacy of revolution in France was mixed.

1.4: Chapter Themes to Discuss

This page offers different themes that appear throughout the sections in this chapter. The themes are meant to provide a framework in which discussion questions can be developed to inspire further exploration of the topics covered.

1. The main ideas that drove the political, social, and philosophical developments during the Age of Enlightenment.
2. The influence the Enlightenment had on the revolutionary movements in the Americas and France.
3. The similarities and differences among the revolutions in the Americas and France.
4. The application of Enlightenment-era principles of "freedom" and "equality" in the new systems of governments and who was and was not included.

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1.5: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials to Enhance the Chapter

These materials are provided to help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction. Some resources are openly licensed, while others may require institutional access or individual review before use in class.

Web Resources

These websites may help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction.

- [World History Encyclopedia](#) – Provides overviews of important people, places, and events throughout history. This resource can be useful for finding concise, expert-informed background information.
- [Fordham University Internet History Sourcebooks Project](#) – Provides translated, transcribed, and digitized primary sources. This resource can support source-based instruction, though instructors should review links carefully because some materials may be incomplete or less suitable for classroom use.

Articles

These articles provide additional scholarly context for this chapter. Access may depend on your institution's JSTOR subscription.

- Blackburn, Robin. "Haiti, Slavery, and the Age of the Democratic Revolution." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (2006): 643–74. [Access article in JSTOR](#)
- CONRAD, SEBASTIAN. "Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique." *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 4 (2012): xxii–1027. [Access article in JSTOR](#)
- Taylor, Barbara. "Feminism and the Enlightenment 1650-1850." *History Workshop Journal*, no. 47 (1999): 261–72. [Access article in JSTOR](#)

Videos

These videos can be used to explore a specific topic in the chapter in more detail and as an entry to further discussion on chapter topics.

- [TED-Ed: What you might not know about the Declaration of Independence](#)
Length: 3 minutes, 38 seconds
In June 1776, a little over a year after the start of the American Revolutionary War, the US Continental Congress huddled together in a hot room in Philadelphia to talk independence. Kenneth C. Davis dives into some of the lesser known facts about the process of writing the Declaration of Independence and questions one very controversial omission.

2: INDUSTRIALIZATION AND IMPERIALISM

Overview

One of the most transformative eras in all of world history occurred in the eighteenth century. The Industrial Revolution unleashed forces that realigned social structures and economic systems and still shape our world in foundational ways today. Industrialization affected everyone either directly or indirectly and contributed to the continuation of the imbalanced relationships among nations that had undergone industrialization and the regions that had not. The changes initiated by the Industrial Revolution led to new theories and ideas about the world that would also leave a lasting impact on the trajectory of world history.

[2.1: The Beginnings of Industrialization](#)

[2.2: Ideas in an Industrialized World](#)

[2.3: Imperialism and Colonialism](#)

[2.4: Chapter Themes to Discuss](#)

[2.5: Teacher Resources](#)

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2.1: The Beginnings of Industrialization

Industrialization

The Industrial Revolution was not the result of any type of technological or scientific superiority in Europe. East Asia was just as advanced in both areas during the late 1700s. Rather certain structural factors existed in England which were absent elsewhere. Most historians agree that there were five necessary inputs that are required for an industrial revolution: capital (wealth for investment), technology, a vast energy source, availability of labor, and consumers. By the late 1700s, Great Britain had all of these and became the birthplace of the First Industrial Revolution.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Why did the Industrial Revolution originate in England?
- How did the Industrial Revolution affect Asia, Africa, and Latin America?

The steam engine was used more out of necessity in Britain during the early 1700s than out of any foresight of its transformational role. There was a major need for fuel, and Britain lacked timber as it had already deforested large areas in earlier phases of history. Huge coal seams were located in Britain, but the easier to reach layers were flooded by water. British craftsmen early on made significant improvements to the steam powered pumps to get water out of the mines and allow access to the coal. Overall, the steam engine grew in importance because the British made incremental improvements to the technology rather than a single breakthrough. Some have argued that Europe had a technological edge in instrument production due to improvements in precision engineering technologies such as clocks, watches, and telescopes and the British engineers carried over their calibrating skills to make improvements in the already existent steam engine. Crucially, Scotsman James Watt's 1781 engine was the first to produce rotary power that could be applied to drive factories, wheels, and propellers. Throughout the later 1700s, the steam engine was used to mechanize the weaving and spinning of cloth which resulted in the mass production of textiles, making the first major commercial breakthrough in what historians term the industrial revolution.

People all over the world purchased manufactured cotton because it was comfortable to wear, cheap, and easy to wash even before its mass production in British factories. However, mass-produced British textiles were also finer, stronger, and more uniform in addition to being cheaper. As a consequence, by the early 1800s, Britain replaced India and China as the leading cotton textile producer. Then, the steam engine continued its pivotal role in helping to launch a transportation revolution. This technology made it possible to sail upstream as easily and quickly as down, causing an explosion of travel and shipping. The other transportation technology from steam power, of course, was the railroad, which was perhaps just as revolutionary as the steamship. Land transport by train was substantially cheaper and much faster than transportation using horses and wagons.

Britain also had an abundance of capital—wealth that can be invested to passively create more wealth was available to merchants and others. Much of this capital had been created in the era of the explosion of the slave and sugar trade described in the previous chapter. Capital could be used to invest in factories that housed machinery and equipment, often made out of iron which was also plentiful in Great Britain. These developments rested on agricultural improvements in the previous century and the introduction of new staple crops like the potato, imported from the Americas, produced more food using less labor. Increased calories allowed Britain's population to grow, increasing the number of people available for work in the factories being constructed with capital. Tea from Asia and sugar from the Caribbean are appetite suppressants and provided British workers with the energy to work longer hours in factories. For mass production to occur, there needs to be a market for mass-produced goods and there was regional specialization. The colonies in the Americas served as markets for British manufactured goods and supplied key raw materials. Even after independence, the United States remained a supplier of raw materials like grain, timber, cotton, and salted pork to the former "home country."

Governments typically have three major policies to promote an industrial revolution. First, is a national bank with a national currency, this connected to a modern banking system allows investors to get loans and for smoother commercial transactions. Second, few nations (the USSR being the main exception) have undergone an industrial revolution without protective tariffs on imported manufactured goods. Tariffs increased the price of imports to consumers, encouraging them to buy the now-competitive

domestically-produced goods. Lastly, governments typically invest in and encourage infrastructure to create an integrated economy. The cities, the farms, and the mines are all understood as needing to be connected for economic modernization to occur. Cities in Britain were growing, because the factories were located in the cities. Trains and/or steamships were needed to quickly bring millions of tons of food to feed the cities.

The Second Industrial Revolution

Beginning in the 1830s until roughly the First World War, countries throughout most of western and central Europe, the USA, and Japan underwent what historians often term the Second Industrial Revolution. This was another radical transformation of society from top to bottom. Economic transformation entailed building a modern transportation system, communication system, education system, and advanced health systems. Agriculture was also further modernized during the Second Industrial Revolution. New products of the Second Industrial Revolution included chemicals, pharmaceuticals, electrical goods, synthetic dyes, aluminum, and vehicles like cars. Steel, which is more malleable and stronger than iron, became an essential metal for ship-building and railways. Additionally, new energy sources were used. Petroleum, which powered the internal combustion engine came to play a role later in the century but already in the second half of the century had a dominant role as a source of light through its refinement into kerosene. Similarly, electricity, which could be produced by burning coal, petroleum, gas, or through hydroelectric power lit up cities and powered factories and vehicles. The image shows crowded sidewalks on both sides of the street with horses, carriages, trolleys, and trains. What do you see that is modern and what does not appear modern? There were also advances in science and medicine. For the most part, science was a hobby for amateurs during the 1700s. However, by the mid-1800s, the scientist was a professional who was employed by universities, the government, hospitals, businesses, or some other institution. This was when research and development became an essential component of industrial development. Also, Louis Pasteur discovered that bacteria caused diseases, and he promoted the use of vaccines. Soap production increased dramatically as people began to bathe more and populations continued to grow.

Many developments of the Second Industrial Revolution built on or improved earlier technology. Mass production of steel, for example, had begun with the development of the Bessemer process in the 1850s. This innovation removed impurities from molten pig iron, producing stronger steel better suited to building rail lines and machines. Later engineers further improved the process. The open-hearth Siemens-Martin process, first developed in Germany in the 1860s, was slower than the Bessemer process, but it produced higher-quality steel that was less brittle. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Siemens-Martin process had become the most common way of manufacturing steel. The mass production of steel made possible the great engineering feats of the Second Industrial Revolution, such as the first skyscrapers and the expansion of railroads.

Improvements in steel manufacturing enabled other innovations. As rust-resistant steel became less expensive, more could be used to manufacture rail lines, making them heavier, stronger, and able to support heavier locomotives pulling heavier loads. Railroads expanded their reach across continents, carrying more freight and passengers.

Other inventions also made railroads more efficient. The air brake, invented by George Westinghouse in 1869, sent compressed air through a line to enable the train's engineer to apply brakes from the locomotive. Before this, trains had been braked by workers who jumped from one moving car to the next and applied the brakes manually. The method was obviously very dangerous, and if a train car broke free, there was no way of stopping it. Because trains could now be stopped more safely, they could also travel at higher speeds.

By the end of the nineteenth century, railroads had become a common way of transporting people and products over land across distances long and short. Two new modes of transportation vied with railroads for popularity. The first modern bicycle, the safety bicycle, was developed by John Kemp Starley of England in 1885 and sported two wheels of equal size, unlike earlier bicycles with oversized front wheels that required riders to perch far above the ground. The safety bicycle could be ridden by anyone, including women and children. Developments in rubber-production technology also improved the bicycle. The process of vulcanizing rubber, discovered by American inventor Charles Goodyear in 1839, made it stronger and better able to hold its shape under extremes of temperature. (Non-vulcanized rubber melts in the heat and shatters in the cold.) In 1887, Scottish-born inventor John Boyd Dunlop made a pressurized air-filled pneumatic tire from vulcanized rubber, just in time for use by bicycle and automobile manufacturers. Although pneumatic tires had been invented earlier, Dunlop's was the first practical tire to be mass produced, and he patented his invention in 1888. By the 1890s, bicycling had become popular in Europe and the United States, and tens of thousands of people rode daily.

Eventually eclipsing both the train and the bicycle in popularity in the United States and western and central Europe was the gasoline-fueled automobile, patented by the German Karl Benz in 1886 and marketed beginning in 1888. Within a few decades, the automobile had transformed the world as few other inventions have. Cities and suburbs could expand beyond the reach of rail lines, leading city and national governments to raise taxes to pay for new roads. New businesses that sold and repaired cars

replaced blacksmiths and stables. City traffic grew noisier and more dangerous, and autos added their exhaust to the emissions of factory smokestacks. The automobile industry also increased the demand for rubber and petroleum, which most industrialized nations needed to import. Even though the United States was initially able to satisfy its petroleum demands with domestic oil, it had to look elsewhere for rubber.



Patent-Motorwagen mit Gasketrieb, Originalzeichnung von G. Franz.

Figure 2.1.1: A drawing depicting Carl and Bertha Benz driving a Model 2 of the Benz automobile. (CC BY 4.0; G. Franz via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

The automobile's arrival depended on another crucial invention—the internal combustion engine. This engine generates power by burning fuel, often some form of petroleum, in the presence of oxygen in a chamber, to produce a gas whose high pressure exerts force on another component such as a piston, rotor, or turbine blade, causing it to move. Internal combustion engines powered automobiles as well as machinery in small workshops, offering an alternative where steam engines, which were large, could not easily fit.

Internal combustion did not become the sole source of energy that powered the Second Industrial Revolution, however. It did not completely replace steam or the horse. Indeed, the steam turbine, invented by Sir Charles Parsons in 1884, provided efficient power for river- and ocean-going vessels. Steam was also used to generate electricity, one of the great developments of the Second Industrial Revolution. Burning coal turned water to steam that moved the blades of turbines, which generated electric current. Parsons's steam turbine served this purpose in Britain and the United States. Water power also generated electricity; in 1882, the world's first commercial hydroelectric plant opened in Appleton, Wisconsin. Wind turbines also generated electricity, and in 1911 Italy built a plant to produce electricity from geothermal power. By the end of the century, electricity was the dominant force powering the factories of industrialized nations.

Electricity ran machines in factories and lit streets, workplaces, and homes following the invention of the incandescent light bulb, by Joseph Swan in Britain in 1878 and Thomas Edison in the United States in 1879. The incandescent bulb's bright light replaced the dim and often odorous illumination of oil and gas lamps that brought the risk of fire and, in the case of gas, of suffocation and explosions. Electric lighting made it possible for factories to operate far into the night.

Communications technology improved when the first transatlantic telegraph line between Great Britain and North America was completed in 1858, and by the end of the century all the world's continents were connected except Antarctica. The telephone, patented by Scottish-Canadian inventor Alexander Graham Bell in 1876, spread throughout Europe and North America during the same time, greatly easing business communications. In 1901, the Italian engineer Guglielmo Marconi successfully transmitted a wireless signal across the Atlantic Ocean from Wales to Newfoundland, Canada. He then founded broadcasting stations in Europe and North America and used them to send communications to ships at sea. In the 1920s, once the vacuum tube and the triode had been developed, commercial radio that broadcast news, music, and radio plays became available as well.

Other discoveries transformed the factory and the home. Chemical experimentation produced synthetic aniline dyes yielding textile colors more intense and vibrant than those from plant dyes, transforming fashions. Along with combine harvesters, mechanical seeders, and horse-drawn machines that reaped, gathered, and winnowed grain in one operation, chemical fertilizers enabled farmers to grow ever-larger crops. Another invention, barbed wire, helped cattle ranchers protect their herds. Refrigerated

rail cars were perfected in the 1870s by engineers working for U.S. meat packer Gustavus Swift. The meat and other foods being produced in increasing quantities could now be shipped great distances without spoiling.

Other inventions made office workers more productive. Typewriters and adding machines were common by the 1880s, and New York jeweler Willard Legrand Bundy patented the time clock in 1888. Upon arriving at or leaving work, employees inserted a card in the machine, which stamped it with the exact time and led to the expression “punching the clock.”

New technology also changed leisure activities. In 1877, Thomas Edison patented the phonograph, a machine that could record sound by tracing soundwaves with a stylus on a rotating disc or cylinder and then play it back. Although it had business applications, the phonograph was soon used for entertainment. Phonograph recordings were often combined with the projection of still photographic images to create audiovisual presentations, the forerunners of motion pictures.

Industrialization Around the World

China

During the 1700s, the Qing Empire (1644-1912) in China was the global economic powerhouse. So, why was there no industrial revolution there? For the most part, China did not undergo an industrial revolution because conditions that existed in Great Britain were lacking in China. China did not have this same type of regional specialization that the British Empire had where one region focused on manufacturing while other regions produced raw materials. There can be no mass production on a factory scale if there is no market for factory-produced goods. The Chinese were focused on expanding their own land frontiers, and about 10,000,000 peasants established farms in western China. This westward expansion of the Chinese frontier was based on agriculture and home handicraft production which reproduced patterns of production found in the more densely populated areas in eastern China. Therefore, families in the West produced their own textiles, and trade with the East was limited. The Chinese ideal was that men would plow and women would produce cloth. So, there was a family division of labor instead of geographical economic specialization.

The technology between Europe and China was about equal in 1750. In fact, the Chinese understood the basic scientific principles involved in steam engine technology. However, the Chinese did not need to use coal since there was no timber shortage in China. Once Western Europe advanced technologically, the Chinese government did not put in place policies that would transform the Chinese economy. During the 1800s, the Qing Empire kept in place the exam system and government-run schools which focused on Confucian texts rather than applied sciences.

Russia

Russia had begun industrializing in the early nineteenth century, as Russian entrepreneurs imported textile manufacturing equipment from Britain to create cotton cloth. The tsars were eager to use new technology to unite their empire and offered cash incentives to European and American business leaders willing to assist. With their help, Russia established steamship lines, and as early as 1820 steamships were regularly traveling the Volga River, Russia's main waterway. By 1851, Moscow was joined by rail with St. Petersburg, the nation's capital and home of the tsar.

Nevertheless, Russia remained relatively unindustrialized compared to the United States and much of western and central Europe. This became apparent when Russia lost the Crimean War in 1856, despite having a population larger than that of its opponents Britain and France and despite fighting the war in its own backyard while the enemy traveled more than a thousand miles by sea. Britain's and France's steamships provided better transportation than Russia's few roads and railroads did, and their factories produced more and better weapons.

Despite its size and the support of its tsars, Russia lacked many advantages for industrializing that other countries possessed. It did not have many artisans, and mechanization of production means little in a country without crafts to be mechanized. So long as peasant families were available to plant and harvest crops, there was no pressing need to mechanize agriculture either. Russia's population also consisted of many serfs who, unlike American and British farmers, were bound to the land and could not seek opportunities elsewhere such as in factories. The Russian state also worried about freeing these peasants from the land for fear it would create the kind of upheaval and unrest that plagued industrializing cities in Britain and Western Europe. Finally, many Russian businessmen found it easier to profit by shipping raw materials such as grain, timber, and hemp to the industrializing nations of western Europe than to build a manufacturing sector of their own.

Finally, Russia's sheer size made industrialization difficult. Its rich natural resources were widely separated and far from the

capital cities in which populations were concentrated. Although some regions like those in the Ural Mountains had long been sites of factory production that drew on local natural resources, these regions were far from the main population centers further west. To allow access, thousands of miles of roads and railroad lines needed to be constructed through the dense tracts of forests, over raging rivers, and across the frozen tundra that covered much of the country. The United States, which industrialized relatively early, is also large, but not as large as Russia. The workers who laid railroad lines to connect its Atlantic and Pacific coasts worked across easy terrain of largely flat, treeless prairie and plains. In Russia, the few railroad and steamship lines and the few thousand miles of roads constructed before the end of the nineteenth century were not enough to bring natural resources to factories or manufactured goods to the countryside.

Following its defeat in the Crimean War, the Russian state increased its efforts to industrialize. In 1861, it abolished serfdom, providing potential workers for factories. In the 1890s, Minister of Finance Sergei Witte successfully lobbied for improvements in Russia's railway system, which had long connected Moscow and St. Petersburg, but at the end of the Crimean War had had fewer than one thousand miles of track. In 1891, the construction of a rail line across Siberia was begun. By 1900, the country had approximately thirty-six thousand miles of track. Soon it became easier to exploit the interior's vast reserves of iron, wood, and coal. However, Russia's late start meant it did not reach the same level of industrialization as western and central Europe and the United States until the twentieth century.

Industrialization conveyed a great advantage. Once a country had begun the process, it was capable of generating even more wealth and building larger, more technologically advanced military forces, which enabled it to gain an advantage over non-industrialized countries. It became nearly impossible for non-industrialized countries to compete with industrialized ones or even to protect themselves from aggression by their industrialized rivals. Japan proved an exception.

Japan

In July 1853, U.S. commodore Matthew Perry sailed into Edo (Tokyo) Bay at the head of a fleet of four gunships, charged with negotiating diplomatic relations and trade agreements with Japan. Japan had largely closed itself off in the 1600s to avoid colonization and domination by western countries. The Japanese also wished to protect their cultural integrity, and warding off foreign influences was part of this strategy. Intent upon securing entry, Perry ordered his ship's guns to turn toward the shore and fire. The guns fired blanks, but the Japanese military did not know this. Talks between Perry and the Japanese government ensued, and on March 31, 1854, Japan signed the Convention of Kanagawa, which opened the ports of Shimoda and Hakodate to American ships, promised assistance for American ships and sailors shipwrecked on Japanese coasts, granted American merchants permission to purchase provisions in Japan, and promised peaceful and friendly relations between the United States and Japan. Lacking the military power to resist Perry's demands, the Japanese government had no choice but to agree.

Japan was then governed by the Tokugawa shogunate, a system in which a military leader, the *shogun*, ruled in place of the emperor, whose role had largely been that of a figurehead for hundreds of years. Under the shogunate, aristocratic lords who were subordinate to the shogun, called *daimyo*, and their retainers, members of a warrior elite called the *samurai*, governed the country. After Perry's arrival, modernizers in Japan, remembering the American gunboats and China's humbling by Britain's navy in the first of the Opium Wars (1839–1842), believed the best way to protect their country was to adopt the technology and institutions of the west. They saw the shogunate as a barrier to modernization, so they called for the emperor to resume rule. Many samurai were not convinced by these arguments. Not only would industrialization elevate “inferior” craftspeople and merchants, who were far below them in the social hierarchy, but the shogunate's end would deprive them of power and influence.

In January 1867, Emperor Meiji ascended the throne following the death of his father. In November, the reigning shogun Tokugawa Yoshinobu resigned and relinquished his power, and in January 1868 the emperor officially proclaimed the end of the shogunate. The period called the Meiji Restoration was underway. In 1869, the daimyo surrendered their titles and their land to the emperor. Although the daimyo were allowed to remain governors of their former lands, the samurai were no longer their retainers. Instead, they worked for the state. In 1871, the daimyo were removed as governors, and they and the samurai were given yearly stipends.



Figure 2.1.2: Emperor Meiji in full court dress. (CC BY 4.0; Uchida Kuichi via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

Even further indignities awaited those who had once held power in Japan, however. The government stipends given to daimyo and samurai were made subject to taxation in 1873, and beginning in 1876 they were distributed in the form of government bonds. The Meiji government officially abolished class distinctions, which for the samurai meant the loss of privileges such as the right to wear swords. Although some rebelled, rising up against government forces several times in the 1870s, they were defeated by Japan's new national army, equipped with modern weapons and trained in western methods of fighting.

Industrialization was a major goal of Japan's Meiji government, and the state played a greater role in it than in most western countries in the nineteenth century. The first goal was to build railroads to unite the regions of the country and assist in further industrial development. Construction began in 1870; by 1872, a rail line linked the capital of Tokyo with the port of Yokohama. Perhaps remembering that Perry's demands had been dictated from the deck of a gunboat, the government also invested heavily in shipbuilding.

The Mitsubishi Corporation, a private company founded by samurai Iwasaki Yatori, competed directly with the government and, with its modern ships and efficient management, replaced it as the country's leading shipbuilder and shipper. Seeking independence from western shipping lines, the government then turned eleven ships over to Mitsubishi with the provision that it establish regular trade with China. In 1887, the company purchased the government-owned shipyard in Nagasaki. Mitsubishi became one of Japan's first *zaibatsu*, family-owned business conglomerates with financial and industrial branches influential in Japanese politics.

Mitsubishi also invested heavily in coal mining. The Japanese government did so too and invested in lead, iron, and copper mines, as well as in factories that manufactured weapons and cement. The government's willingness to fund industries not crucial to military defense or industrial development was variable. The textile industry, for example, relied less heavily on government support. Thus as Japan strove to build battleships and railways and to modernize its army, textile companies continued to purchase mechanized equipment from abroad.

The Japanese government abolished feudalism and gave peasant farmers title to their land, freeing them to sell it and travel to cities for work in factories and shipyards if they wished. Those who remained on the land were helped to increase Japan's food production by the government's importation of fertilizers and farm equipment. The abolition of samurai status freed the warrior elite to use their skills as managers of factories. As the samurai built private wealth, they invested in economic sectors that received less government support. Textile production benefited greatly from this trend, as did brewing and the manufacture of glass and chemicals.

Japan established a public school system in 1872. By 1900, attendance was nearly universal for boys, and girls were not far behind. The new system stressed the study of both science and the Confucian classics. Japan also sent students abroad to study technology and institutions in the United States and Europe.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Japan had become capable of competing with larger countries and was eager to do so. It soon got the chance. In 1895, it successfully defeated non-industrialized China in the Sino-Japanese War. In 1905, it defeated

Russia and sent a clear message to the United States and Europe that it was now a world power. Its rise and defeat of Russia also set off a wave of interest in Japan and its model among non-European peoples especially in Asia that would shape the thinking of colonized peoples about industrialization and national politics for much of the rest of the century.

India

India's industrial endeavors were greatly affected by its relationship with Britain, which had begun trading in India in the 1600s after the way had been paved by Portuguese and later French and Dutch merchants. The Seven Years' War and the subsequent Treaty of Paris, signed in 1763, effectively brought French power in India to an end, paving the way for Britain's eventual control of the subcontinent. At this time, India possessed characteristics that seemed to make it an ideal candidate for industrialization. It had large merchant and artisan classes, which produced beautiful textiles highly valued in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. India was, in fact, the largest exporter of cotton cloth in the world by the middle of the eighteenth century. It was also wealthy, and the country's Mughal rulers had maintained ports, roads, and bridges that helped manufacturers and merchants bring goods to market.

Britain, however, had no intention of allowing its colony to become its economic rival. Like all colonies, India was meant to enrich Britain, not compete with it. Thus began a process often referred to as deindustrialization, a reduction in a nation's or region's industrial activity. In the early eighteenth century, even before Britain had forced the French from India, the British Parliament passed the Calico Acts, prohibiting the importation of finished cotton textiles that could compete with the products of English weavers. India thus lost an important market for its goods and a source of revenue. Many weavers lost their jobs, reducing the number of workshops that could be mechanized later in the century. The destruction of the Indian textile industry only accelerated once British textile production became mechanized. Inexpensive mass-produced British cloth flooded Indian markets, underpricing local weavers and driving them out of business.

India's economy was not completely destroyed by the British presence, however, and Indian entrepreneurs invested in industrial development. For example, Dwarkanath Tagore, a member of a wealthy Hindu family, founded a bank and purchased hand-manufacturing operations. Eager to work with the British, he pooled his money with that of British investors to open a coal mine in 1834 and to build sugar refineries and textile factories. Other Indians also invested in such ventures, especially cloth production. Indeed, at the time Britain entered the Second Industrial Revolution, Indian textile factories were successfully competing with British ones selling cloth in China.

Ultimately, though, Indian textiles could not compete with British products on price. One part of the Indian economy that Britain did encourage was cash-crop agriculture. Small farmers unable to pay British taxes were evicted from their lands, which were combined with others and transformed into cotton plantations. The loss of food-producing land in the late eighteenth century led to devastating famines that killed some thirty million people. Thus India was transformed from a manufacturing nation into an export economy, producing primarily raw materials such as cotton but also tea and sugar for use by the British and opium for the British to sell in China.

Latin America

The nations of Latin America also became export economies. Now freed from Spanish and Portuguese control, they were eager to industrialize but faced a variety of obstacles. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Brazil had imported steam engines and developed facilities for sugar refining, coffee processing, and textile production. Paraguay built an iron foundry and established a steamship line. Chile opened coal mines and built sawmills and flour mills. Many countries also built rail lines. However, they did not become heavily industrialized; consequently, their development took another path.

Ironically, independence was part of the problem. When Spain and Portugal regulated their economies, Latin American merchants had chafed at restrictions, but these regulations had also heavily taxed foreign-made goods, which protected local handicraft industries. Now that merchants could trade with any countries they wished, however, goods made in Europe and the United States flooded in. Like India and Egypt, Latin American countries quickly found their own manufactured goods could not be made or sold as cheaply as imports. They also could not make enough to supply internal demand. As Brazilians and Chileans watched, their silver flowed overseas instead of being spent at home.

Latin Americans quickly realized that they would be more successful at continuing to grow sugar and coffee, products that had been the bases of the colonial economy and were still in high demand, than they would be at attempting to compete with foreign manufacturers. Later in the nineteenth century, Brazil produced rubber for the same reasons, using its abundant land and large agricultural workforce to supply raw materials for industrialized nations. Although these decisions made sense to planters and politicians, they nevertheless locked Spain's and Portugal's former colonies into providing raw materials that did not command as

high a price as the finished products made from them.



Figure 2.1.3: Bales of plantation rubber harvested in Brazil. (CC BY 4.0; Frank and Frances Carpenter Collection via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

Thus, though Latin Americans sold large amounts of cash crops to the United States and Europe, enriching the planter class, their earnings never exceeded (or even equaled) what they paid for imports. This disparity had a negative effect on Latin American society. Wealthy plantation owners and urban professionals could afford the factory-made products of other continents, but agricultural laborers could not, accentuating the class divide. Furthermore, many of the industrial improvements that Latin American countries did make, like the construction of mines and railroads, were funded by European and U.S. banks, and much necessary equipment, like steam engines and other machinery, was imported from Europe, leaving little money at home for domestic projects like building roads and telegraph lines. Regional wars in the nineteenth century also destabilized South America and interfered with industrialization. For example, from 1864 to 1870, Paraguay battled the united forces of Uruguay, Brazil, and Argentina in the War of the Triple Alliance. By the time the war ended, it and infectious diseases had killed much of Paraguay's population.

Thus a variety of forces combined to make Latin America's attempts to industrialize largely unsuccessful, and the region remained primarily an exporter of cash crops. Although railroads were built, they tended to be short lines linking the interior to the coast, enabling the export of raw materials. No national rail networks developed like they did in the United States and Europe, and electrification took place only in major cities.

2.2: Ideas in an Industrialized World

Industrialization and Social Transformation

Economic modernization resulted in major social tensions across the industrialized world. While the middle class grew, urban poverty increased as well, and with it, political instability. Nevertheless, governments attempted to adapt to the changing times and struggled to address many of the new problems created by industrialization.

The industrial revolutions transformed social structures, in particular it created a new class mega-rich industrialists and bankers. Now, wealth was far less dependent on ownership of land. With the expanding economy, there was also a need for college-educated middle-class professionals such as engineers, lawyers, accountants, doctors, dentists, merchants, bankers, teachers, architects, nurses, and white-collar civil servants. Many professions were now certified with specialized education such as medicine, law, and education. Following the example of China, civil service exams were used in most of Western Europe. Governments claimed to staff bureaucracies with men based on talent and merit rather than birth. Overall, this emerging middle class based its status on wealth and education instead of birth and titles.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify the origins of socialism in Europe.
- Recognize the distinct philosophical impact Karl Marx had on socialist movements.
- Explain how Charles Darwin's ideas on biological evolution informed the construction of Social Darwinism.

The other major class that emerged was the working class who were typically factory workers, construction workers, and miners. Increasingly, Europe's working class lived and worked in cities but were at first peasant migrants from rural areas. Their living and working environment were drastically different. For one, working in a factory required regimented discipline. There were bells to start and end work and designated break periods. In the countryside, these workers were free to set their own pace. Secondly, the agricultural worker in Europe had a personal relationship with their landlord. Theoretically, the European peasant lived in a moral economy where the landlord knew the worker by name and oftentimes assumed a moral obligation for the wellbeing of his workers. In many cases the farm worker had a sense of loyalty to the landowner. In the cities, this moral economy broke down. The factory worker had no relationship with the factory owner and the factory owner felt no obligation to ensure that the basic needs of the worker and his family were taken care of. Therefore, the factory worker had little loyalty to his employer. Cities were often unprepared to receive so many people so quickly. Inadequate housing, sanitation, and transportation contributed to cholera outbreaks, environmental degradation, and psychological stress.

Additionally, many skilled craftsmen lost their jobs. The new factory jobs required less skill than artisanal craftwork, especially when the worker was making a larger number of standardized products. Previously, a carpenter needed to be a skilled craftsman to design and assemble, for instance, a custom-built chair, but with industrialization, a less-skilled lathe operator could turn out large quantities of legs that could be assembled into any number of chairs of a standard pattern. Worker's wages would almost always be lower.

Socialism

Socialism was a specific historical phenomenon born out of two related factors: first, the ideological rupture with the society of orders that occurred with the French Revolution, and second, the growth of industrial capitalism. It sought to address both the economic repercussions of the industrial revolution, especially in terms of the living conditions of workers, and to provide a new moral order for modern society.

The term itself is French. It was created in 1834 to contrast with individualism, a favorite term among liberals but one that early socialists saw as a symptom of moral decay. Right from its inception, socialism was contrasted with individualism and egoism, of the selfish and self-centered pursuit of wealth and power. Socialism proposed a new and better moral order, one in which the members of a society would care not only for themselves, but for one another. For the first decades of its existence socialism was

less a movement with economic foundations than with ethical ones. It had economic arguments to make, of course, but those arguments were based on moral or ethical claims.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the word socialism came to be used more widely to describe several different movements than had hitherto been considered in isolation from one another. Their common factor was the idea that material goods should be held in common and that producers should keep the fruits of their labor, all in the name of a better, happier, more healthy community and, perhaps, nation. The abiding concern of early socialists was to address what they saw as the moral and social disintegration of European civilization in the modern era, as well as to repair the rifts and ameliorate the suffering of workers in the midst of early industrial capitalism.

There was a major shift in socialism that occurred over the course of the century: until 1848, socialism consisted of movements that shared a concern with the plight of working people and the regrowth of organic social bonds. This kind of socialism was fundamentally *optimistic* – early socialists thought that almost everyone in European society would eventually become a socialist once they realized its potential. Following the later work of Friedrich Engels, one of the major socialist thinkers of the second half of the nineteenth century, this kind of socialism is often referred to as "utopian socialism."

In general, the broad "Utopian" socialism of the 1840s was quite widespread leading up to 1848, it was peaceful in orientation, it was democratic, it believed in the "right" to work, and its followers hoped that the higher orders might join it. There was an enormous revolutionary explosion all over Europe in 1848. From Paris to Vienna to Prague, Europeans rose up and, temporarily as it turned out, overthrew their monarchs. In the end, however, the revolutions collapsed. The awkward coalitions of socialists and other rebels that had spearheaded them soon fell to infighting, and kings (and in France, a new emperor) eventually reasserted control. Socialists made important realizations following 1848. Democracy did not lead inevitably to social and political progress, as majorities (especially in the countryside) sometimes supported established community leaders (often priests or nobles). Class collaboration was not a possibility, as the wealthier bourgeoisie and the nobility recognized in socialism their shared enemy. Peaceful change might not be possible, given the forces of order's willingness to employ violence to achieve their ends. Russia, for instance, invaded Hungary to ensure the continued rule of (Russia's ally at the time) Habsburg Austria. After 1848 socialism was increasingly militant, focused on the necessity of confrontational tactics, even outright violence, to defend the working class and to achieve a better society. Two post-Utopian and rival forms of socialist theory matured in this period: state socialism and anarchist socialism.

The first, state socialism, is represented by the French thinker and agitator Louis Blanc. Blanc believed that social reform had to come from above. It was, he argued, unrealistic to imagine that groups could somehow spontaneously organize themselves into self-sustaining, harmonious units. He believed that universal manhood suffrage should and would lead to a government capable of implementing necessary economic changes, primarily by guaranteeing work for all citizens. He actually saw this happen in the French revolution of 1848, when he briefly served in the revolutionary government. There, he pushed through the creation of National Workshops for workers, which provided paid work for the urban poor.

In the end, the most influential socialist was a German: Karl Marx. Marx was born in 1818 in the Rhineland, the son of Jewish parents who had converted to Lutheranism (out of necessity – Marx's father was a lawyer in conservative, staunchly Lutheran Prussia). He was a passionate and brilliant student of philosophy who came to believe that philosophy was only important if it led to practical change – he wrote "philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways. The point, however, is to change it."

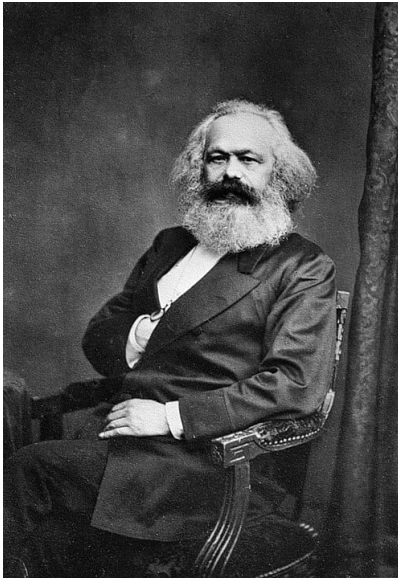


Figure 2.2.1: A portrait of philosopher Karl Marx. (CC BY 4.0; John Jabez Edwin Mayall via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

A journalist as a young man, Marx became an avowed socialist by the 1840s and penned (along with his friend and collaborator Friedrich Engels) the nineteenth century's most famous and influential socialist work, *The Communist Manifesto*. Exiled to Great Britain in the aftermath of the failure of the Revolutions of 1848, Marx devoted himself to a detailed analysis of the tendencies of a capitalist economy, ultimately producing three enormous volumes entitled, simply, *Capital*. The first was published in 1867, with the other two edited from notes and published by Engels after Marx's death. It is worthwhile to consider Marx's theories in detail because of their profound influence: by the middle of the twentieth century, fully a third of the world was governed by communist states that were at least nominally "Marxist" in their political and economic policies.

All of history, according to Marx, is the history of class struggle. From ancient pharaohs to feudal kings and their nobles, classes of the rich and powerful had always abused and exploited classes of the poor and weak. The world had moved on into a new phase following the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution, however, one that (to Marx) simplified that ongoing struggle from many competing classes to just two: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The bourgeoisie were the rising middle classes, the owners of factories and businesses, the bankers, and all of those with direct control over industrial production. The proletariat was the industrial working class.

Before this, the classes of workers in the pre-modern era generally had direct access to their livelihood: a small parcel of land, access to the common lands, the tools of their trade in the case of artisans. They had, in Marx's language, some kind of protected access to "the means of production," which could mean anything from some land, a plow, and an ox to a workshop stocked with a carpenter's tools. In the modern era, however, those rights and those tools were systematically taken away. The common lands were closed off and replaced with commercial farms. Artisans were rendered obsolete by the growth of industry. Peasants were pushed off the land or owned plots so small their children had to look for work in the cities. The net effect was, generally, that the class of workers who had "nothing to sell but their labor," the proletariat, grew.

At the same time, the people who did own property, "the bourgeoisie," were under pressure themselves. In the climate of the new capitalism, of unregulated markets and cutthroat competition, it was terribly easy to fall behind and go out of business. Thus, former members of the bourgeoisie lost out and became proletarians themselves. The net effect was that the proletariat grew and every other conceivable class (including peasants, the owners of small shops, etc.) shrank.

Meanwhile, industry produced more and more products. Every year saw improvements in efficiency and economy in production, arriving at a terrific glut of products available for purchase. Eventually, there was simply too much out there and not enough people who could afford to buy it, as one of the things about the proletariat, one of their forms of "alienation," was their inability to buy the very things they made. This resulted in a "crisis of overproduction" and a massive economic collapse. This would be unthinkable in a pre-modern economy, where the essential problem a society faced was the scarcity of goods. Thanks to the Industrial Revolution, however, products need consumers more than consumers need products.

In the midst of one of these collapses, Marx wrote, the members of the proletariat *could* realize their common interests in seizing the unprecedented wealth that industrialism had made possible and using it for the common good. Instead of a handful of super-

rich expropriators, *everyone* could share in material comfort and freedom from scarcity, something that had never been possible before. That vision of revolution was very powerful to the young Marx, who wrote that, given the inherent tendencies of capitalism, revolution was inevitable.

In turn, revolutions did happen, most spectacularly in 1848, which Marx initially greeted with elation only to watch in horror as the revolutionary momentum ebbed and conservatives regained the initiative. Subsequently, as he devoted himself to the analysis of capitalism's inherent characteristics rather than revolutionary propaganda, Marx became more circumspect. With staggering erudition, he tried to make sense of an economic system that somehow repeatedly destroyed itself and yet regrew stronger, faster, and more violent with every business cycle.

To Marx, revolution seemed not only possible but probable in the 1840s, when he was first writing about philosophy and economics. After the revolutions of 1848 failed, however, he shifted his attention away from revolution and towards the inner working of capitalism itself. In fact, he rarely wrote about revolution at all after 1850; his great work *Capital* is instead a vast and incredibly detailed study of how England's capitalist economy worked and what it did to the people "within" it.

To boil it down to a very simple level, Marx never described in adequate detail when the material conditions for a socialist revolution were possible. Across the vast breadth of his books and correspondence, Marx (and his collaborator Friedrich Engels) argued that each nation would have to reach a critical threshold in which industrialism was mature, the proletariat was large and self-aware, and the bourgeoisie was using increasingly harsh political tactics to try to keep the proletariat in check. There would have to be, and according to Marxism there always would be, a major economic crisis caused by overproduction.

At that point, somehow, the proletariat could rise up and take over. In some of his writings, Marx indicated that the proletariat would revolt spontaneously, without guidance from anyone else. Sometimes, such as in the second section of his early work *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx alluded to the existence of a political party, the communists, who would work to help coordinate and aid the proletariat in the revolutionary process. The bottom line is, however, that Marx was very good at critiquing the internal laws of the free market in capitalism, and in pointing out many of its problems, but he had no tactical guide to revolutionary politics. And, finally, toward the end of his life, Marx himself was increasingly worried that socialists, including self-styled Marxists, would try to stage a revolution "too early" and it would fail or result in disaster.

In sum, Marx did not leave a clear picture of what socialists were supposed to do, politically, nor did he describe how a socialist state would work if a revolution was successful. This only mattered historically because socialist revolutions *were* successful, and those nations had to try to figure out how to govern in a socialistic way.

In historical hindsight, Marx was really writing about what would happen if capitalism was allowed to run *completely rampant*, as it did in the first century of the Industrial Revolution. The hellish mills, the starving workers, and the destitution and anguish of the factory towns were all part of nineteenth-century European capitalism. Everything that could contain those factors, primarily in the form of concessions to workers and state intervention in the economy, had not happened on a large scale when Marx was writing - trade unions themselves were outlawed in most states until the middle of the century. In turn, none of the factors that might mitigate capitalism's destructive tendencies were financially beneficial to any *individual* capitalist, so Marx saw no reason that they would ever come about on a large scale in states controlled by moneyed interests.

Darwin and Evolution

Science made incredible advances in the the Victorian era. Some of the most important breakthroughs had to do with medicine and biology. Those genuine advances, however, were accompanied by the growth of scholarship that claimed to be truly scientific, but that violated the tenets of the scientific method, employed sloppy methods, were based on false premises, or were otherwise simply factually inaccurate. Those fields constitute branches of "pseudo-", meaning "false," science.

Disease had always been the greatest threat to humankind before the nineteenth century - of the "four horsemen of the apocalypse," it was Pestilence that traditionally delivered the most bodies to Death. In turn, the link between filth and disease had always been understood, but the rapid urbanization of the nineteenth century lent new urgency to the problem. This led to important advances in municipal planning, like modern sewer systems - London's was built in 1848 after a terrible epidemic of cholera. Thus, before the mechanisms of contagion were understood, at least some means to combat it were nevertheless implemented in some European cities. Likewise, the first practical applications of chemistry to medicine occurred with the invention of anesthesia in the 1840s, allowing the possibility of surgery without horrendous agony for the first time in history.

By far the most important advance in medicine, however, was in bacteriology, first pioneered by the French chemist Louis Pasteur (1822 - 1895). Starting with practical experiments on the process of fermentation in 1854, Pasteur built on his ideas and proved

that disease was caused by microscopic organisms. Pasteur's subsequent accomplishments are Newtonian in their scope: he definitively proved that the "spontaneous generation" of life was impossible and that microbes were responsible for putrefaction. He developed the aptly named technique of pasteurization to make foodstuffs safe (originally in service to the French wine industry), and he went on to develop effective vaccines against diseases like anthrax that affected both humans and animals. In the course of just a few decades, Pasteur overturned the entire understanding of health itself. Other scientists followed his lead, and by the end of the century, deaths in Europe by infectious disease dropped by a full sixty percent, primarily through improvements in hygiene (antibiotics would not be developed until the end of the 1920s).

These advances were met with understandable excitement. At the same time, however, they fed into a newfound obsession with cleanliness. All of a sudden, people understood that they lived in a dirty world full of invisible enemies - germs. Good hygiene became both a matter of survival and a badge of class identity for the bourgeoisie, and the inherent dirtiness of manual labor was further cause for bourgeois contempt for the working classes. For those who could afford the servants to do the work, homes and businesses were regularly scrubbed with caustic soaps, but there was little to be done in the squalor of working-class tenements and urban slums.

Comparable scientific breakthroughs occurred in the fields of natural history and biology. For centuries, naturalists (the term for what would later be known as biologists) had been puzzled by the fact that the fossils of marine animals could be found on mountaintops. Likewise, fossils embedded in rock were a conundrum that the biblical story of creation could not explain. By the early nineteenth century, some scientists argued that these phenomena could only occur through stratification of rock, a process that would take millions, not thousands, of years. The most famous geologist at the time was the British naturalist Charles Lyell, whose *Principles of Geology* went through eleven editions it was so popular among the reading public. Archeological discoveries in the middle of the century linked human civilization to very long time frames as well, with the discovery of ancient tools and the remains of settlements pushing the existence of human civilization back thousands of years from earlier concepts (all of which had been based on a literal interpretation of the Christian Bible).

In 1859, the English naturalist Charles Darwin published his *Origin of the Species*. In it, Darwin argued that lifeforms "evolve" over time thanks to random changes in their physical and mental structure. Some of these traits are beneficial and increase the likelihood that the individuals with them will survive and propagate, while others are not and tend to disappear as their carriers die off. Darwin based his arguments on both the fossil record and what he had discovered as the naturalist aboard a British research vessel, the HMS Beagle, that toured the coasts of South America and visited the Galapagos Islands off its west coast. There, Darwin had encountered numerous species that were uniquely adapted to live only in specific, limited areas. On returning to Britain, he concluded that only changes over time within species themselves could account for his discoveries.

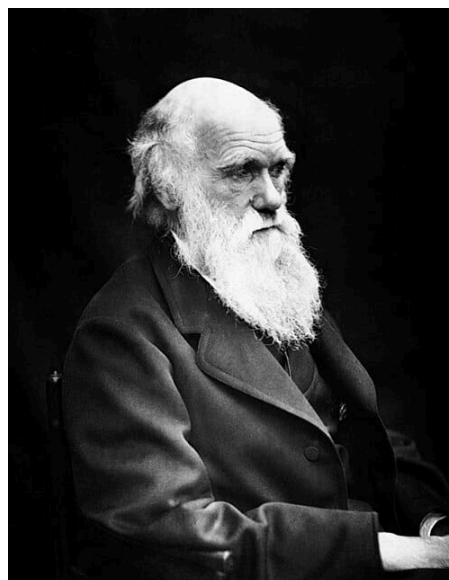


Figure 2.2.2: Charles Darwin, naturalist and author of *On the Origin of Species*. (CC BY 4.0; Julia Margaret Cameron via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

Darwin's arguments shocked most of his contemporaries. His theory directly contradicted the biblical account of the natural world, in which God's creation is fundamentally static. In addition, Darwin's account argued that nature itself was a profoundly hostile place to all living things; even as nature sustains species, it constantly tests individuals and kills off the weak. Evolutionary adaptations are random, not systematic, and are as likely to result in dangerous (for individuals) weaknesses as newfound sources of strength. There was no plan embedded in evolution, only random adaptation.

Nevertheless, Darwin's theory was the first to systematically explain the existence of fossils and biological adaptation based on hard evidence. As early as 1870 three-quarters of British scientists believed evolutionary theory to be accurate, even before the mechanism by which evolution occurred, genetics, was understood. In 1871, in his *The Descent of Man*, Darwin explicitly tied human evolution to his earlier model and argued that humans are descended from other hominids - the great apes. Despite popular backlash prompted by both religious conviction and the simple distaste of being related to apes, Darwinian theory went on to become one of the founding discoveries of modern biological science.

The mechanism of *how* evolution occurred, was not known during Darwin's lifetime, at least to very many people. Unknown to anyone at the time, during the 1850s and 1860s a Czech-Austrian monk named Gregor Mendel carried out a series of experiments with pea plants in his monastery's garden and, in the process, discovered the basic principles of genetics. Mendel first presented his work in 1865, but it was entirely forgotten. It was rediscovered by a number of scholars simultaneously in 1900, and in the process, was linked to Darwin's evolutionary concepts. With the rediscovery of Mendel's work, the mechanisms by which evolution occurs were revealed: it is in gene mutation that new traits emerge, and genes that favor the survival of offspring tend to dominate those that harm it.

Social Darwinism

Many Europeans regarded Darwinian theory as a proof of progress: nature itself ensured that the human species would improve over time. Very quickly, however, evolutionary theory was taken over as a justification for both rigid class distinctions and racism. A large number of people, starting with elite theorists, came to believe that Darwinism implied that a parallel kind of evolutionary process was at work in human society. In this view, success and power is the result of superior breeding, not just luck and education. The rich fundamentally deserve to be rich, and the poor (encumbered by their poor biological traits) deserve to be poor. This set of concepts came to be known as Social Darwinism. The British writer and engineer Herbert Spencer was the most significant proponent of Social Darwinism. He summarized his outlook with the phrase "the survival of the fittest," a phrase often misattribute to Darwin himself. Spencer was a fierce proponent of free market economics and also began the process of defining human races in biological terms, rather than cultural or historical ones.

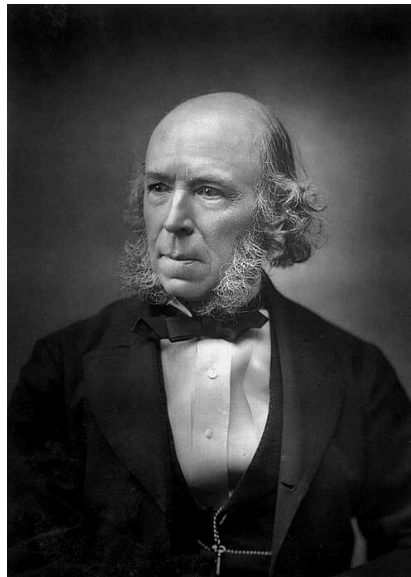


Figure 2.2.3: Herbert Spencer, English philosopher and sociologist associated with Social Darwinism. (CC BY 4.0; Unknown via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

In turn, the new movement led an explosion of pseudo-scientific apologetics for notions of racial hierarchy. Usually, Social Darwinists claimed that it was not just that non-white races were inherently inferior, it was that they had reached a certain stage of evolution but stopped, while the white race had continued to evolve. Illustrations of the evolutionary process in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century encyclopedias and dictionaries were replete with an evolutionary chain from small creatures through monkeys and apes and then on to non-white human races, culminating with the supposedly "fully evolved" European "race."

In addition to non-white races, Social Darwinists targeted elements of their own societies for vilification, often lumping together various identities and behaviors as "unfit." For Social Darwinists, the "unfit" included alcoholics, those who were promiscuous, unwed mothers, criminals, the developmentally disabled, and those with congenital disabilities. Social Darwinism's prevailing

theory was that charity or “artificial” checks on the exploitation of workers like trade unions would lead to the survival of the unfit, which would in turn cause the human species to decline. Likewise, charity, aid, and rehabilitation were misplaced, since they would supposedly lead to the survival of the unfit and thereby drag down the health of society overall. Thus, the best policy was to allow the “unfit” to die off if possible, and to try to impose limits on their breeding if not. Social Darwinism soon led to the field of eugenics, which advocated programs to sterilize the “unfit.”

Ironically, even as Social Darwinism provided a pseudo-scientific foundation for racist and sexist cultural assumptions, these notions of race and culture also fed into the fear of degeneration mentioned above. In the midst of the squalor of working-class life, or in terms of the increasing rates of drug use and alcoholism, many people came to fear that certain destructive traits were not only flourishing in Europe, but were being passed on. There was thus a great fear that the masses of the weak and unintelligent could and would spread their weakness through high birth-rates, while the smart and capable were simply overwhelmed.

2.3: Imperialism and Colonialism

The Rise of Imperialism

Like a chain of falling dominoes, industrial development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had many consequences, short and long term. To generate profits for themselves and their investors, businesses needed to operate inexpensively and sell as many goods as possible. To keep costs and therefore prices low, they sought inexpensive raw materials. They also wanted markets in which to sell their finished goods, preferably without competing with others. The ships that transported raw materials and finished products required ports where they could refuel and resupply, as did the navies that kept them safe.

To the industrial powers, these needs justified their practice of imperialism, that is, the policy of gaining direct or indirect control over parts of the world with low-cost resources and no competing mass-produced goods. Improved forms of transportation, communication, weaponry, and medicine made this control possible. As the industrialized nations came to dominate states in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific, taking natural resources and money from them, they sent not only soldiers and administrators but also missionaries to introduce the inhabitants to Christianity and other aspects of western culture, often against their will.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify the main reasons imperialism grew during the Second Industrial Revolution
- Explain how colonized people were harmed by imperialism
- Explain how colonized people resisted control by the imperial powers

By the beginning of the Second Industrial Revolution, new inventions and industrial processes demanded new raw materials, such as petroleum to fuel engines, natural rubber for valves and tires, palm oil for lubricating machinery, copper to conduct heat and electricity, silver for medicine and photography, and lead for pipes. Coal was in demand to transform iron into steel, to produce the gas that heated homes, and to generate the electricity that powered machines and lit streets and buildings. Not all the industrialized nations could produce enough to supply their increased needs.

New fashions and tastes also created demand for foreign imports. Middle-class families in Europe and the United States wanted their daughters to play the piano and drove a market in ivory (from which piano keys were once made). The need for quick sources of energy for industrial workers fueled an increased demand for coffee, tea, and sugar. Elites and aspiring members of the middle class filled their homes with furniture of mahogany, rosewood, and ebony. Cotton textiles remained fashionable, but following the abolition of slavery in the United States, cloth manufacturers could no longer depend on an inexpensive supply of raw cotton.

The industrializing powers could satisfy their needs for raw materials and markets only by reaching outside their borders to places in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific Ocean. To amass large profits, however, they needed to extract raw materials at such low prices that it was unlikely Africans, Asians, and Pacific Islanders would consent to them. In addition, and also unlikely, these nations would have to agree to purchase manufactured goods from their industrialized partners even though they might be able to produce such things for themselves. Business owners and politicians in industrialized nations thus believed they needed to gain control over these distant countries and rule them as part of an empire. Quite often, military conquest was the means by which they did so. Once these foreign territories were secured, markets established, and funds invested, the imperial powers then needed to prevent encroachment on their possessions by other industrial powers. This led to them to exercise even greater control over their colonies and often to attempt to conquer neighboring regions. Great Britain, for example, competed with Russia for control of Afghanistan largely to limit Russian access to Britain's prize colony of India.

The new colonies were quite different from those that European powers had established in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was not generally expected that large numbers of Europeans would relocate to Africa or Asia and make permanent homes there, and the colonies were not intended to have quite the same relationship to the home country that earlier "settler colonies" had had. The U.S. treatment of the Philippines and Filipinos was fundamentally different from what North American colonists had experienced from Great Britain, for example. The industrial nations intended to exploit the resources and people of the colonies they established, not settle them.

There were some exceptions. The North African colony of Algeria, which France had taken control of in 1830, was incorporated as part of France in 1848. Many French people and other Europeans immigrated to the coastal regions of Algeria and Tunisia with government encouragement in the nineteenth century. Many Europeans also settled in the British and Dutch colonies in southern Africa. However, this was not the imperial norm.

On the heels of the soldiers who first opened countries in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific to agents of businesses came others seeking to bring what industrializing countries thought was valuable. Many from the United States and Europe considered it the duty of citizens from the industrialized—or as they phrased it, the “civilized”—world to bring the benefits of western culture to the conquered. According to Social Darwinism, a theory then popular in Europe and the United States, some groups of people become stronger and more powerful because they are naturally superior. In this view, those of European ancestry could impose their will on others because they were innately “better” and their societies more advanced. Jules Ferry, the prime minister of France in the early 1880s, stressed that such domination was not only the duty of “superior” peoples but also their right. The “benefits” brought to the colonized typically consisted of religion, education, western clothing, and “character-building” sports like soccer. The British also introduced cricket to colonies in Africa and Asia, and baseball came to the Caribbean from the United States. The introduction of these sports was thought to teach people supposedly western values like fair play, teamwork, and competitiveness. The French called this aspect of imperialism “the civilizing mission.” Colonizers also typically erected an infrastructure in the lands they controlled, building roads and railroads and establishing secure water systems and telegraph lines.

As the claim went, people had been conquered not to deprive them of their wealth but to introduce them to the benefits of civilization through the generosity of the industrialized country. This view no doubt served many as merely a cover for baser motives. Others, however, truly believed that African, Asian, and Pacific Islander societies were being improved by the adoption of the hallmarks of western civilization, such as Christianity, monogamous marriage, and fashions that covered the entire body. This was the attitude taken by English writer Rudyard Kipling in his pro-imperialist poem “The White Man’s Burden.” In the first stanza of the poem, written in 1899 in response to the U.S. acquisition of the Philippines, Kipling expresses his belief that it was the White conquerors who suffered at the expense of the conquered people of color, who are portrayed as uncivilized and in need of guidance by people of a biologically and culturally superior race:

*Take up the White Man's burden—
Send forth the best ye breed—
Go, bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait, in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught sullen peoples,
Half devil and half child.*

As Kipling’s reference to the “half devil” nature of people of color suggests, missionaries played a prominent role in the civilizing mission. They were often the chief means by which the “gifts” of civilization were brought to people. All the imperial powers except Japan sent missionaries to their new colonies. Roman Catholic clergy had already been converting people in European colonies for hundreds of years. Now Protestant clergy and avid lay volunteers established churches and schools to convert the peoples of Africa, Asia, and the Pacific to Christianity and teach them the language of the conquering nation. They also took in orphaned or abandoned children and attempted to assimilate them to the home country’s culture.

Although some missionary activities, like the building of hospitals, may have benefited the Indigenous inhabitants, most others were undoubtedly harmful. Shocked by the practice of polygamy, missionaries often demanded that men with multiple wives choose one and divorce the others, who then had to return to their families in shame or, if they had no family, live without means of support. In China, missionaries’ insistence that Christian converts abandon the practice of ancestor veneration often caused the new Christians to be rejected by their families.

Many aspects of the “civilizing mission,” whether carried out by missionaries or government functionaries, were believed to benefit the conquering nation and its citizens as much as to help the “savage” inhabitants of foreign lands. Telegraph lines enabled communications, and water systems protected city dwellers from diseases like typhoid and cholera. Literate Indigenous people trained in European values and customs were employed in colonial bureaucracies and police forces. Although such changes may have eventually benefitted the people of the colonized country, they also changed the nature of societies, for example by eliminating traditional jobs, and it was always the case that the colonizing nations benefited the most. Instead of connecting population centers as European railroads did, for instance, railroad lines in places like Africa led only from the interior to the coast, the better to move to waiting ships the raw materials destined for European and U.S. factories.

Before either the economic or the cultural goals of the imperialists could be achieved, the desired regions had first to be

conquered. One of the first hurdles was the physical difficulty of penetrating the interiors of Africa and Asia. Sub-Saharan Africa was a hot and humid home to microbes unknown to Europeans that sickened both them and their draft animals. Malaria laid low many Europeans who attempted to explore the continent's interior.

Malaria was also a significant problem in Britain's colony of India. It was exacerbated by schemes to dig irrigation canals and clear land for railroads, creating more areas for water to collect in breeding grounds for the mosquitoes that carried the disease. Quinine, which comes from the bark of the cinchona tree, had been used to treat malaria for years, and in the 1840s the British discovered that taking it before exposure could prevent people from ever contracting the disease. Cinchona trees grew only in the Andes, however, and there were not enough to meet the European demand. Attempts to plant cinchona trees elsewhere often failed, but by the 1870s the Dutch were successfully growing them in their colony of Indonesia and producing additional quinine, a development that assisted Europeans in their exploitation of the African interior.

Besides disease, difficult terrain and dense brush also made European exploratory and military missions difficult. Following rivers inland was the easiest means of travel. However, most rivers were too shallow for sailing ships, so exploration beyond the coast depended on the development of steamboats. In the 1810s, American explorers began to use steamboats to venture into the interior of North America, exploring the upper reaches of the Mississippi River in 1825, for example, and the British sent steamboats up the Irrawaddy River to conquer Burma (also currently known as Myanmar).

Steamboats were also of great use in Africa. The interior of the continent is a high plateau from which rivers pour down and rush to the seacoast. All have waterfalls, making it impossible for large sailing ships to follow them for their full length. By the second half of the nineteenth century, however, Europeans were regularly plying African waters in steamships much improved over the earliest ones. Besides sturdy iron hulls, the boats had propellers instead of the paddle wheels the original boats had and steel boilers that were less likely to explode than iron ones. When the boats reached a waterfall, they were disassembled, carried around the falls by African porters, and reassembled to continue down the river.

Steamships carried not only soldiers, explorers, and traders into the interiors of continents but also guns. Weapons had improved rapidly in the industrialized world in the nineteenth century, and guns were another type of technology that gave Europeans a significant advantage. European and U.S. soldiers were armed with breech-loading, repeating rifles and handguns that could be loaded quickly and fired with greater accuracy. Smokeless powder increased the velocity of bullets—and thus the severity of gunshot wounds—and bullets had been rendered more lethal. Dum dum bullets (named for Dumdum, the arsenal town in India where they were first used) were flat or hollow bullets that expanded upon impact, increasing the size of the holes they made. Machine guns were also used extensively in colonial warfare. The Gatling gun from the United States could fire three thousand bullets per minute. A British invention, the Maxim gun, was a single-barreled weapon (unlike the Gatling gun) that could fire eleven bullets per second.



Figure 2.3.1: A Gatling gun on the deck of the USS Enterprise. (CC BY 4.0; E.H. Hart via Wikimedia Commons).

Such weapons could be produced in large numbers only in industrialized nations. Thus the only way the people of Asia, Africa, and the Pacific could acquire guns was to purchase them, and they were inordinately expensive. A native of the Sudan who wanted to purchase a European- or U.S.-made rifle at the end of the nineteenth century would have to pay at least five camels or, if a

Europeans were willing to make the trade, thirty-six enslaved people. Firearms were less common in Central and South Africa, and people fought with swords and spears into the nineteenth century.

Imperialism's Exploitative System

While all the great powers were capable of brutality and people were exploited in all the colonies, King Leopold II's subjects in the Congo Free State suffered in ways that have become infamous. Despite his claims that his interest in Africa lay solely in a desire to improve people's lives, in reality, Leopold was a cruel master. The Congo Free State was considered his personal possession and thus immune from intervention by the Belgian government. Leopold extracted wealth from it by leasing portions to private companies and individuals. Without adopting even a veneer of benevolence, these intermediaries brutalized the peoples of the Congo from the moment they arrived.

Disembarking from steamboats that brought them up the Congo River, Europeans seized Africans and forced them to carry their numerous possessions inland. At times, several hundred would be conscripted to carry a boat's cargo, marching single-file with iron collars around their necks, attached to chains to ensure they did not run away.

Europeans used Africans in the Congo Free State for all forms of labor, but primarily to gather ivory and harvest rubber from wild rubber tree vines. The amount of rubber they were required to collect each day was so large that, instead of tapping the rubber-bearing vines and letting the liquid flow into pails, they chopped through the vines and allowed the liquid latex to cover their bodies. At the end of the day, the hardened rubber had to be scraped from their skin. For this work, they received low pay if any, often only the food they were given.

Entire villages could be emptied of men forced into service, their wives and children held hostage to ensure their compliance. The ill and injured were left to die, and those who were uncooperative or slow were whipped, sometimes to unconsciousness or even death. Discipline was maintained by the *Force Publique*, an Indigenous army commanded by European officers. This army killed those who resisted forced labor or tried to run away and then cut a hand from each victim to maintain a tally of the dead. If the quota set by officers was not met, hands were chopped from the living to make up the number. People who failed to gather enough rubber could also lose their hands.

In 1899, Joseph Conrad published his novella *Heart of Darkness*, based on what he had seen in the Congo Free State. The book elicited cries for intervention among the British, and following a British official's detailed report, the Congo Reform Association (CRA) was founded. Many prominent British and American thinkers were members, and they pressured governments to end the suffering of the Congolese people. In 1908, the Belgian Parliament took the Congo from Leopold II, renamed it the Belgian Congo, and assumed authority over it.

Although the Congo Free State became notorious for the brutal treatment its people suffered, it differed from most other colonies largely in degree, not in kind. Forced laborers toiled in Egypt to build portions of the Suez Canal. In Portugal's African colonies, people were made to grow rice and cotton and sell it to government agents at prices the government set. Where Europeans ruled through local leaders, such as in France's West African colonies, forced labor might be disguised as a form of traditional communal labor ordered by a village head or chief.

Imperialism harmed the people of Africa, Asia, and the Pacific Islands in other ways as well. European and U.S. visitors in the late nineteenth century often brought infectious diseases. The introduction of measles to Fiji in 1875 resulted in the death of approximately one-quarter of the population. Modern methods of travel further spread disease. Railroads built to move goods and raw materials in India helped spark outbreaks of cholera, smallpox, and bubonic plague. The demand of textile producers for cotton resulted in the digging of irrigation canals in places like Egypt, which provided ideal breeding environments for malaria-bearing mosquitoes.

Colonizers also brought the cattle disease rinderpest with them wherever they went. Rinderpest came to the Philippines from the United States, for example, swiftly killing the draft animals of Filipino farmers and making it harder for them to grow adequate amounts of food. Once the domestic cattle had died, the mosquitoes turned to biting humans and sickening them with malaria. The introduction of rinderpest-infected cattle to the Horn of Africa by Italians afflicted herds throughout the eastern and southern part of the continent. With herds diminished, thornbush shrubs flourished, providing a perfect home for the tsetse flies that carried sleeping sickness.

Farmers often devoted so much land to cash crops that they were unable to raise enough food to feed themselves. People who mined ore or gathered ivory or rubber for Europeans also did not have time to grow crops to feed themselves. Thus people became dependent on food sold by European and American overseers that was often highly processed and lacked nutrients, such

as white flour and white rice, leading many to suffer from dietary deficiency diseases.

Exploitation also occurred in other ways. In the United States, “Wild West” shows hired Native Americans to re-enact battle scenes for crowds of paying White customers. Carnival barkers often placed Native Americans, Inuit, and Filipino Islanders on display for others to look at. The 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair featured Filipino tribespeople living in recreations of their native villages. Such “human zoos” of tribal peoples from Africa, Asia, the Arctic, and the Pacific were not uncommon in European cities and in other world’s fairs as well.

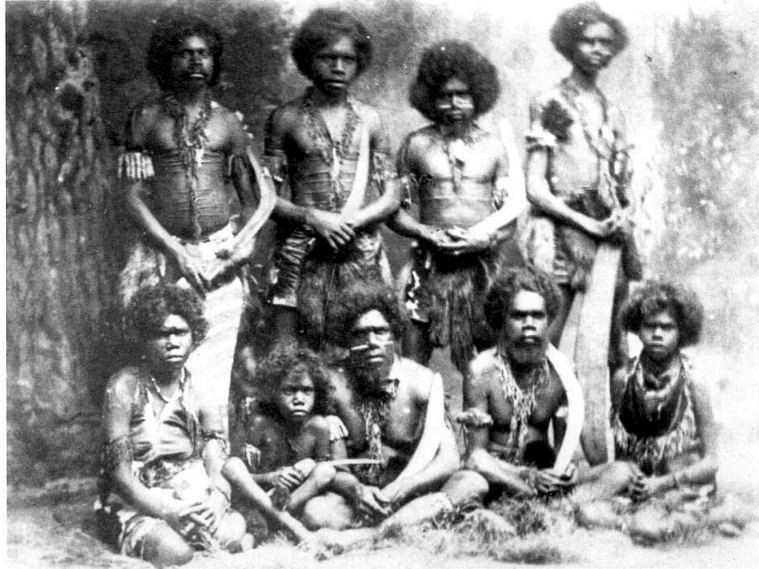


Figure 2.3.2: A picture of Aborigines group: “Captive Lives and Western Spectacle.” (CC BY 4.0; Unknown via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

Given the harm colonization caused, it is worth asking why native peoples ever cooperated with foreign imperialists. Of course, some did so for fear of the consequences of refusing. Some, however, worked with the imperial powers to gain advantages for themselves and their families. For those who learned to speak the language of the imperial power and acquired a certain level of education, jobs were available at the lower levels of government bureaucracies. People could also serve as soldiers and police, a benefit for members of minority tribal groups that had been dominated by more powerful ones. Others could secure jobs as interpreters or guides, and wealthier ones might enter into business with the imperial power, as did some Indians, Chinese, and Vietnamese. Imperial powers like Britain and France often provided education for the children of those who assisted them, preparing them for a possible job in the colonial bureaucracy and even a university education in London or Paris. Finally, many converts to Christianity were sincere in their beliefs and may have felt they had more in common with European fellow Christians than with non-Christian peers.

Resistance to Imperialism

Resistance movements and outright revolts sprang up wherever colonizers went. The revolt by Egyptians unwilling to submit to European control, the war waged by the Mahdi’s army in Sudan, and Ethiopia’s war with Italy were all examples of African acts of resistance. Elsewhere in Africa, more limited revolts took place, such as the Zulu and Matabele (Ndebele) tribes’ resistance of British or Dutch control in the south.

Resistance to foreign rule also took place in Asia and the Pacific. By the end of the nineteenth century, Chinese people’s resentment against foreigners in their land was high. The sale of foreign manufactured goods had hurt many Chinese artisans. The imperialists’ building of railroads and bridges had put many porters, cart drivers, and ferriers out of work. Foreigners were not subject to Chinese law. Protestant and Catholic missionaries in the country were especially resented. They interfered with rituals for venerating ancestors, and families were sometimes split when some members became Christians and others did not. Rumors abounded concerning the missionaries’ orphanages. One story, no doubt influenced by foreigners’ interest in taking photographs, said missionaries took children in only to kill them and use their eyeballs to make the substance that captured images on photographic plates.

In northern China, anti-foreign sentiments led to the formation of a secret society known as the Society of the Righteous and Harmonious Fists. Foreigners who witnessed the ritual exercises (that members believed made them invulnerable to bullets)

called them Boxers. In 1899, the Boxers began their campaign to drive foreigners from China by killing two German priests. Violence swept through northern China as the Boxer Uprising flared. Boxers murdered foreigners and Chinese Christians and destroyed foreign property, sometimes disrupting railroads by pulling the steel rails from the ground.

At first the Chinese army tried to stop the Boxers. However, in January 1900, believing foreign forces had invaded China to stop the uprising, the dowager empress Cixi proclaimed the Boxers should not be treated like criminals. Terrified foreigners streamed into Beijing seeking protection, but Cixi encouraged them to leave. Fearing for their lives, they barricaded themselves inside the embassies in the foreign quarter of Beijing. Cixi then proclaimed her allegiance to the Boxers and declared war on foreigners within China.

Swiftly Britain, France, Germany, the United States, Japan, Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Italy formed the Eight-Nation Alliance, and their troops raced to Beijing. Waiting for help, the foreigners rationed their food and huddled in fear. One woman recalled hearing frenzied Boxers trying to dig through the building's wall to reach the people inside. After a siege of fifty-five days, the international force arrived and the Boxers were dispersed, killed, or captured. In September 1901, the Boxer Protocol was signed, officially ending the incident. China was forbidden to import weapons for two years, and foreign legations were given the right to keep troops of their own nation for their defense. China also awarded \$330 million to the members of the Eight-Nation Alliance.

U.S. attempts to rule the Philippines after purchasing it from Spain were hindered by the resistance of many Filipino tribes. Middle-class Filipinos had sought independence from Spanish control just as the Cubans had. Following Spain's defeat, leaders of the independence movement like Emilio Aguinaldo had expected the United States to allow them to rule themselves. When President William McKinley announced in 1898 that the United States intended to govern the islands until the Filipinos were judged capable of ruling themselves, Aguinaldo objected: "My relations with the United States did not bring me . . . to make war on the Spaniards for their benefit, but for the purpose of our own liberty and independence."

The United States did not intend to relinquish control of its newly claimed territory, however, and war broke out. Attempts by the Filipinos to defeat U.S. forces in conventional warfare failed, so they adopted guerrilla tactics. Both sides tortured captives. U.S. soldiers burned villages to weaken civilians and guerrilla fighters alike and built concentration camps to hold resisting Filipinos. Many starved or died from infectious disease. In 1900, the United States began a "policy of attraction" by promising economic development along with a degree of self-government. The policy drew the support of wealthy and middle-class Filipinos and others who did not support Aguinaldo's tactics. In 1901, Aguinaldo was captured, and the United States declared the war over in 1903, although major resistance continued with movements like the Moro Rebellion ending only in 1913. It was several decades before the Philippines gained independence.



Figure 2.3.3: Portrait of General Emilio Aguinaldo of the Philippines. (CC BY 4.0; Unknown via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

India's response to British imperialism was somewhat different. Violence had failed in the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, and middle-class Indians, especially those with a British-style education, now turned to political change. They were disappointed, however, because many British elites considered Indians unfit for self-government, and they feared losing control of their most valuable colony. In 1885, moderate nationalists founded the Indian National Congress (INC), aimed at enacting political reform. The INC especially wished to end unfair taxation and remove all British-imposed barriers to industrialization in India.

The moderate approach did not suit all Indian nationalists, however. Bal Gangadhar Tilak called for immediate independence from Britain, and in his newspaper he stated that Indians were justified in killing the British. “Swaraj (self-rule) is my birthright and I shall have it,” he proclaimed. When the British partitioned the province of Bengal in 1905, making Bengali Hindus a minority group within the new divisions, the INC supported a boycott of British-made goods and government schools, and acts of anti-British terrorism occurred.

Fearing a radical turn would harm their cause, INC president Gopal Krishna Gokhale and other moderate members called for the boycott to end when a new secretary of state for India was appointed whom they believed was sympathetic. The Swadeshi movement calling upon Indians to purchase only Indian-made goods continued, however, led by the Indian lawyer and political activist Mohandas Gandhi. Tilak supported the Swadeshi movement, and in 1907 the INC split in two, with radicals aligning themselves with Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Lala Lajpat Rai.

2.4: Chapter Themes to Discuss

This page offers different themes that appear throughout the sections in this chapter. The themes are meant to provide a framework in which discussion questions can be developed to inspire further exploration of the topics covered.

1. The intellectual and material impact of industrialization.
2. The impact of industrialization on economic and political philosophies.
3. The relationship between industrialization and the rise of imperialism.
4. The response of colonized people to industrialization and imperialism.

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2.5: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials to Enhance the Chapter

These materials are provided to help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction. Some resources are openly licensed, while others may require institutional access or individual review before use in class.

Web Resources

These websites may help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction.

- [World History Encyclopedia](#) – Provides overviews of important people, places, and events throughout history. This resource can be useful for finding concise, expert-informed background information.
- [Fordham University Internet History Sourcebooks Project](#) – Provides translated, transcribed, and digitized primary sources. This resource can support source-based instruction, though instructors should review links carefully because some materials may be incomplete or less suitable for classroom use.

Articles

These articles provide additional scholarly context for this chapter. Access may depend on your institution's JSTOR subscription.

- Bain, Robert B. "Children and the Industrial Revolution: Changes in Policy." *OAH Magazine of History* 15, no. 1 (2000): 48–56. [Access article in JSTOR](#)
- Claes, Gregory. "The 'Survival of the Fittest' and the Origins of Social Darwinism." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61, no. 2 (2000): 223–40. [Access article in JSTOR](#)
- Lazich, Michael C. "American Missionaries and the Opium Trade in Nineteenth-Century China." *Journal of World History* 17, no. 2 (2006): 197–223. [Access article in JSTOR](#)

Videos

These videos can be used to explore a specific topic in the chapter in more detail and as an entry to further discussion on chapter topics.

- [TED-Ed: One of history's most dangerous myths](#)
Length: 5 minutes, 11 seconds
From the 1650s through the late 1800's, European colonists descended on South Africa. They sought to claim the region, becoming even more aggressive after discovering the area's abundant natural resources. To support their claims to the land, the colonizers asserted they were settling in empty land devoid of local people. Was this argument true? Anneliese Mehnert debunks the Empty Land Theory.

3: THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Overview

In 1914, war broke out on the European continent when the Austro-Hungarian Empire's territorial ambitions collided with the rising sentiments of nationalism among the ethnic groups in Southeastern Europe. People from other parts of the world would find themselves involved in the war as extensions of the colonial empires of European powers. The United States also eventually took part in the war that lasted until 1918. In what many thought would be "the war to end all wars," the outcome set in motion events that would plunge the world into another global conflict only twenty years later.

[3.1: Prelude to War](#)

[3.2: The War](#)

[3.3: Peace and the War's Global Impact](#)

[3.4: Alternate Text Descriptions](#)

[3.5: Chapter Themes to Discuss](#)

[3.6: Teacher Resources](#)

3.1: Prelude to War

The Conditions for War

By the early twentieth century, Europe had achieved outward stability through a series of alliances. Such accords were a hallmark of nineteenth-century diplomacy and had maintained peace for decades on the continent, compressing the wars that did occur into finite conflicts. In the 1900s, these alliances had solidified two opposed groups, each with major powers that allied with one another and then developed relationships with smaller nations. Germany's territorial ambitions put it in direct conflict with other imperialistic powers as it sought to expand its colonial holdings. Its desire to be taken more seriously and become a force in global affairs threatened to destabilize the peace when its goals brought it into competition with other countries hungry for land and power, notably Great Britain, and led to military buildups. A specter of war soon hung over Europe.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe political conditions in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, including the decline of the Ottoman Empire
- Analyze the nature of the alliances made among European powers by 1914
- Describe the competition to build modern navies in the early twentieth century

The decades before the world erupted into the Great War, as World War I was known, were generally marked by great stability. The work done in 1815 to create a balance of power among European nations in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars had been quite successful. The Concert of Europe—an informal agreement to maintain the status quo—had been able to absorb some internal conflicts and the growth of more liberal political thoughts without incurring political or territorial instability. There were occasionally military conflicts, but these were usually of short duration and limited in scale.

Prussia, however, with its militarized culture, clearly did still see warfare as a means of achieving its own ends, as did other nations such as France. Austria-Hungary and Prussia went to war in 1866. The conflict lasted only about seven weeks and was handily won by Prussia, which had invested in better military technology and weaponry and now annexed several German states. Austria was effectively barred from participating in German affairs from that point forward, and Prussia became the dominant German state. The war also forced Austria into accepting the dual monarchy system, an unwieldy alliance with Hungary. Austria agreed because it needed allies after being ousted from German affairs, but it and Hungary had separate national governments and parliaments (and different goals) despite being part of the same empire.

The Franco-Prussian War in 1870 and 1871 was another fairly brief conflict that resulted in major change. France declared war against Prussia after a dispute over who would inherit the Spanish throne. The fighting lasted only a few months, but Paris was besieged by the Prussian army, and Napoléon III was captured. The treaty that ended the conflict forced France to pay a large war indemnity to Prussia. France also had to pay for the occupation forces, while losing the territories of Alsace and Lorraine (which changed hands again several times during the first half of the twentieth century). This was a humiliating defeat for France, though it paved the way for the unification of the German Empire. The declaration of the Prussian King, Wilhelm I as Emperor (Kaiser) of the newly proclaimed German Empire in the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles cemented Prussia's leadership of the new empire and its successful achievement of what had been left undone by the revolutions of 1848: Germany automatically emerged as a major power in Europe.

The fighting in these wars was localized, and because they were short, the conflicts did not require the mobilization of a country's economy or full resources. They did not involve numerous countries either, and the fighting rarely spilled over into other nations' lands. With the exception of the Franco-Prussian War, their impact on civilian society was minimal, with little loss of civilian life or destruction of property. In a sense, their very nature lulled much of Europe into expecting that although there might be future wars, they would be swift and small affairs.

The Decline of the Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire had long been predicated on expansion. It drew its strength from its territorial gains and the exploitation of the best and brightest from these new territories to serve the leader of the empire, the sultan. The strategy had worked for a number of centuries, even delivering an Ottoman army as far as the gates of Vienna in 1529 and 1683. At its height, the empire encompassed areas of the Middle East, northern Africa, and significant swaths of southeastern Europe.

Starting in the 1800s, however, the Ottoman Empire entered a period of waning power as it grew unable to respond to nationalistic challenges as well as internal problems. In the 1820s, nationalist leaders in Greece began fighting the Greek Civil War, and after crucial military and diplomatic help from Britain, France, and Russia, in 1830 Greece gained its independence from the Ottomans. More countries split off from the Empire in the 1870s, including Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria. By the end of the nineteenth century, the demise of the empire, now known as “the sick man of Europe,” was being predicted; only the timing was in question. The Ottoman Empire was no longer strong enough to hold onto its outlying areas, and these grew ever more destabilized. The other powers in Europe watched with concern as the Ottoman Empire became weaker and other countries stepped in to fill the power vacuum, occupying and administering a region but not annexing it as Ottoman influence withdrew.

The ideology of nationalism was taking hold across Europe in the 1800s, and in the 1900s it only grew. The prospect of having a country for each nationality was tantalizingly appealing if overly simplistic given the intermixing of peoples and shifting identities on the ground. But the straightforward calls of Poland for the Poles, Serbia for the Serbs, and so on held great appeal to many. In an empire, however, nationalism was a powerful danger. Empires were built of many different nationalities, and they would disintegrate if each group were granted its own land and nation. The Ottoman Empire had already seen such pressures develop in its eastern sections, and Austria-Hungary faced this problem as well: more than ten different nationalities could be found within its borders. The concept of nationalism threatened the Austro-Hungarian Empire's very survival.

The theory of pan-Slavic nationalism, which would unite all Slavic people under one rule, was a powerful one at times too, complicating the picture of what a nation means. Slavic peoples have a shared historic culture and similar languages that include Bulgarian, Russian, Croatian, Serbian, Slovak, Czech, and Polish. They extended throughout the Balkan region and shared many of the same animosities toward the imperial powers of Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. By the twentieth century, Serbia had emerged as the leader of the pan-Slavic position in the Balkans. Its policy was characterized by hatred of Austria-Hungary and opposition to that empire's forays into Balkan issues. Russia, too, was a Slavic nation and showed great interest in what was happening to its historic kin in the Balkans. Indeed, some in Russia saw it as the natural leader of any potential pan-Slavic political entity that might emerge in the Balkans. Russia also saw Austria-Hungary and the Ottomans as rivals in the region and did not want either power to make any territorial gains. Russia hoped that by gaining influence in the Balkans, it could gain direct access to the Mediterranean Sea, which caused many to see pan-Slavism as hiding ulterior self-serving motives. Before 1914, however, Russia was not prepared to risk war to maintain this stance.

The Balkans was a prime example of both the threat of nationalism and the threat from the weakening power of the Ottoman Empire. The region housed people of different nationalities and different religions living side by side. The Ottomans had been steadily losing power there and were certain to continue to do so. The nearby empire of Austria-Hungary looked covetously upon the Balkans, seeing an opportunity to take over more territory. In 1908, Austria-Hungary moved to block Serbian expansion in the Balkans by taking over administration of Bosnia-Herzegovina, with its capital of Sarajevo.

Serbia continued its plan to exercise more control through the Balkans and helped found the Balkan League with Greece, Bulgaria, and Montenegro in 1912. The league then touched off the First Balkan War in October 1912 by attacking Macedonia, which was still held by the Ottomans. In May 1913, the Balkan League comprehensively defeated the Ottomans and forced them to give up most of their territory in Europe. Disagreements among the victors in the Balkans soon devolved into the Second Balkan War as Bulgaria attacked Serbia and Greece in 1913. Bulgaria was soon defeated, but this loss drove it to forge a deeper alliance with the Central powers—Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire—when World War I broke out.



Figure 3.1.1: Map of the Ottoman empire in 1900. (CC BY 4.0; Julieta39 via Wikimedia Commons). Detailed Description of Figure 3.1.1.

The Balkan Wars also forced continued displacement of Muslims from the region. Most of these Muslims were the descendants of local Balkan peoples who had converted to Islam during Ottoman rule, therefore they shared much in terms of language and culture, further complicating the question of what makes a nation in this (or any) region. After Serbia's independence decades earlier, there had been systematic efforts to force Muslims to leave. This drive spread throughout the Balkans as Christians increasingly attacked Muslims, causing hundreds of thousands to relocate to the Ottoman Empire. As the empire withdrew from the Balkans, many of these Muslims left with it, although substantial Muslim populations remained and still live in the Balkans today. The Ottoman Empire then had to cope with a substantial population increase at the same time that its standing in the world was on a decline.

Alliances

Since he first rose to power in 1862, German chancellor Otto von Bismarck had pursued conservative policies that strengthened first Prussia and then Germany itself. In particular, Bismarck hoped to check the power of Russia and France by developing a series of alliances that would keep them from growing more dominant and presenting a threat to German leadership in the region. A military alliance with Austria-Hungary was created to stand up to Russia. This alliance later grew to include Italy and became formalized as the Triple Alliance. In 1894, Russia and France signed a treaty pledging military support for one another if attacked and requiring each to mobilize its armies if the other did so. In 1907, the Triple Entente was created between Russia, France, and Britain, growing out of a shared distrust of German aims.

By the early twentieth century, then, a series of alliances had effectively divided Europe into two blocs of power. A bloc is a group of countries united for a common purpose. One bloc included Russia, France, and Britain, and the other Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. While these two groups stood opposed to one another, there were nuances in the arrangements. Britain, for example, had not promised any mutual aid in times of war when it signed its initial agreement with France, nor had it done so in its agreement with Russia, while France was bound to provide military support for Russia if Russia were attacked and not the aggressor.

What these new alliances also did was provide fuel for the German emperor Wilhelm II's growing concern that he was surrounded by hostile nations. Some of this preoccupation was undoubtedly justified. Germany faced a hostile France to its west and Russia to its east. But Wilhelm's fixation on it drove him and Germany to adopt even more aggressive stances toward their "enemies" that helped create the cataclysm of World War I.



Figure 3.1.2: Map of military alliances in Europe at the beginning of 1914. (CC BY 4.0; historicaire via Wikimedia Commons). Detailed Description of Figure 3.1.2.

Colonialism

The view that imperial strength should be devoted to colony building was still very much in place in the late 1800s. Still industrializing, and having unified as a country only in 1871, Germany soon felt the pressure to build an overseas empire, just as the other industrializing nations of the world—Britain, France, Belgium, the United States, Russia, and Japan—did. But there were limited locales it could target.

Germany began to look to the Pacific as a place where it could establish itself as a colonial power. The United States, Britain, France, Japan, and the Netherlands already held extensive territory in the Pacific. Germany soon claimed part of New Guinea, part of the Solomon Islands, and the Marshall Islands. In 1899, Germany's growing power in the Pacific led to the partitioning of the Samoan Islands with the United States. Germany also gained some of the smaller island groups—Palau, Caroline Islands, and Mariana Islands—by the beginning of the twentieth century. In addition, it planned to join the “Scramble for Africa” in which European nations were engaging to shore up their colonial holdings on the African continent.

When Germany went in search of African colonies, there was not much left. Britain, France, Belgium, and Portugal had already seized control of most of the continent and did not welcome the claims of yet another European nation. Germany took a portion of East Africa and Southwest Africa, which had a large border with the British colonies. Togoland and the Cameroons also became part of the German colonial empire.

In 1905, Germany clashed with both France and Britain in North Africa. Kaiser Wilhelm II arrived in Morocco that year and made a speech in which he threw his full support behind its being an independent state led by the sultan. He also voiced his expectation that Germany would enjoy the same benefits of trade in the region that France and England did. Wilhelm hoped to divide Britain and France by thus claiming a place for Germany in North Africa equivalent to that held by other European nations. Instead, in response to this First Moroccan Crisis, Britain and France established stronger bonds of friendship.

A few years later, another crisis erupted over Morocco, though this one was more media driven and involved more national posturing. The Second Moroccan Crisis started in 1911. France and Germany had been negotiating over what say Germany would have in rail lines under construction in Morocco and over some territory in the French Congo that Germany wanted. Britain and France had earlier become alarmed by Germany's plans to build another railroad in connect with the Ottoman Empire that would link Berlin to Baghdad. This railway would provide Germany with more direct access to both Persian Gulf oil and its African colonies. Moving oil and other goods by rail would also make Germany less vulnerable to potential British naval attacks.

In May 1911, France, fearing rebellion in Morocco, sent troops to the city of Fez. In July of that year, Germany sent a gunboat to Agadir, a Moroccan port on the Atlantic, to ensure that it would be compensated for any loss of control over Moroccan territory that resulted from French intervention. Germany also undoubtedly intended to frighten Britain and force it to back out of its alliance with France. Soon British politicians and the media seized on the opportunity to attack Germany for

its demands. The British said they were not yet sending in the Royal Navy but would be monitoring the situation. In the end, France and Germany held successful negotiations over the issues, with Germany receiving territory in the French Congo in exchange for acknowledging French dominance in Morocco, but the international effect of the crisis was broader. Britain was reinforced in its view that Germany posed a threat to its own colonial ambitions. On the German side, the military leadership gained greater political influence in the capital in Berlin.

Militarism

Naval power assumed a greater role in world affairs in the late nineteenth century. As more of the industrialized nations embarked on empire building, and as reaching international markets became an expected part of their strategy, the value of having strong navies to protect commercial trade only grew. Maintaining supply and fueling stations around the world to service these navies and fleets of merchant ships became a key argument in favor of developing more colonies.

At the start of the twentieth century, Great Britain was still the unmatched naval power in the world. Kaiser Wilhelm II was determined to counter Britain's sea power by building up the German navy. In this, he was ably assisted by Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz. Tirpitz had similarly grand dreams for the navy, and through his various positions in the naval high command, he set out an ambitious building program for new battleships.

Germany's fear of naval inferiority became especially strong after 1906. In that year, Britain debuted an entirely new class of ship when the HMS *Dreadnought* set sail. What made this ship different was its ten 12-inch guns, some of them mounted on rotatable turrets, and its faster speed, powered by steam turbines. Other ships of the period had only a handful of guns and not all of this size. No other warship could match it in battle. Germany tried to keep pace by constructing ships similar in size, but although it clearly hoped to one day outbuild Britain, at no point before or during the war did its fleet ever match the British numbers.

Germany's army, however, was much larger than Britain's. Compulsory military service was the norm in Germany and Austria-Hungary. Germany placed high reliance on its active military units, which totaled close to four million soldiers, and had numerous units on reserve as well. Germany's ally Austria-Hungary had a smaller force of under 500,000. In reaction to the growth and power of the German army, other nations also built up their armies.

In Russia, military service via peacetime conscription was widespread. Although its armies were poorly trained and outfitted, its peacetime forces numbered nearly 1.5 million, and millions more could be called up as part of military mobilization from the reserves. France had also adopted compulsory service (at the time it required three years of service from all men) and fielded an active army of almost 1.3 million. Those who had already done their compulsory service were classified as reservists and could be mobilized as well.

The British army, which relied on volunteer troops, was still relatively small at the onset of the war. The Old Regulars, as they were known, numbered only a little over a quarter-million. The strength of Britain lay rather in its navy. The British reveled in what they called the "splendid isolation" of their island, an acknowledgment that issues on the European continent did not directly touch it.

The United States, which did not enter the war until 1917, had also chosen to keep a small military force, numbering fewer than 130,000. It had built up its navy beginning in the 1890s, when its imperial advances necessitated a more efficient and up-to-date force, though it did not have the ship numbers that European powers possessed. For the United States, keeping a small force was compatible with the isolationist tendencies it had maintained through the 1800s. With oceans on two sides, the country was relatively protected from overseas entanglements and had diplomatically tried to avoid them.

Besides building up their armies and navies, military planners in several European countries also began designing how operations would occur in the next war. Germany anticipated that, encircled by enemies, it would have to fight on two fronts—against Russia on one side and France on the other. Developed by Field Marshal Alfred von Schlieffen in the early 1900s, the Schlieffen Plan held that Russia would be slow to mobilize, so Germany should use that time to attack France through neutral Belgium and then pivot to fight Russia. This plan would make the conflict a short one. The French designed Plan XVII, which called for a major French offensive through Alsace-Lorraine to target the industrial heartland of Germany. Russia developed Plan 19, which would order Russian attacks on East Prussia once Germany was engaged against France.

The Spark

The eighty-four-year-old Austro-Hungarian Emperor Franz Josef had been reigning since 1848. His nephew, Archduke Franz Ferdinand (age 50) was the Crown Prince and expected to soon become the next Emperor. In the area of southeastern Europe between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea called the Balkans, the Austro-Hungarian, the Russian, and the Ottoman empires

each claimed control. The Ottomans had gradually been losing power in Europe since the 1700s. By the end of the nineteenth century, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Montenegro, and Serbia had all asserted themselves as newly-independent nations in former Ottoman territory. The Orthodox Russians dreamed of reestablishing Constantinople in Istanbul and felt that a shared ethnic and religious identity made them a natural fit to be the leading power in a Balkans region filled with their fellow Orthodox Slavs like the Serbs and Bulgarians.

The Balkan conflict Bismarck had predicted was made more likely to begin in 1908 with the Austro-Hungarian takeover of Bosnia from the Ottoman Empire. Since Bosnia contained many ethnic Serbs (although they did not make up a majority), Serbian nationalists believed that the territory naturally belonged to Serbia. The desire to fulfill their national aspirations pushed Serbia to deepen its alliance with Russia which they hoped could check the expanding influence of Austria-Hungary in the Balkans. The competition between two Great Powers in the region made the situation even more volatile.

The independent nations of the Balkans made war in 1912-1913, first with the Ottomans, resulting in an independent Albania, and then with each other as the messy realities of ethnic, national, and religious identities made simple political boundaries almost impossible. These were bloody conflicts that included attacks on civilian populations in waves of ethnic cleansing. The Balkan armies on both sides dug into trenches as new arms and technology limited the movement of troops.

To strengthen Bosnian ties with Austria, Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand and his wife made an official visit to the regional capital of Sarajevo on June 30, 1914. A secretive Serbian nationalist group, that had been encouraged and supported by Serbian military officers, plotted the assassination of the royal couple as their motorcade made its way through the city. After some initial bungling, one of the conspirators, nineteen-year-old Gavrilo Princip, shot and killed the Archduke and his pregnant wife.



Figure 3.1.3: A fantasy drawing of how the assassination at Sarajevo could have happened. (CC BY 4.0; Achille Beltrame via [Wikimedia Commons](#)). [Detailed Description of Figure 3.1.3.](#)

For much of July 1914, Germany had prodded the Austro-Hungarian government to take military action against Serbia. Finally, on July 28th Austria-Hungary made a series of demands for restitution from the Serbian government. These demands were so onerous as to be virtually impossible for Serbia to accept. When Serbia refused, Austria declared war. Austria's invasion of Serbia activated the European alliance system: Russia sided with the Serbs, France supported Russia, and Great Britain decided to honor earlier agreements with Belgium when the Germans invaded France through the neutral country. Confusingly, Germany which entered the war under the pretext of defending Austria-Hungary from Russia immediately invaded France instead. A war that had been precipitated by national and imperial rivalries in the Balkans quickly came to be fought primarily along two massive fronts to Germany's east and west. The Balkan War was basically over with the occupation of Serbia from November 1915, but the larger war, fought among Europe's four greatest powers, would rage on for three more years.

3.2: The War

Modern Warfare

When the war broke out in Europe, it represented a cathartic release for many Europeans. War did not represent real bloodshed and horror in the imaginations of many of the young men signing up – they had never fought in real wars, except for the veterans of colonial wars against much less well-armed “natives” in the colonies. War was an ideal of bravery and honor that many young men in Europe in 1914 longed for as a way to prove themselves, to prove their loyalty, and to purge their boredom and uncertainty about the future. A whole generation had absorbed tales of glory on the battlefield, of the Napoleonic Wars, the Crimean War, the Franco-Prussian War, and the conquests overseas. Depending on their nationality, they were either ashamed and angry or fiercely proud of their country’s performance in past wars. As a result, many saw a new war as a chance to settle accounts, to prove once and for all that they were citizens a great power, and to shame their opponents into conceding defeat.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain how new technology affected combat in World War I
- Describe the experience of the average soldier on the battlefield in World War I
- Discuss the role combatants’ colonies and colonial troops played in World War I
- Analyze the effect of racism on the actions of the major powers in World War I

Military technology had changed greatly by the beginning of the twentieth century, and these changes were not often understood or appreciated by either soldiers or commanders when the war broke out. The recent spread of industrialization meant that more weapons with greater firepower could now be turned out of factories. Just as the guns of the naval arms race had quickly increased in scope and power, the introduction of machine guns, long-range artillery guns, aircraft, and submarines revolutionized warfare in World War I.

Artillery was one clear example of the way warfare had changed. In the 1800s, cannons were moved by horses. In World War I, however, some long-range artillery could be moved only by rail, and in some cases, railroads even had to be specially built due to the weight of the guns. Artillery became a key tool for fighting the war. The German arms manufacturer Krupp unveiled new artillery throughout the war, each time offering greater firepower, but its “Big Bertha,” a 420-mm howitzer, was used extensively from the beginning of the war to its conclusion. In 1918, the Germans began using the so-called Paris Gun to shell the French capital. While its payload was not overly large, this piece of artillery could fire over a distance of eighty miles, propelling a missile into the stratosphere before it came back to earth. Most battlefield casualties in World War I were the result of artillery fire.

The power of machine guns, first seen at the turn of the century in the Boer War, also completely changed the battlefield experience in total war. Many of the machine guns of World War I were based on a design unveiled by inventor Hiram Maxim in 1884. They could fire four to six hundred rounds per minute, utterly transforming what an infantry attack looked like. It was this mechanized weaponry that caused the horrific injuries and mass casualties suffered during the war. A soldier courageously running across a field against an enemy was now undertaking a suicide mission. Barbed wire also became a common sight, strewn across the no-man’s-land between the opposing sides’ frontline trenches. It snagged and caught troops as they advanced, slowing them down as they used wire cutters to break through and making them an easy target for machine gun nests on the opposite side.

Poison gas, outlawed worldwide today, was employed as an instrument of war by all sides, first by German troops fighting Russian units in 1914. Different types of gas were used. Chlorine gas with its greenish hue appeared early in the war, thick and heavy mustard gas came later, and phosgene was used throughout the combat. Mustard gas could burn the eyes, nose, and skin with injuries that took weeks to heal; for the unlucky, it could cause permanent blindness and lifelong respiratory problems, and sometimes death. Phosgene gas was colorless and could be more immediately deadly, though symptoms might not appear for many hours. Historians estimate that 85 percent of deaths from gassing were due to the effects of phosgene.

By the midpoint of the war, gas masks had become a regular part of a soldier’s kit. When a call of “Gas!” went out, soldiers would quickly don them, though they were tight and severely narrowed the wearer’s range of vision. Soldiers came to fear gas attacks

more than any other kind. The prospect of not being able to see your enemy was unnerving, and the gas might not even be noticed until the first few soldiers collapsed from it.

Flamethrowers were employed by both sides as well but were first introduced by Germany, with substantial use beginning in 1915. These were intended to spur enemy soldiers out of their trenches in a battle. The most effective flamethrowers were mobile ones carried by individual soldiers. Their effect was also psychological, much like that of poison gas.

In 1916, the British unveiled a new invention to support their infantry—the tank. Early tanks showed promise in that they made large artillery mobile and could travel with advancing infantry, which could help end trench warfare. However, they often malfunctioned and got stuck in the mud too easily. Commanders at first did not fully understand what a boon to the infantry tanks could be, but in the ensuing years they learned.



Figure 3.2.1: A photograph of British tanks on training maneuvers in France during World War I. (CC BY 4.0; National Library of Scotland via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

On the sea, the submarine debuted in World War I and heralded a new age of naval combat. Its stealth was its biggest tactical advantage; it could sneak up on unsuspecting vessels and fire a torpedo that would sink them. The German navy called its subs *Unterseeboots* or U-boats and focused on expanding this part of its fleet during the war. U-boats were seldom submerged because the batteries on which they ran would not allow them to stay underwater for too long. In the early months of the war, German submarines warned ships before sinking them so that the crew could abandon ship, as was the custom in naval warfare. However, after German submarines were destroyed by armed British merchant ships when they made their presence known, they began to attack without firing any warning shot or allowing the crew on the targeted ship to abandon it. This was used by the Allies as evidence that Germany was a crueler foe than other nations. By 1917, German U-boats “had destroyed about thirty percent of the world’s merchant ships.”

All combatant armies used aircraft for reconnaissance purposes, and pilots soon began engaging one another in aerial “dogfights.” Skilled pilots who were able to shoot down enemy planes became known as “aces.” They kept track of their kills and were heralded for their bravery. The sky was one of the few arenas where skill and courage could make a difference in a confrontation with the enemy.

The Western Front

On the Western Front of the war, it was the trenches that defined almost everything in the lives of the soldiers on both sides of the conflict. An English officer and poet later wrote that “when all is said and done, this war was a matter of holes and ditches.” While they began as improvised, hastily-dug ditches, the trenches involved into vast networks of fortified rifts that stretched from the English Channel in the north to the Swiss border in the south. Behind the trenches lay the artillery batteries, capable of hurling enormous shells for miles, and farther back still lay the command posts of the high-ranking officers who fruitlessly conceived of new variations on a constant theme: hopeless charges against the impregnable enemy position.

The tactical problem facing both sides was due to the new technologies of war: whereas in past wars the offensive strategy was often superior to the defensive strategy, things were entirely reversed in World War I. Because of trenches, machine guns, mines, and modern rifles, it was far more effective to entrench oneself and defend a position than it was to charge and try to take the enemy's position. It was nearly impossible to break through and gain territory or advantage; the British phrase for an attack was "going over the top," which involved thousands of men climbing out of their trenches and charging across the no man's land that separated them from the enemy. While they were charging, the enemy would simply open fire with impunity from their trenches, and without exception not a single offensive captured a significant amount of territory between 1915 and early 1917. As a single example, one British attack in 1915 temporarily gained 1,000 yards at the cost of 13,000 lives.

In turn, and in stark contrast to the early dreams of glory to be won on the battlefield, soldiers discovered that their own competence, even heroism, had been rendered irrelevant by the new technology of warfare. Because warfare was so heavily mechanized, the old ideal of brave, chivalric combat between equals (if it had ever been true) was largely obsolete. Men regularly killed other men they never laid eyes on, and death often seemed completely arbitrary – in many cases, survival came down to sheer, dumb luck. No amount of skill or bravery mattered if an artillery shell hit the trench where a soldier happened to be standing. Likewise, if ordered to "go over the top," all one could hope for was to survive long enough to be able to retreat.

Thus, the experience of war in the trenches for the next three years was a state of ongoing misery: men stood in mud, sometimes over a foot deep, in the cold and rain, as shells whistled overhead and occasionally blew them up. They lived in abject terror of the prospect of having to attack the enemy line, knowing that they would all almost certainly be slaughtered. Thousands of new recruits showed up on the lines every month, many of whom would be dead in the first attack. In 1915, in a vain attempt to break the stalemate, both sides started using poison gas, which was completely horrific, burning the lungs, eyes, and skin of combatants. The *survivors* of poison gas attacks were considered to be the *unlucky* ones. By 1917, both sides had been locked in place for three years, and the soldiers of both sides were known to remark that only the dead would ever escape the trenches in the end.



Figure 3.2.2: A photograph of a British soldier in a trench, 1916. (CC BY 4.0; John Warwick Brooke via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

Individual battles in World War I sometimes claimed more lives than had entire wars in past centuries. The Battle of Verdun, an enormous German offensive that sought to break the stalemate in 1916, resulted in 540,000 casualties among the French and 430,000 among the Germans. It achieved nothing besides the carnage, with neither side winning significant territorial concessions. The most astonishing death count of the war was at the Battle of the Somme, a disastrous British offensive in 1916 in which 60,000 soldiers were killed or wounded on the first day alone – there were more British soldiers killed and wounded in the first three days of the battle of the Somme than there were Americans killed in World War I, The Korean War, and the Vietnam War combined. Ultimately, the Battle of the Somme resulted in 420,000 British casualties (meaning either dead, missing, or wounded to the point of being unable to fight), 200,000 French casualties, and 650,000 German casualties. One British poet noted afterwards that "the war had won" the battle, not countries or people.

In this context of ongoing carnage, even the most stubborn commanders were forced to recognize that their dreams of a spectacular breakthrough were probably unachievable. Instead, by 1916 many of the war's top strategists concluded that the only way to win was to outspend the enemy, churning out more munitions and supplies, drafting more men, committing more civilians

to the war effort at home, and sacrificing more soldiers than could the other side. At its worst, commanders adopted an utterly ruthless perspective regarding their own casualties: tens or even hundreds of thousands of deaths were signs of “progress” in the war effort, because they implied that the other side must be running out of soldiers, too. This was a war of attrition on a new level, one that both soldiers and lower-ranking officers alike recognized was designed to kill them in the name of a *possible* eventual victory.

The Eastern Front

In other combat regions, the armies were more mobile, but the fighting came with its own set of problems. For example, battles between Italian and Austro-Hungarian forces ranged over the Italian Alps, forcing soldiers to fight at high altitude with few opportunities to resupply. Besides the need to live in caves or scale mountain heights, troops also faced regular snowfall and subfreezing temperatures. The threat from frostbite and avalanches was real, and the poor conditions accounted for more than half the casualties suffered during this mountainous fighting. The narrow passes of the Alps also offered little chance to retreat.

Battles in the East by Germany and Austria-Hungary against the Russian Empire went back-and-forth with massive shifts in territory. At first, the Russians had some success against the mostly Austro-Hungarian forces that Germany hoped could hold off a Russian advance while they dealt with France in the West. However, the divisions inside Austria-Hungary meant that forces were not coordinated to fight, often lacked shared and interchangeable equipment (like standard artillery shells), and often units spoke multiple different languages. In the face of Russian advances, the German army sent large numbers of soldiers to push the Russians back, which they did decisively in the Battle of Tannenberg in 1914. This saved the Eastern Front, but it meant a delay in the west and might have been the reason the Germans failed to capture Paris.

Fighting in the Caucasus between the Russians and the Ottomans began in 1914. The front was isolated, and the Ottomans did not have the rail lines to supply operations far from the front. The snow was many feet deep, and temperatures plunged below zero as the troops fought. The Ottoman troops were unable to continue given their lack of supplies, and they suffered tens of thousands of casualties. In arid climates around the Mediterranean and the Middle East, armies had to ensure adequate water supplies in the desert. It was difficult to find enough feed for horses, so particularly in the Middle East, troops became more reliant on camels as a means of carrying supplies and even people.

Colonialism and War

As the imperial powers went to war with one another, so too did their colonies in multiple ways. In some cases, colonial troops came to Europe to fight, such as those the French brought from Senegal or the British brought from India. In other cases, such as in Africa, fighting took place in the colonies themselves.

France had extensive colonial holdings throughout Africa and enlisted more than 600,000 soldiers there, most of them from the continent’s west and north. France also employed troops from French Indochina (modern-day Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia). More than ninety thousand people from French Indochina were brought to Europe, about half of them as laborers for the French armies. Britain made great use of roughly 1.3 million soldiers from India. Many were brought to Europe where they fought in the trenches of France and Belgium. Others went to the other theaters of the war—Mesopotamia, Africa, and the Mediterranean. More than three million Africans participated in the war, either as soldiers or in a support capacity. While many fought in Europe, many others fought in French, British, and German colonies in Africa.

Germany’s colonial forces in Africa were mainly located in East Africa. Colonel Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck commanded thousands of German troops, along with thousands of African porters who carried all the supplies. The plight of African porters underscores the effect racism had on the way the war was fought and who was considered expendable. Porters were given strict rations, in some locations only one thousand calories a day, and forced to march many miles while carrying sixty-pound loads. The death rate among porters was 20 percent over the course of the war, higher than the death rate for British soldiers.

In addition to colonial troops, the troops of British dominions fought in the war as well. From the very beginning of the conflict, soldiers were organized from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand and sent to the Mediterranean and European theaters. Some of the battles in which they fought became key episodes in their growing national histories.

For example, the ANZAC forces representing Australia and New Zealand saw heavy action in the Mediterranean in 1915. The idea behind the British plan was to launch a ship-based artillery attack at the Dardanelles and then land troops on a peninsula called Gallipoli. This would allow the British to link up with Russian forces and coordinate a push against the Turks to isolate the Ottoman Empire and seize control of the important Turkish straits leading to Istanbul. The brainchild of Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, the operation suffered problems from its start in February. The first ships took heavy fire and were crippled by

mines. The Turks were prepared for a ground invasion and began firing on the Allied troops from secure positions. Those who made it ashore were unable to do more than establish beachheads and did not drive far into the interior. The situation continued through all of 1915 before the British decided to evacuate their troops. Casualties from both sides totaled approximately 900,000, losses commemorated in Australia and New Zealand each year on ANZAC Day, April 25. Churchill was forced to resign over the debacle.

The United States Enters the War

It was truly with submarines that naval warfare was fought in World War I. Through 1915 and 1916, German submarines continued to patrol the war zones off the coasts of Britain and France, sinking an increasing number of vessels. In 1916, German submarines torpedoed the *Sussex*, a civilian ferry, and several U.S. citizens were killed. This provoked outrage in the United States, and President Wilson demanded apologies and restitution. Germany responded by apologizing and agreeing to only engage in restricted submarine warfare. That is, German submarines would not target U.S. ships and would endeavor not to fire on ships that had U.S. citizens on board. Implementing such restrictions was impossible, however. Theoretically, Germany would have to have had all U.S. citizens leave a ship before torpedoing it.

The compromise did allow the United States to remain officially neutral even as tensions mounted. Nevertheless, the US was closely linked to Britain and France economically, and there were fears that if Britain and France lost, the massive monetary investments in those two countries would be wiped out in a wartime settlement. This caused the US to remain officially neutral, but there were strong pro-British and French tendencies in government and finance. In 1917, the terms of neutrality changed. Germany announced in January of that year that it would engage in unrestricted submarine warfare. This meant that any ship in a war zone was a target for sinking even if it were sailing under the flag of a neutral power, so U.S. merchant ships were now subject to being torpedoed.

Germany made this decision because it felt that Britain would be forced to pull out of the war if the massive lifeline of cargo and war materials coming to it from the United States were cut off. Germany had suffered food shortages beginning in 1915. By 1917, as a result of the British blockade and the enlistment of male farm laborers for war, the nation's urban population was starving, and its troops were on reduced rations. Unless Britain withdrew from the war soon, Germany would be forced to surrender. Obviously, Germany knew this decision would anger the United States and could well cause it to enter the war itself, but it was a gamble its leaders felt forced to take. They fully believed that Germany could achieve victory if it could force the British to surrender before the United States entered the war.

Further exacerbating tensions between Germany and the United States was the publication on March 1, 1917, of the Zimmermann Telegram. This message had been sent to Mexico by Germany's foreign minister, Arthur Zimmermann, offering a deal. In 1916, there had been numerous disturbances along the border between the United States and Mexico due to the exploits of Francisco "Pancho" Villa as he attacked U.S. towns. The U.S. Army had responded by sending thousands of troops to track Villa down. Germany wanted the Mexican government, in the event of war with the United States, to actively cause more disturbances along the border, keeping even more U.S. troops there and thus unavailable for deployment to Europe. In return for Mexico's cooperation, upon its victory, Germany would grant it the region of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, territory it had lost in 1848 as a result of war with the United States.

In reality, it was unlikely that the Mexican government would have been able to participate in such a plan even if it had wanted to. In 1917, Mexico was embroiled in violent conflict among numerous revolutionary factions, of which Villa's forces were one. The trouble had begun in 1910 when the liberal politician Francisco Madero had announced his candidacy for the Mexican presidency, an office that had been held continuously since 1884 by the dictatorial Porfirio Díaz, whose regime had favored wealthy landowners and business owners and had strong links to US business and political interests. Díaz handily won the rigged election and had Madero arrested, an action that led to uprisings throughout the country. In 1911, Díaz was forced to resign and went into exile.

However, when Madero, who had been declared president, failed to deliver on expected reforms, revolt broke out against his administration as well, and in 1913 he was forced to relinquish his office. He was replaced by Victoriano Huerta, a general who commanded rebellious forces within the Mexican army, and he was executed soon thereafter. Huerta, however, attempted to rule in a dictatorial fashion, and opposition quickly arose. In the south, Emiliano Zapata led a rebellion among Indigenous peasants who hoped to force a program of land reform. In the north, the revolution was led by Venustiano Carranza, Alvaro Obregon, and Pancho Villa. U.S. president Woodrow Wilson supported Carranza and supplied his forces with munitions. Wilson also used the occasion to order U.S. marines to invade Mexico to prevent damage to property owned in Mexico by wealthy and influential Americans. In April 1914, the U.S. Navy took control of the Mexican port of Veracruz.

Throughout the summer of 1914, the various rebel factions did battle with one another as each leader sought to replace Huerta, who fled into exile in July. Carranza declared himself president over the objections of Villa and Zapata. In retaliation for U.S. support of Carranza, Villa attacked the town of Columbus, New Mexico, in March 1916, prompting Wilson to dispatch five thousand troops across the border to capture him. Villa evaded them, and within a year they had retreated. The U.S. invasion damaged U.S. relations with Carranza, however, who refused to countenance the insult to Mexican sovereignty. By 1917, he was firmly in power, but rebellion continued, led by Villa in the northern state of Chihuahua and by Zapata in Morelos in the south.

Thus, when Germany approached Carranza with its offer of an alliance against the United States, Carranza was not in a position to accept even if he had wanted to. Nevertheless, when this offer was made public, the United States was livid. It was not yet a combatant, and Germany was already planning how to dismember it. U.S. banks, which realized the loans they had extended to the European Allies would go unpaid if Germany won, already supported their country's involvement, as did businesses that hoped U.S. assistance would encourage the Allies to grant them greater access to global markets. Many of these interests were closely aligned with the newspapers that curated the Zimmerman telegram story and help grow support for going to war against Germany. In April 1917, the United States government, already angered by the sinking of the *Lusitania* and the *Sussex*, entered the conflict on the side of the Allied powers in spite of Wilson a winning popular re-election on a no war ticket just five months before.

3.3: Peace and the War's Global Impact

The Cost of War

On November 11, 1918, after Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated at the request German military leaders, the new democratic government agreed to an armistice that brought the war to an end. The world had to come to terms with the brutality of modern war, with its advanced artillery, machine guns, poison gas, and submarines. In all between 16 and 19 million soldiers died in World War I along with 7 to 8 million civilians. France had suffered almost a million and a half military dead and Germany even more. Both nations lost about 4 percent of their population. November 11 is still commemorated by the Allies as Armistice Day (today called Veterans' Day in the United States).

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Understand the "politics of peace" as represented in the Treat of Versailles and Wilson's Fourteen Points.
- Understand the impact of the influenza pandemic.
- Explain the political developments that influenced the remaking of Europe and the Middle East.

The Treaty of Versailles

The Treaty of Versailles was signed in June 1919 and would mark the formal end of the fighting between Germany and its adversaries (additional treaties dealt more specifically with the other combatants). Since the moment of its signing contemporary observers and later historians and political scientists have argued over its significance. Was it too harsh on Germany? Too lenient? Did its terms make future war inevitable or was it mistakes by the following generation that led to the next crisis? Beyond such questions, the terms of the Treaty did, at least, radically reshape the borders of Europe by dismantling the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires, creating new nations based on ideas of ethnic kinship in their place, and also enlarging the borders of existing nations.

The treaty was a compromise that included demands for German reparations, provisions for the League of Nations, and the promise of collective security. Wilson did not get everything he wanted, but the US banker Thomas Lamont who was part of the US negotiating team did. According to historian Ferdinand Lundberg, the "total wartime expenditure of the United States government from April 6, 1917, to October 31, 1919, when the last contingent of troops returned from Europe, was \$35,413,000,000. Net corporate profits for the period January 1, 1916, to July 1921, when wartime industrial activity was finally liquidated, were \$38,000,000,000." In the years after the war, Lamont's bank, J.P. Morgan and Company would earn additional millions by loaning Germany the money the treaty required it to pay to the allies so they could pay the bankers.

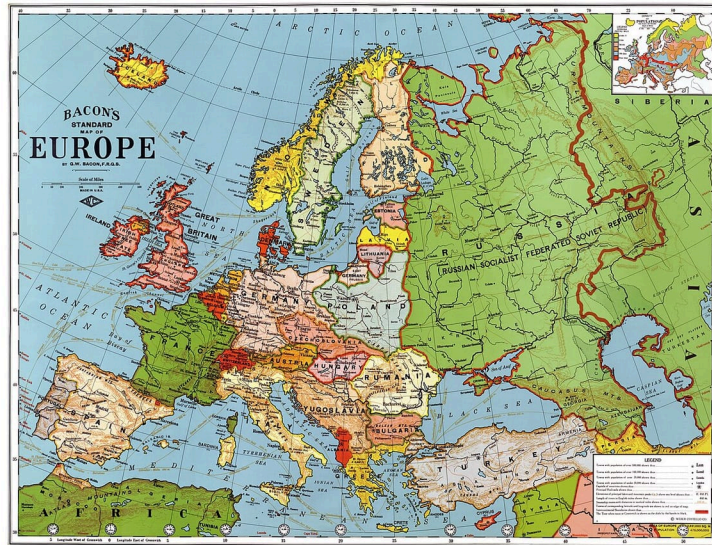


Figure 3.3.1: A map of postwar Europe. (CC BY 4.0; George Washington Bacon via Wikimedia Commons). Detailed Description of Figure 3.3.1.

Wilson's Fourteen Points

When the United States entered the war, Wilson proclaimed his aim was “to make the world safe for democracy.” At the center of his plan for peace was a new international organization, the League of Nations. It would be charged with keeping a worldwide peace, “affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike.” This promise of collective security, that an attack on one sovereign member would be viewed as an attack on all, was a key component of the Fourteen Points. Wilson’s Fourteen Points speech was translated into many languages and was even sent to Germany to encourage negotiation. More recently, historians have argued that Wilson’s ideas were largely shaped by the need to respond to popularity of the message of the Bolsheviks who recently came to power in the Russian Empire who were promoting self-determination and anti-colonial ideas in their speeches and writing.

But while President Wilson was celebrated in Europe as a “God of Peace,” many of his fellow statesmen were less enthusiastic about his plans for postwar Europe. Former U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt called the Fourteen Points “high-sounding and meaningless” and said they could be interpreted to mean “anything or nothing.” Whether intentionally or not, the very ambiguity of many of Wilson’s points helped make him for a time one of the most popular politicians in the world. It turned out that when the ideas were unclear people tended to choose the meaning they wanted in the “high-sounding” text. Indeed, when Wilson traveled through Italy and France before the opening of the Peace Conference he was greeted by rapturous and adoring crowds wherever he went. As popular as he was among Europeans, he was also often loved by those living under colonial rule. Across the world, colonized people assumed that Wilson’s embrace of “self-determination” meant that they would finally have a sympathetic figure to turn to at the height of the global power structure. Such hopes would end in disappointment for many. Traveling to Versailles in 1919, and renting a suit for the occasion, the future Vietnamese anti-colonial leader Ho Chi Minh was frustrated to find that he was never even able to get close to Wilson, much less present him with his petition for Vietnamese independence.

In an even more disappointing example, a group of Korean nationalists drafted their own declaration of independence from Japanese rule which they hoped they could get Wilson to support. Japanese authorities in Korea, however, refused to give them exit visas to leave the country. Still desperate to get their declaration to Wilson at Versailles, they gave the job to one of their members who had been living in China. He set off on foot, following the tracks of the Trans-Siberian Railroad, but by the time he arrived, the peace talks had already concluded and Wilson was gone. Such disappointments were not entirely the fault of Wilson. It turned out that, like the Japanese in Korea, the French and the British also worked to prohibit the travel of the most influential colonial leaders. Additionally, the British were careful that any petitions sent from the colonies would be safely filed away before reaching the American delegation. In the end, though, the inability of colonial people to meet with him or get their petitions read was not what undermined this Wilsonian moment. Instead, it was the formidable barriers of white supremacy and the unwillingness of the victors to place abstract principles above what they saw as their national interests.

High-minded rhetoric could not overcome the fact that many of those responsible for crafting what would become the Treaty of Versailles, including Wilson himself, held deeply racist assumptions about the natural order of the world. One of Wilson’s fears of bringing the U.S. into the war was that it would weaken the country’s ability, “to keep the white race strong against the yellow –

Japan for instance.... White civilization and its domination of the planet rested largely on our ability to keep this country intact." Self-determination, to Wilson, was fine for – to use the language of the time – “self-governing races” but inappropriate for non-Europeans. “After all,” Wilson is quoted as saying about America’s colonial subjects in the Philippines “they are children and we are men in these deep matters of government and justice.”

The degree of racism among the representatives at Versailles can be seen in the experience of the Japanese delegation. The Japanese arrived in France convinced that as an imperial nation themselves they had graduated to the rank of Great Power and deserved a seat at the table. They were indeed at the table, but it was at the far end of the conference table away from where the important conversations were happening. Aside from being mostly left out of the key discussions, they also had to deal with the racist remarks and insults of their fellow delegates. The senior Japanese diplomat, Mokino Nobuaki, nevertheless attempted to push forward Japan’s most important item – adding a racial equality clause into the charter of the proposed League of Nations:

The equality of nations being a basic principle of the League of Nations, the High Contracting Parties agree to accord as soon as possible to all alien nationals of states, members of the League, equal and just treatment in every respect making no distinction, either in law or in fact, on account of their race or nationality.

The clause was mostly meant to push back on generations of anti-Asian legislation in the U.S. and Australia. In making his case for the clause, Mokino quoted extensively from the constitutions of the Western Powers and called on these nations to live up to their liberal promises. This was met with fierce resistance. When Mokino referenced Thomas Jefferson’s words that “all men are created equal,” Lord Balfour of the British delegation angrily responded with his disbelief that, “a man of Central Africa was created equal to a European.” Despite this attitude, when Mokino put the racial equality clause to a vote it won. Refusing to accept the outcome, the American and Australian delegations vetoed the clause with Wilson claiming that the strong objections to the clause were enough to annul the vote. If industrialized Japan with its constitutional system, emerging economic might, and overseas empire could barely get its voice heard in international affairs then what chance did Indians, Vietnamese, Koreans, or other colonized people have?

The Influenza Pandemic

Even as war raged on the Western Front, an even deadlier threat loomed. In the spring of 1918, a new strain (H1N1) of the influenza virus appeared in the farm country of Kansas and hit nearby Camp Funston, one of the largest army training camps in the nation. The virus spread like wildfire. Between March and May 1918, fourteen of the largest American military training camps reported outbreaks of influenza. Some of the infected soldiers carried the virus on troop transports to France. By September 1918, influenza had spread to all training camps in the United States.

The second wave of the virus was even deadlier than the first. Unlike most flu viruses, the H1N1 strain struck down those in the prime of their lives rather than old people and young children. A disproportionate number of influenza victims were between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five. In Europe, influenza hit troops and civilians on both sides of the Western Front. The disease was misnamed “Spanish Influenza,” due to accounts of the disease that first appeared in the uncensored newspapers of neutral Spain while the warring nations tried to suppress the news of the disease for propaganda purposes.



Figure 3.3.1: The Red Cross Emergency Ambulance Station in Washington, D.C., during the influenza pandemic of 1918. (CC BY 4.0; National Photo Company Collection via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

The Influenza Pandemic infected about 500 million people worldwide and resulted in the deaths of between fifty and a hundred million people; possibly more. The world population in 1918 was about 1.8 billion; influenza infected nearly a third and killed between 5% and 10%. Reports from the surgeon general of the army revealed that while 227,000 American soldiers had been hospitalized from wounds received in battle, almost half a million suffered from influenza. The worst part of the wartime epidemic struck during the height of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive in the fall of 1918 and weakened the combat capabilities of both the American and German armies. During the war, more soldiers died from influenza than combat. But the pandemic continued to spread after the armistice, with a death toll of nearly 20% of those infected, as opposed to about 0.1% in regular flu epidemics. Four waves of worldwide infection spread before cases and deaths finally began fading in the early 1920s. No cure was ever found.

The Middle East

World War I transformed the world. The Middle East, especially, was drastically changed. In the heat of the war, in 1917, the British Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour promised that Palestine would be recognized as a “Jewish homeland,” in an attempt to gain the support of Jews among the belligerents—ignoring that Zionism was hardly the majority view at that time within Judaism. The movement to establish a Jewish Homeland—Zionism—was begun in the 1890s by Jewish Hungarian journalist Theodor Herzl. Shocked by how Jews were being persecuted throughout Europe, even in liberal France, Herzl concluded that Jews would never be fully accepted as citizens anywhere and that they needed to establish a separate Jewish homeland. After some debate, his movement decided to begin buying land in Palestine, the site of the ancient Hebrew kingdom. Originally, most Jews around the world, especially religious Jews, rejected the movement because they believed that Jews were not to return to Israel until the Messiah came. The arrival of Zionist settlers in Palestine often led to tension with their Muslim and Christian Arab neighbors, who looked upon these new arrivals as Europeans trying to take over their country. The British also promised to respect Arab sovereignty in Palestine; setting the stage for conflict in the region that has continued to today.

It is hard to overstate how destabilizing the post-war settlements in the former Ottoman territories were to the rest of the 20th century. There is a straight line between many of the decisions made so quickly and thoughtlessly in 1919/1920 and current issues in the region today. To choose one example, the boundaries that were drawn for the new British Mandate of Iraq were almost guaranteed to create tension among the populations involved. Roughly two-thirds of the people in British-mandate Iraq were Shi’a Muslims while Sunni represented much of the remainder. Despite the numerical dominance of Shi’a by 1921, the British would install a Sunni monarchy. This reflected an all too familiar colonial pattern. In many European colonies in Africa, for instance, certain ethnic groups were selected out of the broader population to receive greater economic and political opportunities. They would then become staunch allies of the colonizer while also earning the enmity of less favored groups. This divide-and-rule strategy was very much alive in the Kingdom of Iraq. Under first the British, then the British-backed monarchy, and even under the authority of the secular Ba’athist Party, the majority Shi’a population would be economically disadvantaged while also underrepresented politically and culturally in the country.

The Aftermath of the Ottoman Empire

Before the war, the region east of the Mediterranean had three main centers of power: the Ottoman Empire, British-controlled Egypt, and independent Iran. As early as 1916, the French and British had already agreed to a plan to partition Ottoman territory after its defeat. The Sykes-Picot Agreement (named after British and French diplomats Mark Sykes and Francois-George Picot) established spheres of influence for each nation and was ratified by their respective governments in May 1916. By 1918 the situation had become far more complex as a result of President Wilson's call for self-determination in the Fourteen Points. That promise appealed to many under Ottoman rule, especially the Arabs. In the aftermath of the war, Wilson sent a commission to determine the conditions and aspirations of the people. The King-Crane Commission found that most favored an independent state free of European control. However, the people's wishes were largely ignored and the lands of the former Ottoman Empire were divided into several nations created by Great Britain and France with little regard to ethnic realities and still largely based on the secret agreement of 1916. The British in particular wanted to continue to control the Suez Canal which was their route to India, and to monopolize the oil of the Persian Gulf to fuel the diesel engines of their navy and merchant marine.

To consolidate their power over the Arabs, the British supported Hussein Ibn Ali (related distantly to the Prophet Muhammad) as king of Hejaz on the Arabian Peninsula, including the holy sites of Mecca and Medina, in 1916. His sons Abdullah and Faisal were chosen to be kings of Transjordan and of Syria, where Faisal was rejected and so instead became the king of Iraq. The Iraqi dynasty ended in violence with the murder of Faisal's grandson in 1958, but Abdullah's dynasty still rules Jordan, under Abdullah II and Queen Rania. In Hejaz, Hussein Ibn Ali was overthrown in 1925 by Ibn Saud, a tribal leader from eastern Arabia. Through strategic marriages with other tribes, Ibn Saud established Saudi Arabia. He had so many children that the current king is still one of his many sons. Correctly feeling that living under a League of Nations Mandate was little different than being a colony, many Iraqi Shi'as (along with some Sunni) were in revolt by 1920. With the war now over, the British army was in the process of demobilizing and there was little public interest in fighting a new war in a faraway location. Instead, the British unleashed their recently discovered air power against the rebels. These bombing campaigns were more cost-effective than traditional military operations and easier too. The British considered the entire Iraqi population as potential fighters and therefore potential targets of their bombs.

The remaining Arab provinces of the Ottomans were to be ruled by Britain and France as League of Nations "mandates" and a new nation of Turkey emerged in the former Ottoman heartland in Anatolia. According to the League of Nations, mandates were necessary in regions that "were inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world." Though supposedly established for the benefit of the Middle-Eastern people, the mandate system was essentially a reimagined form of nineteenth-century imperialism. France received Syria and Lebanon; Britain took control of Iraq, Palestine, and Transjordan (Jordan). The United States was asked to become a mandate power but declined.

The disposition of the Middle East was complicated by the increasing importance of its oil resources. Oil had been discovered in Iran in 1908, and during the period when petroleum was becoming the most important commodity of the twentieth century, it was also becoming clear that some of the world's largest reserves were located in the Middle East. The Anglo-Persian Oil Company (now known as British Petroleum or BP) was established in 1908 to control production in Iran. After the war, British-controlled businesses that had been licensed by the Ottomans to develop oil discovered in Mesopotamia spurred British interest in creating the new Kingdom of Iraq under British mandate in 1920. The British-controlled multinational, TPC (Turkish Petroleum Company, established in 1912), received a 75-year concession to develop Iraq's oil. However, in 1933 when enormous deposits of oil were discovered in eastern Arabia, Ibn Saud turned to the Americans rather than the British to exploit these oil deposits, fearing renewed British meddling in his country. U.S. oil companies have been there ever since.

3.4: Alternate Text Descriptions

Figure 3.1.1: Map of the Ottoman Empire in 1900

Map titled "Ottoman Vilayets, 1905." The map shows the Ottoman Empire in southeastern Europe, Anatolia, the Levant, Mesopotamia, and parts of the Arabian Peninsula. The legend identifies territories lost between 1878 and 1900, areas under Austrian occupation, and the Khedivate of Egypt under British occupation. The map illustrates the Ottoman Empire's territorial decline, particularly in the Balkans and North Africa, while retaining control of much of Anatolia and the Middle East. An inset highlights the Hejaz region and the Sharifate of Mecca.

Figure 3.1.2: Map of Military Alliances

This map of Europe in 1914 uses shading to identify the competing military alliances that existed before World War I. The Triple Alliance consists of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. The Triple Entente consists of the United Kingdom, France, and Russia. The map also identifies several minority groups living within Austria-Hungary, including Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Ukrainians, Romanians, Croats, Serbs, Slovenians, and Italians. The distribution of these groups illustrates the ethnic diversity of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the nationalist tensions that contributed to instability in the region before the outbreak of World War I.

Figure 3.1.3: Assassination at Sarajevo

A detailed illustration shows an open-top car stopped or slowing in a crowded street. Several occupants sit inside the vehicle while people nearby move toward it. One individual in the foreground kneels and points a handgun toward the car. Another individual climbs onto the side of the vehicle, reaching toward the occupants. Additional figures in uniform and civilian clothing stand or move around the vehicle, some appearing to approach or react. A mounted figure on horseback is visible behind the car, adding to the sense of movement and urgency. Objects such as hats and debris are scattered on the ground. The scene conveys a sudden and chaotic moment involving an armed attack and crowd activity.

Figure 3.3.1 A Map of Postwar Europe

This political map shows Europe in the years after World War I. The map identifies countries and political boundaries across Europe, including the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania, and the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, which occupies a large portion of eastern Europe and northern Asia. The map highlights the postwar reorganization of central and eastern Europe, where new states emerged from the former Austro-Hungarian, German, Ottoman, and Russian empires. An inset map compares population distribution and physical geography across Europe. The map illustrates the political landscape that developed after World War I and before World War II.

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3.5: Chapter Themes to Discuss

This page offers different themes that appear throughout the sections in this chapter. The themes are meant to provide a framework in which discussion questions can be developed to inspire further exploration of the topics covered.

1. The factors that contributed to the outbreak of World War I.
2. The new military technology that had an impact on the developments of trench warfare in the Western Front.
3. The political tensions that surfaced before, during, and immediately after the war that realigned certain regions globally.
4. The issues that remained unresolved through the peace talks and the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles that punished Germany.

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3.6: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials to Enhance the Chapter

These materials are provided to help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction. Some resources are openly licensed, while others may require institutional access or individual review before use in class.

Web Resources

These websites may help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction.

- [World History Encyclopedia](#) – Provides overviews of important people, places, and events throughout history. This resource can be useful for finding concise, expert-informed background information.
- [Fordham University Internet History Sourcebooks Project](#) – Provides translated, transcribed, and digitized primary sources. This resource can support source-based instruction, though instructors should review links carefully because some materials may be incomplete or less suitable for classroom use.

Articles

These articles provide additional scholarly context for this chapter. Access may depend on your institution's JSTOR subscription.

- Marks, Sally. "Mistakes and Myths: The Allies, Germany, and the Versailles Treaty, 1918–1921." *The Journal of Modern History* 85, no. 3 (2013): 632–59. [Access article in JSTOR](#)

Videos

These videos can be used to explore a specific topic in the chapter in more detail and as an entry to further discussion on chapter topics.

- [TED-Ed: Ugly History: The Armenian Genocide](#)

Length: 7 minutes, 39 seconds

When an Armenian resistance movement began to form in the 19th century, Sultan Abdul Hamid II took decisive action. He led the Hamidian Massacres— a relentless campaign of violence that killed over 150,000 Armenians. These massacres were the culmination of centuries of oppression, yet they were only the beginning of an even greater tragedy. Ümit Kurt uncovers the history of the Armenian Genocide.

4: THE INTERWAR YEARS

Overview

After World War I, war-torn Europe struggled to recover economically while the United States emerged economically strong...or at least appeared to be. The 1920s brought prosperity to the U.S., but by the end of the decade, a global depression felt among the Industrialized nations, including the United States, created the conditions through which extreme political ideologies emerged and took hold in Italy and Germany. Fascism was embraced as a "solution" to the economic hardships many people throughout Italy and Germany faced in the decades after World War I, and it would create the conditions for a second major world war.

[4.1: The Bolshevik Revolution](#)

[4.2: A Global Depression](#)

[4.3: The Rise of Fascism](#)

[4.4: Alternative Text Descriptions](#)

[4.5: Chapter Themes to Discuss](#)

[4.6: Teacher Resources](#)

4.1: The Bolshevik Revolution

The End of Imperial Russia

The Russian Empire underwent massive political upheaval during the Bolshevik takeover in November 1917. A bloody civil war was fought for the next three years before the Bolsheviks and their leader Vladimir Lenin were victorious. Russia was then reorganized as the Soviet Union in the early 1920s. Lenin's early death created an opening exploited by Joseph Stalin, an autocrat who reshaped the "worker's paradise" of the Soviet Union to bring it fully under his authoritarian control.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe the Soviet Union's early years and the structure of its government
- Analyze the effects of Stalin's first Five-Year Plan on the Soviet economy
- Describe life in the Soviet Union under Stalin

The last Tsar of Russia was Nicholas II (1868 - 1918). At the start of his reign in 1894, at the death of his father Alexander III, Nicholas was among the most powerful monarchs in Europe. Russia may have been technologically and socially backwards behind the rest of Europe, but it commanded an enormous empire and boasted a powerful military. Alone among the monarchs of the great powers, the Tsars had successfully resisted most of the forces of modernity that had fundamentally changed the political structure of the rest of Europe. Nicholas ruled in much the same manner as had his father, grandfather, and great grandfather before him, holding nearly complete authority over day-to-day politics and the Russian Church.



Figure 4.1.1: A portrait of Nicholas II of Russia with the family (left to right): Olga, Maria, Nicholas II, Alexandra Fyodorovna, Anastasia, Alexei, and Tatiana. Livadiya, Crimea, 1913. (CC BY 4.0; Boasson and Egger via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

The Russian state was able to control the press and punish dissent into the first years of the twentieth century, but then events outside of its immediate control undermined its ability to exercise complete control over Russian society. The immediate cause of the downfall of Nicholas's royal line, and the entire traditional order of Russian society, was war: The Russo - Japanese War of 1904 - 1905 and, ten years later, World War I.

Japan shocked the world when it handily defeated Russia in the Russo-Japanese War. To many Russians, the Tsar was to blame for the defeat in both allowing Russia to remain so far behind the rest of the industrialized world economically, and because he himself had proved an indecisive leader during the war. Following the Russian defeat, 100,000 workers tried to present a

petition to the Tsar asking for better wages, better prices on food, and the end of official censorship. Troops fired on the crowds, which were unarmed, sparking a nationwide wave of strikes. For months, the nation was rocked by open rebellions in navy bases and cities, and radical terrorist groups managed to seize certain neighborhoods of the major metropolises of St. Petersburg and Moscow. Nicholas finally agreed to allow a representative assembly, the Duma, to meet, and after months of fighting the army managed to regain control.

The aftermath of this (semi-)revolution saw the Tsar still in power and various newly-constituted political parties elected to the Duma. Very soon, however, it was clear that the Duma was not going to serve as a counter-balance to Tsarist power. The Tsar retained control of foreign policy and military affairs. In addition, the Tsar and his allies started to eat away at the power granted to the Duma and allowed most actual decision making where it always had been: with the Tsar himself and his circle of aristocratic advisors. Still, some things did change thanks to the revolution: unions were legalized and the Tsar was not able to completely dismiss the Duma. Most importantly, the state could no longer censor the press effectively. As a result, there was an explosion of anger as various forms of anti-governmental press spread across the country.

One of Nicholas's many concerns was that his only male heir, the prince Alexei, was a hemophiliac (i.e. his blood did not clot properly when he was injured, meaning any minor scrape or internal bruise could be potentially lethal). Nicholas's wife, the Tsarina Alexandra, called upon the services of a wandering, illiterate monk and faith healer named Grigori Rasputin. Rasputin, definitely one of the most peculiar characters in modern history, was somehow able (perhaps through a kind of hypnotism, or through calming the child's hysterical mother and thus calming the child) to stop Alexei's bleeding, and the Tsarina thus believed that he had been sent by God to protect the royal family. Rasputin moved in with the Tsar's family and quickly became a powerful influence, despite being the son of Siberian peasants, and despite the fact that part of his philosophy was that one was closest to God after engaging in sexual orgies and other forms of debauchery.

When World War I began in 1914, the already fragile political balance within the Russian state teetered on the verge of collapse. In the autumn of 1915, as Russian fortunes in the war started to worsen, Nicholas departed for the front to personally command the Russian army. In 1916 a desperate conspiracy of Russian nobles, convinced that Rasputin was the cause of Russia's problems, managed to assassinate him. By then, however, the German armies were steadily marching deeper into Russian territory, and tens of thousands of Russian troops were deserting to return to their home villages (often to defend their families against forced grain seizures by the Tsarist state). As the social and political situation began to approach outright anarchy, one group of Russian communists steeped in the tradition of radical terrorism stood ready to take action: the Bolsheviks.

The Revolution

The form of radical politics that had taken root in Russia in the late nineteenth century revolved around apocalyptic revolutionary socialism. Mikhail Bakunin was the exemplary figure in this regard - Bakunin believed that the only way to create a perfect socialist future was to utterly destroy the existing political and social order, after which "natural" human tendencies of peace and altruism would manifest and create a better society for all. By the late nineteenth century, this homegrown Russian version of socialist theory was joined with Marxism, as various Russian radical thinkers tried to determine how a Marxist revolution might occur in a society like theirs that was still largely feudal.

The problem with Marxist theory faced by Russian Marxists was that, according to Marx, a revolution could only happen in an advanced industrial society. The proletariat would recognize that it had "nothing to lose but its chains" and overthrow the bourgeois order. In Russia, however, industrialization was limited to some of the major cities of western Russia, and most of the population were still poor peasants in small villages. This did not look like a promising setting for a revolution of the industrial working class.

The key figure who saw a way out of this theoretical impasse was Vladimir Lenin. Lenin was an ardent revolutionary and an astute political thinker. He created the concept of the "vanguard party": a dedicated group of revolutionaries who would lead both workers and peasants in a massive uprising. Left to their own devices, he argued, workers alone would always settle for slight improvements in their lives and working conditions (he called this "trade union consciousness") rather than recognizing the need for a full-scale revolutionary change. The vanguard party, however, could both instruct workers and lead them in the creation of a new society. Led by the party, not only could a communist revolution succeed in a backwards state like Russia, but it could "skip" a stage of (the Marxist version of) history, jumping directly from feudalism to socialism and bypassing industrial capitalism.



Figure 4.1.2: A picture of Vladimir Lenin delivering a speech in Moscow on May 5, 1920. (CC BY 4.0; Grigory Petrovich Goldstein via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

In Lenin's mind, the obvious choice of a vanguard party was his own Russian communist party, the Bolsheviks. By 1917, the Bolsheviks were a highly organized militant group of full time professional revolutionaries with deep roots in the army, navy, and working classes of the major cities. When political chaos descended on the country as the possibility of full-scale defeat to Germany loomed, the Bolsheviks had their chance to seize power.

After the Bolshevik seizure of the government and Russia's hasty departure from World War I, Lenin moved to consolidate power in Russia. Civil war raged from 1918 to 1921 between the Red Army of the Bolsheviks and the White Army representing all the groups that opposed them, including the Russian upper classes, forces loyal to the monarchy, and Lenin's enemies within the Russian Social Democrats, such as the Menshevik faction. Members of the White Army disagreed on whether they sought an anti-Bolshevik communist government or the return of a tsarist government. The Red Army, though smaller, had a focused goal and was better organized. It also seemed to most in Russia as the only group willing and able to defend the revolution and during the war the Bolsheviks and their allies (the Socialist Revolutionary Party) had quite widespread support.

British, French, Japanese, and U.S. troops all invaded Russia in support of the White Army and stayed until 1920, but they were unable to stop the Bolsheviks victory. The civil war ended in 1921 with the Bolsheviks in control. Approximately 1.5 million soldiers had died in the fighting, but the civilian death toll was substantially higher—about eight million.

During the civil war, Lenin and the Bolshevik leadership also sought to take over lands outside Russia that had been controlled by the now-deposed tsar. Lenin approached these regions with the goal of creating a federal state of republics governed by a *soviet*, an elected committee of workers' representatives. Each republic in this new "Soviet Union" would represent an ethnicity and be nominally independent but ultimately under the central government's control. Many of these areas fiercely resisted reincorporation by the Bolsheviks into a state centered on Moscow.

In 1919, for example, the Red Army invaded Ukraine and faced strong resistance among many groups, although they were not without their supporters, but by 1920, the Bolsheviks had control of the country. Belarus was also established as a Soviet republic fairly easily. Both Ukraine and Belarus had some autonomy but had to rely on Lenin's government to direct foreign policy. Other areas, like the Caucasus, proved more contentious. Azerbaijan and Armenia were incorporated by the Bolsheviks in 1920. The government in Georgia was heavily Menshevik and resisted Bolshevik rule, but in 1921 the Red Army took control of this region as well. In 1922, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was established. It incorporated the country of Russia and the regions Russia had absorbed as soviet republics under a new centralized national government quite different from what the revolutionaries had envisioned only a few years before.

The Soviet Union

During the civil war, the Bolsheviks strengthened their control over the economy. This included wielding oversight of industrialization and taking steps toward the elimination of private property. The national government decided what could be

produced and rationed goods throughout the country. Some historians have pointed out that this was largely a continuation (albeit a more aggressive) set of policies that most countries on all sides had utilized during WWI. Such control was held up as necessary to meet government and military needs, but the focus on top-down administration vied with the revolution's slogans about workers having more power under communism.

World War I and the civil war had created massive dislocations in the Russian economy. Industrial production had dropped significantly below prewar levels, as had agricultural production and particularly grain output. People were out of work, and prices had risen. The economy was essentially bankrupt. To combat these problems, Lenin abandoned the earlier economic approach, called war communism, and introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1921. The NEP kept the government in overall control of the so-called "commanding heights" of the economy (large industry, communications, banking, and transportation), but it introduced some aspects of capitalism, such as giving peasants the ability to sell their produce on the market and allowing small businesses to operate through private not state ownership. This was not the pure socialist economy some who had fought in the civil war had hoped for, instead, it was an emergency response to significant hardships and economic collapse.

By the end of the civil war, Russia's Communist Party (as the Bolsheviks had renamed themselves) bureaucracy had grown quite large and intricate. There were multiple layers of leaders, from the local through the regional and national levels. In many places in this stage, it operated what one historian has called a kind of "affirmative action empire" where local national minority groups and languages were given privileged posts and influence. One (himself a non-Russian) who began to exploit his understanding and control of this bureaucracy was Joseph Stalin. Stalin had grown up in poverty in the Russian Empire's state of Georgia. He adopted the surname Stalin in adulthood because it meant "man of steel," and he became a Bolshevik in the early 1900s. In 1922, Stalin became the Communist Party's general secretary. This was not a high-level position, but Stalin realized he could use it to consolidate power behind the scenes. He controlled all appointments within the party and could ensure that only those who agreed with him achieved these positions.

Lenin's death in 1924 opened a power vacuum and a debate over the future of policy in the Soviet Union. There were two very different paths the country could follow. Favoring one path were leaders such as Leon Trotsky, the man responsible for making the Red Army a dependable fighting force during the civil war. Trotsky hoped to both increase industrialization and end the more capitalistic policies of the NEP. In particular, Trotsky hoped the Soviet Union could serve as an example to spur more revolutionary movements around the world. On the other side were those who wanted to continue the NEP and pursue a slower, less radical path to industrialization, this group was led by Nikolai Bukharin who was, after Lenin the leading theorist of the party. Stalin, then in his forties, joined with Bukharin to outmaneuver Trotsky and his control over the Communist bureaucracy proved decisive.

In 1927, Stalin expelled Trotsky from the Communist Party. In 1929, Trotsky was forced into exile. He was assassinated by a Soviet agent in Mexico in 1940. By the end of the 1920s, although the new Soviet government did seek to fulfill some of the promises Bolshevism had held out, Stalin turned against his former ally Bukharin signalling that the collective approach of the early years of the decade had devolved to one-man rule.

Stalin's First Five Year Plan

Stalin's domestic agenda was codified in the form of Five-Year Plans outlining economic achievements the Soviet Union was to have made by each plan's conclusion. The timeline was ambitious, if not impossible. Yet officials tried to achieve the goals; they risked losing their jobs or even their lives for not meeting production quotas.



Figure 4.1.3: A picture of Joseph Stalin at the Moscow Kremlin, 1932. (CC BY 4.0; James Abbe via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

The first Five-Year Plan was designed to rapidly industrialize the Soviet Union. Stalin abandoned his earlier support of slow growth in light of the need to produce more farm equipment for the peasants and the desire to undercut those who had been advocating for more industrialization. Cities devoted to specific industries were developed and funded. Iron and steel production was to be raised dramatically under the plan, and new electrical power stations were to be built. Many of these goals were achieved, and overall industrial capacity increased by approximately 50 percent.

Stalin's intention to exert state control over all aspects of the economy in the Soviet Union foundered when it came to agriculture. The collectivization of agriculture consisted of the shift from individual farms to large state-run farms, and when Communist Party officials moved to quickly meet production quotas that were increased after the first Five-Year Plan was implemented, they did so with little regard for the realities of agricultural production. The peasants heavily resisted the intrusion of government officials into their workdays. As the plan began to be implemented, they even resorted to violent means. The revolution had promised them better lives, but these would not be possible under the terms of the plan.

Across the country's agricultural communities were a number of peasants labeled *kulaks* by the government. *Kulaks* had prospered under the more liberal policies of the NEP. In the early 1920s, Soviet policy had specifically defined a *kulak* as someone who hired seasonal farm laborers for an individual farm of twenty-five to forty acres. Very few farmers fell into this category, but they became scapegoats for Stalin. He blamed them for the difficulties in implementing collectivization and cast them as enemies of the state, which made them subject to arrest and even execution. Even their family members were prevented from holding certain jobs or pursuing university educations, and when not enough actual *kulaks* were found, the government created quotas for their numbers in each region to have their land expropriated by the state.

Stalin speeded the drive to collectivization, and local officials did what they could to comply with the new targets for grain collection. By 1939, more than 90 percent of the peasants had been forced to live and work on collective farms. If they resisted, they could be arrested, and many were sent to labor camps in Siberia. While some poor peasants complied with collectivization because they had little of their own property to lose, middle-class peasants continued to oppose it, even killing their livestock rather than turning flocks over to the Soviet government. More than half the nation's livestock was lost under collectivization in the 1930s, and the numbers did not recover until the 1950s. In some areas, spring planting did not occur due to the upheaval.

The failures of collectivization spelled deaths for millions in the Soviet Union. Approximately two million died resisting or in prison, and between five and ten million additional lives were lost in a famine caused by the chaos of the process, the peasants' choice to slaughter their livestock, and government policies that took food from the peasants. The grain-producing regions of Southern Russia and Ukraine were hit especially hard; government decisions there caused mass starvation. Some officials actually went into homes and took whatever food they could find. Approximately 3.9 million Ukrainians are estimated to have died in the famine they called the Holodomor ("death by famine" in Ukrainian). The results of the famine as a percentage of population were even more severe in Soviet Kazakhstan, where roughly half of the population of Kazakhstan died or fled the country in the aftermath of collectivization policies.

The problems surrounding collectivization also led many within the Communist Party to question the wisdom of Stalin's decisions.

In 1934, the assassination of Sergei Kirov, a high-ranking Soviet politician, led to an investigation that uncovered what Stalin believed was a plot to kill him. Kirov's death, together with the unrest caused by collectivization, the anti-Soviet rhetoric of Germany's Nazi Party (which had taken control of Germany in 1933), and his knowledge that many Soviet politicians did not share his vision of the USSR's future, fed Stalin's growing feelings of paranoia. His belief that he was surrounded by enemies led to a reign of terror in which the Soviet secret police arrested millions of Soviet citizens on suspicion of disloyalty. Many were sent to prison camps in Siberia where they perished as a result of starvation and overwork. Some were executed immediately following brief trials. Some did not even receive trials. Among those imprisoned or killed were *kulaks*, former tsarist officials, intellectuals, Russian Orthodox priests, ethnic minorities, workers (labeled "saboteurs") in factories where accidents had occurred under the frantic pace of the Five-Year Plan, Red Army officers, government officials, prominent Soviet politicians, and supporters of Lenin from the earliest days of the Bolshevik Revolution. Historians disagree about how many Soviets died as a result of the political purges of the 1930s, but one million is a likely figure.

Despite the clear problems with Stalinist rule, many people living in the Soviet Union, about 80 percent of whom were peasants, were still optimistic about the promised equality they believed communism could bring to their lives. The school of socialist realism that dominated art in the Soviet Union glorified peasants and industrial workers, depicting heroic, muscular steelworkers and smiling farmers wielding agricultural implements. Paintings and drawings of male and female workers in the 1930s were about patriotism as much as artistic expression.

The reality behind the government's rhetoric about building a worker's paradise often fell short, however. Some improvements in the quality of life were made, literacy skyrocketed, electricity was brought to rural areas, education exploded, and many people found opportunities for advancement that would have been impossible due to their gender or social class under tsarist rule. But not everyone shared in these changes. People whose innovations in the workplace increased production were rewarded with higher pay, recognition, and promotions, but the production goals party leaders laid out were often impossible to meet.

Urban life grew more difficult during the 1930s. Peasants migrated to the cities to fill jobs in the new factories built to speed industrialization. Hours were long, pay was low, and housing, clothing, and food were in short supply. People crowded into small apartments, and because it was hard to find enough to eat in the state-run stores, they became more dependent on dining halls at work or school, where it was also easier for officials to monitor their conversations. At the same time, many Soviet citizens remained excited by their belief that the government would repay their efforts by providing for their needs better than the tsarist government ever would have done.

Religion served to divide the Soviet government and the masses of Soviet people. Lenin had always seen it as dangerous and a competitor to socialism, so from the early days of the Soviet Union, religion was targeted by Communist leaders. Yet the history of Orthodox Christianity among the Russian people was long, and many found it difficult to abandon their faith and traditions despite government policies to discourage them. On the other hand, the Orthodox Church was controlled by the widely hated tsarist government and its priests and leadership were often viewed as corrupt and cruel by large numbers of ordinary people, giving some support for anti-religious policies.

Soviet ideology rested on the idea that women should be liberated from traditional gender roles that kept them locked in subservient positions to men. As part of this push, under Soviet power women went on to play revolutionary new roles in society and the economy and millions took industrial or agricultural jobs outside the home through the 1920s and 1930s. However, their situation was often fraught with discrimination and emotional turmoil. Women were rarely given positions of power in their workplaces (or within the Soviet political hierarchy with some very important exceptions), yet they were expected to produce just as much as men. Nor did the role of homemaker and mother go away entirely, while there were hopes for communal laundries, dormitories, canteens, and other plans to free women from these unpaid labors, they failed to achieve widespread establishment. Instead, women typically had to fulfill both kinds of roles, highlighting the disparity between female and male work.

4.2: A Global Depression

The Impact of World War I

Many of the economic implications were due to the aftereffects of World War I. In the months immediately following the end of the war, the victorious states from the West joined together to create the Reparations Commission, designed to hold the belligerent powers, most notably the Germans, responsible for the cost and cause of the war. The Commission, after many months of deliberation, set the cost of the war owed by Germany at 132 billion gold marks (more than \$270 billion in today's currency), and ordered the Weimar Republic (the German state that replaced the German Empire) to repay that amount to the Allies. The United States wanted nothing to do with the reparation payments, but they did want the loans that they had made to the Allies repaid, which created a cycle of German reparation payments being made, and then the Allies returning monies to the United States from those payments. The situation was not long lasting, as the Germans defaulted for the first time in 1923, with the French and British responding by occupying the heavily industrialized Ruhr River Valley to seize assets. The situation remained at an impasse until the United States agreed to lend Germany money.

The imposition of war reparations meant that these states, previously significant empires in the cases of Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, were forced into recessions, resulting in inflation, hyperinflation, and then poverty for many regular citizens. This economic crisis led to the creation of new political parties that were quick to promise a return to glory, power, and economic prosperity; much of this will be covered in the section about the rise of the fascist autocratic states.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the causes of the Great Depression
- Describe the immediate effects of the Great Depression on the economies of industrialized and developing nations
- Describe how industrialized nations responded to citizens' needs during the Great Depression

The Impacts on the United States

While the United States had tried to isolate itself from its European and Asian counterparts, part of the problem for America's economy was due to the fact that even prior to the war, speculators had been allowed to buy stocks on margin. This meant that, instead of having to pay the full value, a speculator only needed to produce a percentage of the price to purchase stock. The idea behind this was fairly simple – the speculators bought the stocks, paying about 10% of the purchase price up front, waited for the stocks to go up, and then sold them, paying back the remainder of the purchase price from the profits and pocketing the rest. In order to buy the stocks, speculators took out loans, with the understanding that they would profit sufficiently to pay the loans back.

This system worked fine when it involved a fairly small number of people and the economy was continually growing, but as time passed, more people began to get involved in the purchasing of stocks, believing that it was a quick and easy way to make money. This continued through the 1920s in the United States. Then, in October 1929, the United States Stock Market crashed, shrinking the economy, and plunging the US into a depression unlike anything that had been seen before.

Banks began to recall loans, and speculators and others were forced to default without the benefit of institutional insurance, leading to runs on banks resulting in a general economic collapse. The United States' collapse impacted the European states that had been borrowing money and selling goods to the Americans, with Germany and Great Britain particularly hard hit. Because of the depression in Germany, people began to call for changes to government, leading to the rise of fascism, under the leadership of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist Workers Party (Nazis). Similar events happened with the rise of Benito Mussolini as the head of the Republican Fascist Party in the wake of Italy's depression.

The Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930 was an example of the isolationist and protectionist policies the U.S. government followed in the 1920s. An increased tariff of nearly 40 percent had already been enacted in 1922. Smoot-Hawley raised tariff rates another 20 percent on more than twenty thousand kinds of imported goods, supposedly to protect American farmers and industries from

foreign competition. These extreme rates caused other countries to institute their own retaliatory high tariff rates on U.S. goods. Therefore, the industrial might of the United States was stymied because its residents were unable to purchase goods due to job losses and lack of income, and its businesses were unable to recoup any of their monies by selling goods overseas. Smoot-Hawley was the highest tariff the U.S. government has ever enacted. It helped stifle world trade, which decreased 30 percent by the early 1930s.

One of the key aspects of the Great Depression was the way it encumbered foreign trade around the globe. Worldwide gross domestic product (GDP)—the value of all the goods and services a country produces in one year—decreased by 15 percent between 1929 and 1932. With trade plummeting, many U.S. banks began recalling loans made to foreign businesses and countries, which exported what was primarily a US crisis to other places.

When the economic collapse that came to be known as the Great Depression began in the United States in 1929, it ended the postwar boom and sent the entire world's economy reeling. U.S. industry had grown significantly and was producing consumer goods at an unprecedented rate. With consumers both at home and abroad unable to purchase, however, the twin problems of overproduction and underconsumption ground the economy to a halt. Contributing to this financial catastrophe was the unequal distribution of wealth. When the Depression began, the majority of American families (80 percent) had no savings at all, so a job loss quickly led to homelessness and hunger. No economic depression is caused by one element alone. One contributing factor, however, was economic instability that the rising stock market in the United States had camouflaged.



Figure 4.2.1: Unemployed men queued outside a depression soup kitchen opened in Chicago by Al Capone, 1931. (CC BY 4.0; Unknown via Wikimedia Commons).

In 1933, newly elected president Franklin D. Roosevelt unveiled a comprehensive reform plan. This New Deal was designed to restore faith in the banking system, create work-relief programs to put the unemployed to work, increase the bargaining and consumer power of industrial workers, and provide an overall enhanced quality of life. Overhauls to the banking system included more regulations on U.S. banks and regular audit controls. The creation of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) in 1933 meant that depositors could feel their money on deposit was safe. The United States also adopted programs that already existed elsewhere that had long been the demand of organized labor in the US. For example, the Social Security Administration was created in 1935 to provide an old-age pension program for the country. Germany had such a program for several decades, and Britain had already enacted many programs as part of its welfare state that the United States was slow to adopt.

Political Implications of Depression

With economic depression dominating the world's nations, frustration built among people who felt their governments were not actively combating the problems. In countries with capitalist systems, the gap between the “haves” and “have-nots” was particularly stark in the 1930s. Many of the rich went on with their lives with little change, while other people lost jobs and homes. The appeal of communist ideology grew among some who felt abandoned by the capitalist system, and the prospect of economic equality was its most attractive feature. In other countries, the economic crisis became an opportunity for increased authoritarianism.

The Communist Party experienced substantial growth in many Western democracies in the early 1930s as a way through the problems of the Great Depression. The Communist International, or Comintern, actively pursued the spread of communism worldwide during this decade, led by the Soviet Union. For some, communism offered not simply economic parity but the prospect of racial parity as well. In the United States, segregation laws and continued discrimination against African Americans caused some to turn to the egalitarian society promised by communism as a new avenue to pursue. The Communist Party in the United States also sought to overturn racist policies.

In Western Europe, the allure of communism grew as governments sought to handle the Depression. In France, different cabinets were formed and repeatedly reorganized, and the disordered political realm threatened to become a vacuum that far-right politicians could exploit. In 1936, a coalition of leftist groups known as the Popular Front managed to win power in the government. They introduced progressive and pro-labor policies such as forty-hour workweeks and minimum wages, both hallmarks of Western democratic responses to the Great Depression. But as other countries had done, France found it could not resolve the Great Depression through policy changes alone.

On the pretext that certain actions were necessary for the good of the populace in this time of crisis, some leaders took advantage of the opportunity to impose authoritarian rule. This was particularly true in Italy, Spain, and Germany, which all embraced fascism in the 1930s. Fascism was a political movement focused on transforming citizens into committed nationalists striving for unity and purity, to remedy a perceived national decline. To forge a unified nation, fascists espoused using violence, abandoning democratic norms and the rule of law to eliminate enemies real or imagined, and employing government power to attempt to reshape all aspects of a person's life. The interwar period and the problems of the 1920s gave rise to disillusionment with democratic and parliamentary governments worldwide.

In Italy, Benito Mussolini was firmly in power by the 1930s. He had begun his rise to national prominence in 1919, partly by denouncing the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, which many Italians believed had cheated their country of land it was owed as a reward for fighting on the Allied side. In 1924 his Fascist Party who had seized power in a coup two years before won a majority in a heavily manipulated parliamentary election and then Mussolini, referring to himself as *Il Duce* ("the leader"), became the undisputed head of Italy. He then outlawed future elections. The fascists in Italy had wanted to focus on industrial development in the 1920s and 1930s, which had lagged, especially in the southern half of the country. In the 1930s, in a bid to prop up the industrial sector, Mussolini took over many industrial entities as banks failed across the country. The Italian government also dismantled labor unions.

In Spain, a military dictatorship was instituted in 1924. After it ended in 1930, a republic was established that quickly sought to modernize the nation. It tried to eliminate the Catholic Church's dominant role in society and politics and attempted other changes such as land redistribution and the institution of voting rights for women and more liberal divorce laws. However, a serious military coup erupted in 1936. Fascists calling themselves Nationalists had co-opted much of the Spanish military and drawn the support of right-wing conservative authoritarians.

General Francisco Franco, former head of Spain's military academy, was opposed to Republican ideologies. Fighting against modernity, the radicalism of the Republicans, and the specter of communism, Franco was able to call upon fellow fascists Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini for support. Though it is debatable how militarily effective the German and Italian bombing of civilian targets like Madrid and Guernica was, it did cause people to shudder at the increased horror of warfare. British, French, and other European powers pursued a policy of nonintervention and instituted an arms embargo against both sides, including against the democratically elected Republican government, believing it prudent given Japanese expansion in Asia and elsewhere and the U.S. policy of neutrality. The League of Nations also failed to take action.



Figure 4.2.2: A map showing the regions within Spain controlled by the warring sides at the start of the civil war. (CC BY 4.0; Panotxa via Wikimedia Commons). Detailed Description of Figure 4.2.2.

In Germany, the Depression followed a decade of economic uncertainty and massive inflation, conditions that offered the National Socialist Party (Nazi Party) under Adolf Hitler an opportunity to consolidate power. The rise of fascism in Germany was also the result of Germany's devastating military loss in World War I and fear of communism. Having been assured of victory, the German population took the news of the armistice as a profound shock. The country's political parties had forced the kaiser to abdicate in favor of a new constitutional government, the Weimar Republic. Given the timing of these events, many Germans therefore believed civilian politicians were responsible for their defeat in the war. In 1919, monarchists, socialists, and communists began to disrupt politics and violently contest for control of the streets in Berlin and elsewhere.

The Nazis received a substantial boost from their criticism of the Weimar Republic's handling of the hyperinflation of the 1920s and its response to the onset of the Depression. The Nazis adopted nineteenth-century theories of the hierarchy of races that proclaimed the Germanic Nordic or Aryan races to be master humans. In garnering political support, whether through acceptance or intimidation, the German fascist militias branded journalists as liars, attacked political opponents and Jewish people, and labeled them filthy, unclean, vermin, or subhuman. The intimidating violence and anti-Semitism of fascists became central to the political life of the nation after World War I.

Global Impact

No part of the world was immune from the effects of the Great Depression except for the diplomatically isolated Communist Soviet Union. China was still relatively isolated in the 1930s, but it did experience economic problems when prices for two of its major exports, soybeans and silk, dropped. As an island nation, Japan had limited natural resources, and its militaristic new government needed to alleviate scarcities and secure needed resources such as oil and rubber. With a growing population, it also needed reliable food supplies.

All these factors coalesced into a Japanese plan to target certain areas throughout Asia for takeover, relying heavily on the Imperial Navy. Japan moved into Manchuria in 1931, setting up the state of Manchukuo there the following year. Seizing the region meant Japan would not have to pay for the items it wanted, such as rice, important during a depression that had limited its exports and thus its income from trade. The move also further established Japan as a preeminent power in the region.

Many regions of Africa produced agricultural crops—wheat, maize, and cotton, for example. As trade declined, these sectors bore significant losses, and here too the poor suffered most. The colonial areas of Africa often mirrored the economic troubles of their imperial countries. However, South Africa's gold mines produced enough income to keep it more stable than other regions in Africa.

European countries fought the Great Depression in different ways. Britain saw its exports drop considerably and in 1931 found it necessary to lower tariff rates within its empire to stimulate trade. Britain's economy was stagnant in the 1920s, so the dip of the Great Depression was not as painful as in the United States, though economic sectors such as mining experienced a

greater decline than others. Britain did not adopt widespread work-relief programs, relying instead on more targeted support of specific industries. France implemented austerity programs, hoping to keep taxation levels low. It was only in the late 1930s that the French economy turned around, due to an increase in military equipment production.

Many Latin American countries were unable to contend with the severe decrease in exports the Depression brought. Some had financial systems heavily dependent on the export market and little in the way of an industrial sector to make up for the loss. Despite this weakness, however, Latin America weathered the Great Depression quite well. Most countries went off the gold standard—a monetary system in which the value of a currency is tied directly to the value of gold—in the early 1930s, but there was no widespread banking collapse as there was in the United States.

Similar to the USA, the Great Depression brought social democratic reformers into power in Chile. By 1930s, more and more of the Chilean middle class believed that the government must step in to promote economic growth and address the poverty and radicalism of the workers. A few months after Roosevelt was elected president, Adolph Hitler began to establish a fascist dictatorship in Germany in large part, because moderate liberals, Social Democrats, and Communists of Germany were unable to unite. As a result, the Communists changed tactics and formed anti-fascist Popular Fronts with liberals and democratic socialists. By the mid 1930s, Popular Front governments were formed in France and Spain. In Chile, the radical Socialist Party and the Communist Party allied themselves with moderates to form a Popular Front which swept the elections in 1938. Similar to the New Deal, this government favored the middle classes and the industrial working classes while ignoring the problems of the agricultural workers, the *inquilinos*. The Chilean agricultural workers, just like US farm workers, tended to be non-whites. Many of the governments in Latin America were looking for new solutions to their economic problems. In Chile, Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico the governments sought to initiate massive industrialization projects.

During the first year of the Popular Front unions for industrial workers were legalized and membership increased by 40%. The number of unions doubled, and many strikes were settled in favor of the workers. Similar to the USA, the wages of industrial workers increased as well. Additionally, the Popular Front government established a social security system. It created a workers' fund financed by workers, employers, and the state to provide blue-collar and white-collar workers with retirement pensions, healthcare, and disability insurance, and other social services. There was also an increase in public expenditures on health, education, and housing.

In contrast to the New Deal, the Popular Front government sought to economically transform and modernize Chile through a policy of rapid industrialization. High protective tariffs resulted in substantial growth for manufacturing. By the mid 1940s, Chile produced a wide range of goods including cement, tires, electrical motors, household utensils, and drugs. The Popular Front governments promoted the expansion of basic infrastructure which included a major push to provide electricity for the country. In retrospect, the Popular Front government was largely a failure. There was no industrial revolution and poverty remained high. For the working class, serious problems with housing, health, nutrition, and infant mortality remained. During the 1930s, Chile switched from being reliant on nitrate exports to being reliant on copper exports. So, the economy remained dependent on exporting only one low-value product. Instead of importing cars, Chile imported expensive machinery and equipment to manufacture cars. So, the economy was dependent on foreign technology as US companies invested in copper and heavy industry by building factories. Profits were then repatriated back to the USA rather than invested in Chile. Additionally, large mechanized factories did not need to hire millions of workers. Furthermore, agriculture was not modernized. A small landed elite owned three-quarters of the land and relied on cheap labor instead of machinery. In fact, agricultural production fell by 16% during 1932-1952 and Chile had to actually import food. The failure to modernize agriculture was significant. A prosperous agricultural sector will produce food for workers and purchase manufactured goods, yet neither occurred in Chile. As a consequence, industry was stunted because there were not enough people who could afford to purchase goods such as automobiles. By the 1940s, the economy began to show signs of slowing down.

The state of agriculture was not just an economic problem, but a political one as well. The elites, who controlled Chile since its independence, would not simply hand power over to the Popular Front. They also controlled the military, because the majority of officers came from the Chilean elite. So, the elites could use the military to overthrow the government unless major concessions were made. These elites wanted to maintain their dominance over their mestizo *inquilinos*. Similar to the New Deal program, the Popular Front government agreed that unionization would not extend to the countryside. However, the elites relied on the *inquilinos* for more than just cheap labor. The stability of the Chilean political system during 1938-1958 stemmed from the ability of the landed elites to control the countryside. There was no secret ballot in Chile until 1958. Therefore, the elites determined who their *inquilinos* voted for. The Chilean government did not distribute a national ballot with all of the candidates' names listed. Each political party had its own ballot, so the estate owners simply distributed the ballot of their candidate to the *inquilinos* who were forced to vote for that candidate. This was a practice known as the *cohecho* and estate owners could dismiss any *inquilino* who did not vote for his candidate, guaranteeing their veto power in government. As long as elites had power in Congress through their large, controlled block of *inquilino* voters, they were willing to support this semi-democratic system.

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4.3: The Rise of Fascism

Fascism's Origins

The first fascist movement emerged in Italy largely as an invention of Italian army veterans. Most important among them was Benito Mussolini, a combat veteran who had welcomed the war as a cleansing, invigorating opportunity for Italy to grow into a more powerful nation. He was deeply disappointed by its lackluster aftermath. Italy, having joined with England and France against Germany and Austria in hopes of seizing territory from the Austrians, was given very little land after the war. Thus, to Mussolini and many other Italians, the war had been *especially* pointless.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify the origins of fascism.
- Explain the rise of Italian fascism.
- Understand Nazism as the fascist movement in Germany.

Fascism centered on the glorification of the state, the rejection of liberal individualism, and an incredible emphasis on hierarchy and authority. Fascist movements sprung up right as the war ended. The term fascism was invented by the Italian Fascist Party itself, based on the term *fascii*: a bundle of sticks with an axe embedded in the middle. Symbolically, the sticks are weak individually but strong as a group, and the axe represented the power over life and death. In ancient Rome, the bodyguards of the Roman consuls carried *fascii* as a badge of the authority over war, peace, law, and death, and that symbolism appealed to the Italian Fascists.

By the early 1920s, there were fascist movements in many European countries, all of them agitating for some kind of right-wing revolution against democracy and socialism. Fascism was a twentieth-century phenomenon, but its ideological roots were firmly planted in the nineteenth century. Mostly obviously, fascism was an extreme form of nationalism. The nation was not just the home of a “people” in fascism, it was *everything*. The nation became a mythic entity that had existed since the ancient past, and fascists claimed that the cultural traits and patterns of the nation defined who a person was and how they regarded the world.

The Fascists, who started out with a mere 100 members in the northern Italian city of Milan, grew rapidly because of the incredible social turmoil in Italy in 1919 and 1920. Italy had a powerful communist movement, one that was inspired by and linked to the Soviet Union’s recent birth and the success of the communist revolution in Russia. After the war, a huge strike wave struck Italy and many poor Italians in the countryside seized land from the semi-feudal landlords who still dominated rural society. There was genuine concern among traditional conservatives, the church, business leaders, and the middle classes that Italy would undergo a communist revolution just as had occurred in Russia - at the time Russia was still in the midst of its civil war between the “Red” Bolsheviks and the anti-communist coalition known as the Whites. By 1920 the Reds were clearly winning.

The Fascists organized themselves into paramilitary units known as the Blackshirts (for their party-issued uniforms) and engaged in open street fighting against communists, breaking up strikes, attacking communist leaders, destroying communist newspaper offices, and intimidating voters from communist-leaning neighborhoods and communities. They were often aided by the police, who rounded up communists but ignored Fascist lawbreaking as long as it was directed against the communists. Likewise, business leaders started funding the Fascists as a kind of guarantee against further gains by communists. Fascist politicians ran for office in the Italian parliament while their gangs of Blackshirts terrorized the opposition.



Figure 4.3.1: A picture of Benito Mussolini inspecting Italian troops in Rome. (CC BY 4.0; Unknown via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

In 1922, the weak-willed King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel III, appointed Mussolini prime minister, seeing in Mussolini a bulwark against the threat of communism (and caving in to the growing strength of the Fascist Party). Fascists from all over Italy converged in a famous “March on Rome,” a highly staged piece of political theater meant to demonstrate Fascist unity and strength. Mussolini then set out to destroy Italian democracy from within. From 1922 to 1926 Mussolini and the Fascists manipulated the Italian parliament, intimidated political opponents or actually had them murdered, and succeeded finally in eliminating party politics and a free press. The Fascist party became the only legal party in Italy and the police apparatus expanded dramatically. Mussolini's official title was *Il Duce*: “The Leader,” and his authority over every political decision was absolute. The Fascist motto was “believe, obey, fight,” a distant parody of the French liberal motto (from the French Revolution) “liberty, equality, fraternity.”

Mussolini and the Italian Fascists claimed that “the Italians” were the direct descendants of the most glorious tradition of the ancient Roman Empire and were destined to create a new, even greater empire. The pseudo-sciences of race had arisen in the late nineteenth century as perverse offshoots of genuine advances in biology and the natural sciences. Fascism was, among other things, a cultural movement that found in “scientific” racism a profoundly compatible doctrine: the “scientific” proof in the rightness of the racial nation's rise to power.

At first sight, one surprising aspect of fascism was that many fascists were former socialists – Benito Mussolini, the leader of the Italian Fascist Party, had been a prominent member of the Italian Socialist Party before World War I. In the postwar era fascism and communism did share a rejection of bourgeois parliamentary democracy. They both sought transcendent political and social orders that went beyond “mere” parliamentary compromise. The major difference between them was that fascists discovered in World War I that most people were not willing to die for their social class, but they were willing to die for their nation. Fascism was, in part, a kind of collective movement that substituted nationalism for the class war. All classes would be united in the nation, fascists believed, for the greater glory of the nation and movement.

Mussolini immediately understood the importance of appearances. The 1920s was the early age of mass media, especially of radio, and an intrinsic part of fascism was public spectacle. Mussolini staged enormous public exhibitions and rallies and he carefully controlled how he was portrayed in the media – the press was forbidden of mentioning his age or his birthday, to give the illusion that he never aged. He was always on the move, usually in a race car, and usually accompanied by models, actresses, and socialites years his junior. He spoke about his own “animal magnetism” and often walked around without a shirt on as a kind of (would be) herculean archetype.

Officially, Italian Fascism promised to end the class conflict that lay at the heart of socialist ideology by favoring what it called “corporatism” over mere capitalism. Corporatism was supposed to be a unified decision-making system in which workers and business owners would serve on joint committees to control work. In fact, the owners derived all of the benefits; trade unions were banned and the plight of workers degenerated without representation.

What Italian Fascism did do for the Italian people was essentially ideological and, in a sense, emotional: it directed youth movements and recreational clubs and sought the involvement of all Italians. It glorified the *idea* of the Italian people and in turn many *actual* Italians did come to feel great national pride, even if they were working in difficult conditions in a stagnant economy.

In turn, Fascist propaganda tried to inculcate Italian pride and Fascist identity among Italian citizens, while Fascist-led police forces targeted would-be dissidents, sentencing thousands to prison terms or internal exile in closed prison villages (not unlike some of the Soviet gulags that would exemplify a different authoritarian system to the east).

While Mussolini was often praised in the foreign press, including in American newspapers and magazines, for accomplishments like making (a few) Italian trains run on time, in the long term the Fascist government proved to be inefficient and often outright ineffectual. Mussolini himself, convinced of his own genius, made arbitrary and often foolish decisions, especially when it came to building up and training the Italian military. The circle of Fascist leaders around him were largely corrupt sycophants who lied to Mussolini about Italy's strength and prosperity to keep him happy. When World War II began in 1939, the Italian forces were revealed to be poorly trained, equipped, and led.

The Rise of Fascism in Germany

One place in Europe during the interwar period stands out as a microcosm of the political and cultural struggles occurring elsewhere: Weimar Germany. Named after the resort town in which its constitution was written in early 1919, the Weimar Republic represented a triumphant culmination of liberalism. Its constitution guaranteed universal suffrage for men and women, fundamental human rights, and the complete rejection of the remnants of monarchism. Unfortunately, the government of the new republic was deeply unpopular among many groups, including right-wing army veterans like a young Adolf Hitler. Any discussion of the Nazis must start with Adolf Hitler. It is impossible to overstate Hitler's importance to Nazism: his own private obsessions became state policy and were used as the justification for war and genocide. His unquestionable powers of public speaking and political maneuvering transformed the Nazis from a small fringe group to a major political party, and while he was largely ineffective as a practical decision-maker, he remained central to the image of strength, vitality, and power that the Nazis associated with their state.

What made Nazi ideology distinct from that of their Italian Fascist counterparts was its emphasis on biology. The Nazis believed that races were biological entities, that there was something inherent in the blood of each "race" that had a direct impact on its ability to create or destroy something as vague as "true culture." According to Nazi ideology, only the so-called Aryan race, Germans especially but also including related white northern Europeans like the Danes, the Norwegians, and the English, had ever created culture or been responsible for scientific progress. Other races, including some non-European groups like the Persians and the Japanese, were considered "culture-preserving" races who could at least enjoy the benefits of true civilization. At the bottom end of this invented hierarchy were "culture-destroying" races, most importantly Jews but also including Slavs, like Russians and Poles. In the great scheme for the Nazi new world order, Jews would be somehow pushed aside entirely and the Slavs would be enslaved as manual labor for "Aryans."

Hitler himself combined several related ideas floating around the German right at the time to construct a story of racial potential, codifying it in his autobiography *Mein Kampf* (see below). He was obsessed with the idea that the German race teetered on the brink of extinction, tricked into accepting un-German concepts like democracy or communism and foolishly interbreeding with lesser races. Behind all of this was, according to him, the Jews. Hitler claimed that the Jews were responsible for every disaster in German history; the loss of World War I was just the latest in a long string of catastrophes for which the Jews were responsible. The Jews had invented communism, capitalism, pacifism, liberalism, democracy...anything and everything that supposedly weakened Germany from Hitler's perspective.

One great lie that poisoned the political climate of the Weimar Republic was, as mentioned above, the "stab-in-the-back" myth. Toward the end of World War I, Germany was losing. Its own General Staff informed the Kaiser of this fact; with American troops and munitions flooding in, it was simply a matter of time before the Allies were able to march in force on Germany. As defeat loomed, however, the military leaders Hindenburg and Ludendorff, along with the Kaiser himself, concocted the idea that Germany *could* have kept fighting, and won, but instead public commitment to the war wavered because of agitators on the home front and saboteurs who crippled military supply lines. This is why the military leadership stepped aside to let the civil government take control of the government to make them appear to be the guilty party. Usually, according to the conspiracy theory, those responsible were some combination of Jews and communists (and, of course, Jewish communists). This was an outright lie, but it was a convenient lie that the political right in Germany could cling to, blaming "Jewish saboteurs" and "Bolshevik agents" for Germany's loss.

The Versailles Treaty had also required Germany to disarm - the German army went from millions of men to a mere 100,000 soldiers. It was forbidden from building heavy military equipment or having a fleet of more than a handful of warships. Given the social prestige and power associated with the German military before the war, this was an enormous blow to German pride. While the nations of Europe pledged to pursue peaceful resolutions to their problems in the future, many Germans were still left with a sense of vulnerability, particularly as the Bolsheviks cemented their control by the end of the 1920s in the Soviet Union.

Neither did the Weimar government itself inspire much confidence. Its parliament, the Reichstag, was trapped in an almost perpetual state of political deadlock. Its constitution stipulated that voting was proportional, with the popular vote translated into a corresponding number of seats for the various political parties. Unfortunately, given the vast range of political allegiances present in German society, there were fully thirty-two different parties, representing not just elements of the left - right political spectrum, but regional and religious identities as well. Initially the moderate socialists and liberals of the center and center-right governed in coalition. However, rising economic troubles made this coalition harder to control and govern effectively. Therefore, throughout the 1920s parties of the far left, the communists, and the far right, initially monarchists and conservative Catholics, with the Nazis rose to prominence. Thus, it was nearly impossible for the Reichstag to govern, with the various parties undermining one another's goals and coalition governments crumbling as swiftly as they formed.

Simultaneously, the Weimar Republic faced ongoing economic issues, which fed into the resentment of most Germans toward the terms of the Versailles Treaty and its reparation payments (set to 132 billion gold marks annually, although that amount was renegotiated and lowered over the course of the decade). The actual economic impact of those payments is still debated by historians; what is not debated is that Germans regarded them as utterly unjust, since they felt that *all* of the countries of Europe were responsible for World War I, not just Germany. Especially in moments of economic crisis, many otherwise "ordinary" Germans looked to political extremists for possible solutions; to cite the most important example, the electoral fortunes of the Nazi party rose and fell in an inverse relationship to the health of the German economy.

In 1921, under Hitler's leadership, the Nazis organized a paramilitary wing called the Stormtroopers (SA in their German acronym). In 1923, inspired by the Italian Fascists' success in seizing power in Italy, Hitler led his fellow Nazis in an attempt to seize the regional government of the German region of Bavaria, of which Munich is the capital. This would-be revolution is remembered as the "Beer-Hall Putsch." It failed, but Hitler used his ensuing trial as a national stage, as the proceedings were widely reported on by the German press. The court officials, who sympathized with his politics, gave him and his followers ludicrously short sentences in minimum security prisons, a sentence Hitler spent dictating his autobiography, *Mein Kampf* ("My Struggle"), to the Nazi party's secretary, Rudolf Hess.

The economy of Germany underwent a severe crisis less than five years after the end of the war. In 1923, unable to make its payments, the Weimar government requested new negotiations. The French responded by seizing the mineral-rich Ruhr Valley. In order to pay striking workers, the government simply printed more money, thereby undermining its value. This, in turn, led to hyperinflation: the German Mark simply collapsed as a currency, with one American dollar being worth nearly 10,000,000,000 marks by the end of the year. Workers were paid in wheelbarrows full of cash at the start of their lunch break so they had time to buy a few groceries before inflation made forced shopkeepers to raise prices by the afternoon.

That being noted, the Nazis never came close to winning an actual majority in the Reichstag. They were essentially a strong, combative far-right minority party. Thanks to the advent of the Depression, more "ordinary Germans" than before were attracted to their message, but that message did not seem at the time to be greatly different than the messages of other right-wing parties. That said, the Nazis *were* masters of fine-tuning their messages for the electorate; most of their propaganda had to do with German pride, unity, anticommunism, and the need for social and economic order and prosperity, not the hatred of Jews or the need to launch attacks on other European nations. They offered themselves as a solution to the inefficiency of the Weimar Republic, not as a potential bloodbath.

In fact, 1932 represented both the high point and what could have been the beginning of the decline of the Nazis as a party. The presidential election that year saw Hitler lose to Hindenburg, who had served as president since 1925 despite his own contempt for democracy. The Nazis lost millions of votes in the subsequent Reichstag election, and Hitler even briefly considered suicide. Unfortunately, in January of 1933, Hindenburg was convinced by members of his cabinet led by a conservative Catholic politician, Franz von Papen, to use Hitler and the Nazis as tools to help dismantle the Weimar state, battle the rising popularity of the communists, and replace it with a more authoritarian political order. Thus, Hindenburg appointed Hitler chancellor, the second-most powerful political position in the state.

Hitler seized the opportunity to launch a full-scale takeover of the German government. The Reichstag building was set on fire by an unknown arsonist in February, and Hitler blamed the communists, pushing through an emergency measure (the "Reichstag Fire Decree") that suspended civil rights. That allowed the state to destroy the German Communist Party, imprisoning 20,000 of its members in newly-built concentration camps. Through voter fraud and massive intimidation by the Nazi Stormtroopers, new elections saw the Nazis win 44% in the next elections. Soon, with the aid of other conservative parties, the Nazis pushed through the Enabling Act, which empowered Hitler and the presidential cabinet to pass laws by decree. In July, the Nazis outlawed all parties except themselves. By the summer of 1933, the Nazis controlled the state itself, with Hindenburg (impressed by Hitler's decisiveness) willingly signing off on their measures.



Figure 4.3.2: Firemen trying to put out the fire burning in the Reichstag, 1933. (CC BY 4.0; Unknown via [Wikimedia Commons](#)). [Detailed Description of Figure 4.3.2.](#)

The Nazi government that followed was a mess of overlapping bureaucracies with no clear areas of control, just influence. The Weimar constitution was never officially repudiated, but the letter of laws became far less important than their interpretation according to the “spirit” of Nazism. In lieu of a rational political order, there was a kind of governing principle that one Nazi party member described as “working towards the Fuhrer”: trying to determine the “spirit” of Nazism and abiding by it rather than following specific rules or laws. The only unshakable core principle was the personal supremacy of the Fuhrer, who was supposed to embody Nazism itself.

Ultimately, the Nazi party controlled Germany from 1933 until Germany surrendered to the Allies in World War II in 1945 - that period is remembered as that of the Third Reich, the Nazis’ own term for what Hitler promised would be a “1,000 years” of a new German Empire. During that time, the Nazis sponsored a full-scale attempt to recreate German culture and society to correspond with their vision of a racialized, warlike, and “purified” German nation. They claimed to have launched a “national revolution” in the name of unifying all Germans in one *Volksgemeinschaft*: people’s community.

4.4: Alternative Text Descriptions

Figure 4.2.2: A Map of the regions within Spain

This map shows Spain at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War in August 1936. The legend identifies areas controlled by Nationalist forces and areas controlled by Republican forces. Republican-controlled territory covers much of eastern, central, and southern Spain, including a corridor extending toward the north. Nationalist-controlled territory appears in several separate regions, including parts of northwestern Spain, southwestern Spain, and areas in the south. The map illustrates the division of Spain between the two sides at the start of the conflict rather than a single continuous front.

Figure 4.3.2: Reichstag building fire with smoke rising from the dome

A black-and-white photograph shows a large domed building illuminated at night while fire burns at the top of the structure. Flames and smoke rise from the roof and dome, spreading upward into the dark sky. The building features tall columns at the front and an inscription across the façade that reads “Dem Deutschen Volke.” Bright light from the fire contrasts with the darker surroundings. In the lower left foreground, a figure appears crouched near debris. The image captures an active fire affecting a prominent structure.

4.5: Chapter Themes to Discuss

This page offers different themes that appear throughout the sections in this chapter. The themes are meant to provide a framework in which discussion questions can be developed to inspire further exploration of the topics covered.

1. The historical issues that contributed to the downfall of tsarists rule in Russia.
2. The impact of World War I on the rise of far left and far right political movements and revolutions in Europe.
3. The similarities and differences between Italian and German fascism.

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4.6: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials to Enhance the Chapter

These materials are provided to help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction. Some resources are openly licensed, while others may require institutional access or individual review before use in class.

Web Resources

These websites may help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction.

- [World History Encyclopedia](#) – Provides overviews of important people, places, and events throughout history. This resource can be useful for finding concise, expert-informed background information.
- [Fordham University Internet History Sourcebooks Project](#) – Provides translated, transcribed, and digitized primary sources. This resource can support source-based instruction, though instructors should review links carefully because some materials may be incomplete or less suitable for classroom use.

Articles

These articles provide additional scholarly context for this chapter. Access may depend on your institution's JSTOR subscription.

- Gatrell, Peter. "Tsarist Russia at War: The View from Above, 1914–February 1917." *The Journal of Modern History* 87, no. 3 (2015): 668–700. [Access article in JSTOR](#)
- Paxton, Robert O. "The Five Stages of Fascism." *The Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 1 (1998): 1–23. [Access article in JSTOR](#)

Videos

These videos can be used to explore a specific topic in the chapter in more detail and as an entry to further discussion on chapter topics.

- [TED-Ed: The mysterious life and death of Rasputin](#)
Length: 5 minutes, 13 seconds
On a night in 1916, Russian aristocrats set a plot of assassination into motion. If all went as planned, a man would be dead by morning, though others had already tried and failed. The monarchy was on the brink of collapse, and they believed this man was the single cause of it all. Who was he, and why was he to blame for the fate of an empire? Eden Girma explores the life of the notorious Rasputin.
- [TED-Ed: How did Hitler rise to power?](#)
Length: 5 minutes, 36 seconds
Decades after the fall of the Third Reich, it feels impossible to understand how Adolf Hitler, the tyrant who orchestrated one of the largest genocides in human history, could ever have risen to power in a democratic country. So how did it happen, and could it happen again? Alex Gendler and Anthony Hazard dive into the history and circumstances that allowed Hitler to become Führer of Germany.
- [TED-Ed: The secret student resistance to Hitler](#)
Length: 5 minutes, 32 seconds
In 1943, Allied aircraft rained tens of thousands of leaflets on Nazi Germany below. The leaflets urged readers to renounce Hitler, to fight furiously for the future— and to never give up hope. Their call to action rippled through homes and businesses— and their message even reached concentration camps. They were signed: the White Rose. Iseult Gillespie details the story of the resistance group.

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5: THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Overview

The world war that broke out in the 1930s and lasted until 1945 was the deadliest conflict in world history. The primary reason that deaths in World War II were so staggering was the fact that civilians were targeted and murdered at levels unseen in modern warfare. The atrocities of the Holocaust contributed to the carnage, and the invention of nuclear weapons during the war contributed to the new world order that emerged from its ashes.

[5.1: The Outbreak of War](#)

[5.2: The War](#)

[5.3: The Holocaust and Aftermath](#)

[5.4: Alternative Text Description](#)

[5.5: Chapter Themes to Discuss](#)

[5.6: Teacher Resources](#)

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5.1: The Outbreak of War

Japanese Expansion

Japan in the 1920s was gradually adopting a more liberal political system and continuing its path toward economic modernization. It also built the world's third-largest navy and by the 1920s, Japan dominated the textile market. During this time, Japan had a constitutional monarchy, with political parties, trade unions, a legislature, and a "divine" emperor. There was by the 1920s an emergent class of professional women who were energized by political rights earned by other women in the West. Some calls were made to give women voting and office-holding rights in local elections, but they failed to pass. Women were not allowed to join political parties, but they could attend and sponsor political discussion meetings.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Analyze Japan's efforts to expand its empire in Asia and the Pacific
- Identify Germany's and Italy's actions in the 1930s that were a prelude to the coming war
- Explain the beginnings of World War II

There was instability in Japan due to the intentionally vague language of the Meiji Constitution as to who exercised executive authority. The prime minister represented the majority party in the Diet but did not control the cabinet, military, bureaucracy, or the judiciary. The emperor chose all ministers and officers in the military, who reported to him but did not take orders from him. Only officers could serve as ministers of the army or navy. Overall, democratization was accompanied by new repressive measures. In 1925 universal male suffrage was passed. However, the Diet also passed a law that outlawed any organization that sought to alter the form of government or the system of private ownership.

Similar to Nazi Germany, the Japanese government in the 1920s championed nationalist indoctrination. Japanese youth groups were established to promote loyalty to the nation and the emperor. Education emphasized racist nationalism, and Japanese students were taught that different societies were arranged in a hierarchic order by degree of "civilization." Japan was the most civilized while other Asians lived in less civilized societies. Many educated Japanese went abroad to Germany to study where they learned about German militarism and racism. Just as the Germans wanted to settle in Eastern Europe, more Japanese saw the northern Chinese region of Manchuria as an "empty" space for Japanese settlement.

In international affairs, the civilian government supported the West in its effort to decrease the militarization of the Pacific and East Asia. The Japanese government agreed to maintain a smaller navy than either the U.S. or Great Britain in the 1922 Washington Naval Treaty. This treaty was used by nationalists to discredit the civilian politicians much like the Treaty of Versailles was used to discredit the Weimar governments. Similar to the German military, Japan had an authoritarian, ultra-nationalist officer corps who were upset with the civilian government for negotiating the treaty. They wanted Japan to dominate East Asia, eventually replacing European rule and influence. "Asia for the Asians" was a motto they would use as they turned their attention to more regions that needed liberating from western domination. The Japanese nationalists rejected Western values as inferior and criticized Western society as conflict-ridden. These nationalists wanted to create a new social order based on notions of class harmony. More and more, China was targeted as a major area for Japanese expansion.

Ultra-nationalists in the military began advocating for the extension of the Japanese Empire, following the example of the British in India. In 1931, the Japanese army unilaterally took over the region of Manchuria from China. The civilian Japanese government was not in a position to act, because the Diet had no power over the actions of the military. Both the USA and Great Britain condemned the Japanese occupation of Manchuria. More and more Japan was isolated on the world stage in the early 1930s. Then, Japan united with Germany in an Anti-Comintern Treaty (1935) in opposition to the Soviet Union and communism. The ideology of Japanese militarists was similar to the Nazis in its racism. They believed that it was the destiny of the Japanese people to dominate East Asia just as Hitler claimed a similar mantle for his pure "Aryans" in Europe.

Invasion of China

Japan launched a full-scale invasion of China on July 7, 1937. China was still in the midst of a civil war between the Republican Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party. Kuomintang leader and President of the Republic, Chiang Kai-shek, ignored the Japanese threat in northern China until it was too late as he understood his primary enemy to be the communists. Chiang appealed to the League of Nations for assistance against Japan, and the United States supported their efforts. After a six-month investigation, the League found Japan guilty and demanded the return of Manchuria to China. The diplomats of the League had no way to enforce their ruling, so Japan ignored the demand and simply withdrew from the League of Nations. Japanese diplomatic isolation further empowered radical military leaders who could point to success in Manchuria and compare it to the diplomatic failures of the civilian government. The conquest of China would not only provide for Japan's future industrial needs, but also secure the Empire's military supremacy in East Asia.

The broken Chinese army gave up Beijing to the Japanese on August 8, Shanghai on November 26, and the Nationalist capital, Nanjing, on December 13. In the first six weeks after capturing the capital, Japanese troops killed half of the city's population of 600,000. They began by executing 90,000 Chinese Army deserters who they despised for surrendering, and then moved on to civilians. Japanese troops raped up to 100,000 women and girls and then killed most of them in what is now recognized as one of the worst atrocities of World War II. To pacify the rest, the Japanese distributed opium and heroin to the captive population. Like the Italian fascists in Ethiopia and the German Nazis in occupied Europe, the Japanese military felt themselves to be superior to the conquered peoples and believed that only terror could subdue the civilian population.

Hoping to halt the invading enemy, Chiang Kai-shek adopted a scorched-earth strategy of "trading space for time" by destroying dams to stop his opponents, even if it meant killing millions of his own citizens. His Nationalist government retreated inland, burning villages, breaking down infrastructure, and destroying roads and rails. Chiang established a new capital deep in the interior at the Yangtze River port of Chungking. Although the Nationalists' scorched-earth policy hurt the Japanese military effort, it alienated Chinese civilians and became a potent source of growing support for the emerging Chinese Communist Party. When news of the "Rape of Nanjing" first reached the West, many were skeptical because the violence described was so extreme. However, U.S. missionaries and European businessmen had established an "International Safety Zone" in Nanjing during the atrocities, which saved 200,000 Chinese civilians and documented the Japanese actions. Curiously, the effort was led by the German businessman John Rabe, at the time a card-carrying member of the Nazi Party. Eyewitness accounts written by Westerners were published in American newspapers, along with photographic evidence, and the brutality of Japanese imperialism began to sink in. However, not one of the League members was going to declare war on Japan to save the Chinese.

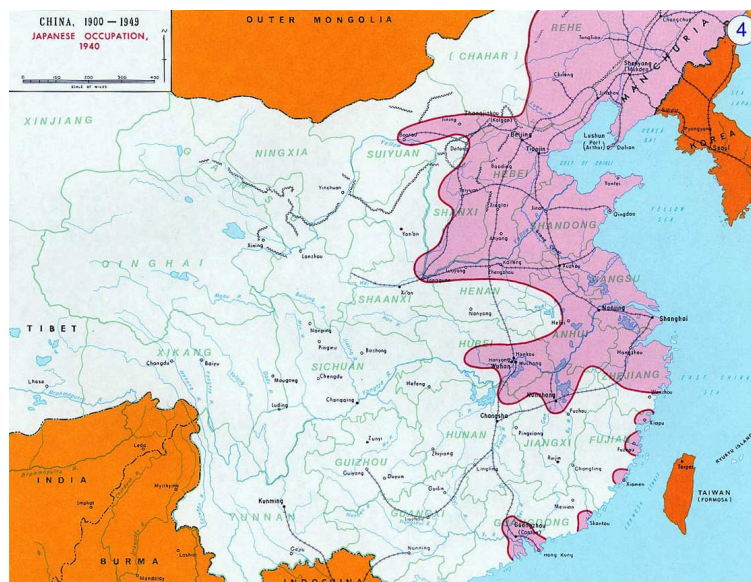


Figure 5.1.1: A map showing the territory controlled by Japan in China by 1940. (CC BY 4.0; U.S. Army via Wikimedia Commons). Detailed Description of Figure 5.1.1.

The United States lacked both the will and the military power to oppose the Japanese invasion, and even continued to sell oil and scrap iron to Japan during their expansions. The Japanese army was a technologically advanced force consisting of 4,100,000 men and 900,000 Chinese collaborators armed with modern rifles, artillery, armor, and aircraft. By 1940, the Japanese navy was the third largest and among the most technologically advanced in the world. Still, Chinese Nationalists lobbied Washington for

aid. Chiang Kai-shek's popular wife, U.S.-educated Soong May-ling, known to Americans as Madame Chiang, led the effort. In contrast to her gruff husband, Madame Chiang was charming and able to use her knowledge of American culture and values to garner support for Chiang and his government. But although the United States denounced Japanese aggression, it took no action. As the Nationalists fought for survival, the Chinese Communist Party was busy accumulating supporters and supplies in the northwestern Shaanxi Province to battle both the Nationalists and the invading Japanese. Their leader, Mao Zedong recognized the power of the Chinese peasant population and began recruiting from the local peasantry, mobilizing the outrage caused by both the Nationalist failure to prevent Japanese invasion and its scorched-earth retreat policy. Mao gradually built his force from a meager 7,000 at the end of the Long March in 1935 to a robust 1,200,000 members by the end of World War II.

Italy's Invasion of Ethiopia

The belief that a nation's greatness lay in war and conquest was fundamental to the fascist ideology in both Italy and Germany. While Hitler was still consolidating the Nazi regime and rebuilding German armed forces in violation of the Versailles Treaty, Mussolini decided to act. In October 1935, Italy invaded independent Ethiopia from its colonies in Eritrea and Somalia. Italy, like Germany, was not unified until the second half of the nineteenth century. Both Germany and Italy were therefore latecomers to the colonial race in Africa. Ethiopia was one of the only African nations that had not yet been colonized by Europeans. Italians launched an unsuccessful invasion of Ethiopia in 1896. This first attack was repelled with traditional spears and out-of-date guns. However, during the second attack on Ethiopia Italy used tanks, machine guns, air power, and poison gas to secure a sweeping victory. Ethiopia was ruled by Emperor Haile Selassie, and Ethiopia was a member of the League of Nations. Emperor Haile Selassie inspired Rastafari, a cultural and religious movement that viewed him as a messiah for people of African descent. Time Magazine named Emperor Haile Selassie as one of the top 21 political icons in history. He is dressed in regal attire, and is wearing a sash. The caption at the bottom of the photo reads "The King of Kings." Ethiopia and Emperor Haile Selassie had a special significance for the Black Diaspora. First, Ethiopia was an ancient center of Christianity. Second, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia galvanized Rastas, Africans, and the Black Diaspora in their struggles against racism, fascism, and imperialism. Ethiopia and Selassie became symbols of anti-imperial resistance. By April of 1936, the League of Nations failed to respond to the pleas of the exiled Ethiopian king Haile Selassie. Italians engaged in a three-day killing spree in response to an attempted assassination on the Italian viceroy in the conquered capital city of Addis Ababa the following year. At least 20,000 were murdered, including Ethiopian intellectuals who had already been imprisoned after the takeover. Such atrocities were typical of the racism inherent in fascist regimes, who thought that using such terror was the only way to "teach a lesson" to "inferior" conquered peoples.



Figure 5.1.2: Italian troops marching in Ethiopia. (CC BY 4.0; Unknown via [Wikimedia Commons](#)). Detailed Description of Figure 5.1.2.

German Expansion

By 1938, Hitler felt that Germany was prepared enough that it could sustain a limited war; by 1939 he felt confident that the German war machine was ready for a full-scale effort to seize the space he imagined for the new Reich. In a sense, this period consisted of Hitler "playing chicken" with the rest of Europe: he would launch a dangerous and provocative initiative, then see if the rest of Europe (meaning primarily France and Britain) would respond with the threat of force or instead back down. The

political leadership of those nations did back down, repeatedly, until the invasion of Poland in September of 1939 finally proved to the world beyond a doubt that Hitler could not be stopped without war.

This is the period remembered as “appeasement.” The term refers to the policy adopted by the French and British governments in giving Hitler what he wanted in hopes that he would not do it again. Pieces of foreign territory, political unions with closely related German territories, and the growth of German military power were seen by desperate British and French politicians as things that Germans might have legitimate grievances about, and thus they played along with the idea that Germany, and more to the point Hitler, might be appeased once those issues were addressed.

It was a popular critique long after the war to vilify the French and British leadership for being willing to concede so much to Hitler when a strong militarized response might have cut the rug out from under the Nazi war machine before it was ready for its full-scale assault. Arguably, one should not be too quick to write off appeasement. World War I had been so awful that it was very difficult for most Europeans, even most Germans, to believe that Hitler could actually want to plunge Europe back into another world war. It is certain that the French and British wanted to avoid full-scale war at any cost; their civilian populations were totally opposed to war and, especially in France, their governments were unstable and unpopular as it was. Thus, British and French political leaders did not think of their concessions to Hitler as caving in: they thought of them as preserving peace.

In March of 1938, Germany annexed Austria, an event known as the *Anschluss*. Despite the German pseudo-invasion being poorly organized, most Austrians welcomed the German tanks that rolled into Austrian cities, and there was practically no resistance. Germans were at first apprehensive that this blatant violation of both the Versailles Treaty and the sovereignty of another nation would result in war, but instead it became a public relations boost for Hitler and the Nazis when there was no foreign response. In one fell swoop, Nazi laws and policies (most notably the entire edifice of anti-Semitic legislation) were imported to Austria, and there was a looting spree as Catholic Austrians attacked their Jewish countrymen.

In September of 1938, the threat of German intervention in the Sudetenland, a region of northwestern Czechoslovakia with a significant German-speaking population, prompted an international crisis. The Czechoslovaks, in the only remaining democracy among the new countries created by the Treaty of Versailles, pinned their hopes for defense against Germany on the western nations and on treaties for mutual defense signed with France in the 1920s and early 1930s. Sudeten Germans had organized their own Nazi Party, however, and began agitating to join Germany. By 1938, it seemed that Britain and France were most concerned with avoiding another major war. The Munich Conference was attended by Chamberlain, Hitler, French prime minister Édouard Daladier, and Mussolini (ostensibly a neutral party but one who had already assured Hitler of his support). On September 30, they produced the Munich Pact, in which Czechoslovakia was forced to grant territorial concessions to Germany, Poland, and Hungary in what has since been called appeasement. The hope of Great Britain and France was that Hitler would be satisfied and cease to be aggressive. The alternative meant fighting Germany, which neither government nor their peoples wanted. The French and British agreed that Germany should annex the Sudetenland to “protect” its German population.

The Western world had not yet decided which was the greater threat to world peace, a fascist Germany or the communist Soviet Union. Some political conservatives in England and France hoped for a German alliance against the Soviets, as did Hitler. The British military was not confident of its preparedness for war, and the isolationist policy of the United States diminished the hope of any aid from Washington. With anxiety growing in London over Britain's possessions in Asia and Japanese aggressions there, domestic support for negotiated solutions was widespread among liberals, and a bargain with Hitler seemed a reasonable policy. In the ensuing weeks, German troops entered the relinquished areas, and by the spring of 1939, Germany had gone on to absorb the rest of Czechoslovakia. The Czech lands were divided between Germany and a newly-created protectorate, while Slovakia became a puppet state under an anti-Semitic Catholic priest, Jozef Tiso.

Even as Germany was expanding its territories against a backdrop of international vacillation, it was forming political alliances. In May of 1939 Italy and Germany pledged alliance with one another, more or less a formality given their long-standing fascist kinship. More importantly, in August of 1939 Germany and the USSR signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact - a mutual non-aggression pact. This pact was absolutely crucial for the Nazis, as they could not envisage a successful war against Western and Northern Europe unless the major eastern threat, the USSR, was neutralized. Whereas Stalin was aware that Hitler had absolutely no intention of honoring the pact in the long term, he hoped to gain time to build and arm the country. To sweeten the deal for the Soviets, the pact secretly included provisions to divide Poland between Germany and the USSR in the immediate future.

Two days after the German *Wehrmacht* invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, Britain and France declared war and began mobilizing their armies. The French and British agreement with Poland said that they would “immediately” invade Germany if Poland was attacked, however while the Poles held out for over a month the invasion from the West never materialized. The German leadership, anxious to avoid the rigid, grinding war of attrition in the trenches of World War I, had built its new army for speed and maneuverability. German strategy emphasized the use of tanks, planes, and motorized infantry to concentrate forces, smash front lines, and wreak havoc behind the enemy's defenses. It was called blitzkrieg, or “lightning war”, and it was incredibly

effective. In addition, two weeks after the Germans invaded Soviet troops also marched across the border as had been agreed by the secret portion of the non-aggression pact. After conquering eastern Poland, Stalin's armies shifted focus to occupying the Baltic States of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, and to invading Finland. However, the invasion of Finland met stubborn resistance and a bitter winter, and while the Soviets won the war and conquered territories, they did not topple the Finnish government or succeed in occupying the entire country.

War had finally erupted in Europe and Germany joined Italy and Japan in militarized expansion that plunged the entire world into war.

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5.2: The War

The World at War

World War II was perhaps history's most global event. Troops fought battles on three continents, in the air, and at sea. Britain and the United States planned early in the war to focus on defeating Italy and Germany before Japan but left the Soviet Union to battle Germany alone. In Asia, the liberation of the inhabitants of European and U.S. colonies by Japanese troops only replaced Western rule with Japanese rule, igniting or giving impetus to nationalist movements. Fought on so many fronts, World War II proved to be the deadliest conflict in history. Among those who perished were millions of noncombatants, including the victims of the Nazi death camps. The experiences of survivors shaped the rest of their lives and the course of the societies to which they returned.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe the Allied and Axis operations in Europe and Africa during World War II
- Discuss U.S. operations in East Asia and the Pacific during World War II
- Describe the final stages of the war in Europe
- Analyze the decision to drop atomic bombs on Japan

Germany's Westward Assault

After the fall of Poland, France and Britain braced for the inevitable German attack. In April 1940, the Germans quickly conquered Denmark and Norway in an effort to prevent the British naval blockade which had been so key to their defeat in World War I. The following month, Hitler launched his *Blitzkrieg* further into Western Europe by invading the Netherlands and Belgium to avoid well-prepared French defenses along the French-German border (The Maginot Line). Poland had fallen in a month; France lasted only a few weeks more. By June, Hitler was posing for photographs in front of the Eiffel Tower. In another propaganda victory, Hitler made the French diplomats sign their surrender in the same railroad car used for the German surrender in the First World War.

Germany split France in half, occupying the north and allowing a collaborationist government to form in Vichy to administer the south and the French colonies. Led by the "Hero of Verdun," Marshal Philippe Pétain, the Vichy regime sought to reorganize France along authoritarian fascist lines. Significant support for Germany by the French right was one of the reasons for their defeat in June 1940. Many on the right in France had also abandoned democracy and welcomed the demise of the Third Republic. They reasoned that if the future held a German-dominated Europe, it would be better for France to collaborate as partners rather than as subjects in a new Nazi empire. Although this rationalization fit into the scheme proposed by German propaganda, Hitler would never allow a full partnership with any of his conquered peoples.

With France under control, Hitler turned to Britain. Operation Sea Lion, the planned German invasion of the British Isles, required air superiority over the English Channel and would necessitate an amphibious landing of massive proportions. From June until October 1940, the German *Luftwaffe* fought the Royal Air Force for control of the skies. Despite having fewer planes, British pilots won the so-called Battle of Britain, saving the islands from invasion and prompting the new prime minister, Winston Churchill, to declare, "Never before in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few."

However, if Britain was safe from invasion, it was not immune from ongoing air attacks. Frustrated by losing the Battle of Britain, Hitler began a bombing campaign against cities and civilians. The Blitz, as the British came to know the nightly bombing raids on London, killed at least 40,000 civilians. Population centers like Bristol, Cardiff, Portsmouth, Plymouth, Southampton and industrial cities like Swansea, Belfast, Birmingham, Coventry, Glasgow, Manchester, and Sheffield were also targeted for heavy bombing. The Royal Air Force defended the cities as well as they could, people slept in the Underground subway tunnels for protection at night, and British industrial production continued after being moved out of major cities. The British people, encouraged by Churchill, kept calm and carried on.



Figure 5.2.1: A soldier spotting planes near St. Paul's Cathedral in London. (CC BY 4.0; Unknown via Wikimedia Commons).

In anger, Hitler and his Vice Chancellor Herman Göring began a policy of striking London every day in an effort to break the will of their enemy. Beginning on September 7, 1940, London was bombed every night for 56 days, including a large daylight attack on September 15. British morale failed to break, and Germany eventually shifted to targeting Atlantic shipping and bombing port cities to starve the enemy. When the port of Clydebank in Scotland was bombed in March 1941, only 7 of 12,000 buildings escaped damage. But the Germans failed to gain complete air superiority, partly due to the British deployment of RADAR (Radio Detection and Ranging). The technology had been developed in the 1930s and was advanced and finally perfected by Britain in the early 1940s. It would be offered to the Americans in exchange for financial and industrial support as the two nations strengthened ties even before official U.S. involvement in the war.

Germany Invades the Soviet Union

Nazi ideology considered the English as close to racial equals, and Hitler hoped that Great Britain would eventually join a crusade against Bolshevism. However, Nazi doctrine focused on establishing German *lebensraum* in Eastern Europe, enslaving the lesser Slavic peoples to work for the Aryans. In order to prepare for an invasion of the Soviet Union, Germany strengthened its alliances with right wing regimes in Hungary and Romania. While he hoped to bypass Yugoslavia, this became impossible when Mussolini sent his troops from Albania (conquered in 1939) to invade Greece. The Greeks not only defended themselves but pushed the Italians back into Albania, forcing Hitler to bail out Mussolini by invading and conquering both Yugoslavia and Greece.

In June 1941, German forces along with their Romanian, Italian, Hungarian, Slovakian, and Finnish allies crossed into the Soviet Union in a massive surprise attack. "Operation Barbarossa" was the largest land invasion in human history, fought over a 1,800 mile front between 10,000,000 combatants. France and Poland had fallen in weeks, and Germany hoped to use the same *Blitzkrieg* tactics to break the USSR before the winter. Initially this plan succeeded in catching Stalin's Red Army unprepared, quickly conquering enormous swaths of land and nearly three million prisoners. The sheer size of the assault, the distance of supply lines, Soviet resistance, and a late start in the year result in significant slowdowns after 4 or 5 months. After recovering from the initial shock of the German invasion, Stalin moved his factories east of the Urals, out of range of the *Luftwaffe*. He ordered his retreating army to adopt a scorched earth policy, destroying food, rails, and shelters to slow the advancing German army.

Germany had won massive gains, but the winter found troops exhausted and overextended eventually split into three main forces. Northern army group reached Leningrad and waged an 827-day siege where over 1,000,000 Soviets starved to death. Center group came within 60 miles of Moscow, but Soviet forces held and ordinary citizens were involved in digging anti-tank ditches. The refusal to retreat created a sense of unity and desperation among Soviet defenders. This combined with the brutal Russian winter and German supply lines thousands of miles long left the Nazis faltering. The third army group to the South faced off in what proved to be the most decisive battle of the entire world war: The Battle of Stalingrad.

All the while, desperate battles were being waged across the rest of the eastern front in the Soviet Union. In August 1941, given the initial success of the German invasion and poised to capture Moscow, Hitler delayed the advance to decide strategy. The

German general staff wanted to drive directly for Moscow and take it before winter. Hitler, however, diverted a significant part of his forces to the south. Both Allied and Axis thinkers had long recognized the strategic military importance of oil. For some time prior to the war, the British government had interjected itself into the politics of Iraq, Persia, Afghanistan, and Egypt for this reason. The Germans too had taken a keen interest in the Middle East and central Asia in the 1930s. In 1925, in Iran, Reza Shah had consolidated his rule and commenced a program of modernization, increasing ties with Germany and employing hundreds of Germans.

To block potential German access to Iranian oil, the British first demanded the possibly pro-German Shah expel Germans and sever ties with Berlin. Taking no chances, British and Soviet forces then invaded Iran in August 1941. Iranian resistance collapsed in a couple of days, and Reza Shah was forced to abdicate in favor of his son Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The Germans were expelled, and the Allied occupation lasted until 1946. During those years, Iran became a funnel through which much Allied aid, especially from the United States, was delivered to the Soviet Union.

In the summer of 1942, the Germans resumed the offensive on all fronts but were unable to get far, except for approaching Stalingrad. Hitler was determined to take the city and Stalin to hold it. In July, Stalin issued Order No. 227 forbidding Soviet troops from retreating: "Not one step backwards!" By the fall of 1942, German troops had actually broken into Stalingrad, but their progress thereafter was gruesomely slow and difficult. For more than two months, the Battle of Stalingrad raged with ferocity, sometimes building by building.

Having assembled sufficient forces, in November 1942 the Soviet Red Army counterattacked at Stalingrad and managed to trap the Germans in a noose. The only way for the Germans to resupply was by air, which was far too limited to sustain them for very long. Despite being specifically forbidden to do so, on January 31, 1943, German field marshal Friedrich Paulus surrendered what was left of his Sixth Army. The Soviets captured close to 100,000 German troops. Total casualties in the battle had reached nearly two million, including substantial numbers of civilians. The Battle of Stalingrad stopped the German advance into the Soviet Union. It was the first clear defeat for Hitler's Germany and the turning point of the war in Europe, setting the Nazis on a defensive course for the remainder of the war.



Figure 5.2.2: Soviet soldiers equipped in winter gear during the Battle of Stalingrad. (CC BY 4.0; Главархив Москвы via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

Japan's Attack and U.S. Entry

Trying to pressure the Japanese into ceasing their expansion, in August 1941 the United States imposed sanctions including an embargo on oil and gas sales to Japan. This action further reinforced Japan's plan to turn to the South Pacific to absorb the natural resources of the crumbling European imperial regimes and the Philippines, a U.S. colony. Seeing the United States as a soft enemy unwilling to make the sacrifices needed to win a war, Japan planned a surprise assault on the naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, while last-ditch efforts at a diplomatic settlement between Tokyo and Washington were taking place. The United States wanted Japan to ultimately withdraw from China, to which it would not agree, and Japan felt the United States would not be open to further negotiations. Its leaders decided they had to move against the United States while they still could before the embargo's effects set in.

U.S. intelligence services had broken various Japanese codes, and by late November 1941, warnings were being sent to U.S. forces that war with Japan was likely, with the Philippines as the probable target. Early in the morning of December 7, a Japanese task force successfully eluded detection in a surprise attack that devastated the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor, sinking or damaging eight battleships and damaging other smaller craft, destroying or damaging approximately three hundred aircraft, killing more than two thousand people, and injuring more than one thousand others. Near-simultaneous attacks were launched on U.S. bases in the Philippines, Guam, and Wake Island. The following day, Congress voted unanimously to declare war on Japan. A few days later, following Germany's and Italy's declarations of war against the United States, the country entered the war in Europe as well on the side of the Allies. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, China also joined the Allies, but it did not join in the fighting in Europe.

U.S. military planners had estimated that it might take nine million troops organized in more than two hundred divisions to secure victory in Europe and Asia. A massive recruitment and draft program had to be instituted to expand the army and prepare it for combat. Eventually, recruitment efforts expanded to African Americans, women, Native Americans, and thirty-three thousand Japanese Americans. Leadership of the troops fell to Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was rapidly promoted through the ranks to become a key aide to Chief of Staff George C. Marshall and commanding general of the European theater of operations.

Italy Falls

From the time of his first meeting with Churchill in August 1942, a frustrated Stalin had been calling for a second front against the Nazis in Europe. In the summer of 1943, the Soviets, fresh from saving Stalingrad, went on the offensive against the Germans. The ensuing Battle of Kursk was the biggest land battle of the war and the largest tank battle in history. The Soviet victory damaged Germany's war-making capacity by compromising its armaments.

Mussolini had insisted on contributing 200,000 troops to the invasion of the Soviet Union, and by early 1943, half of them had become casualties. Allied victories in North Africa and Sicily, along with the Allied bombing of Rome in July 1943, further humiliated Mussolini. In Italy, a coalition of former fascist supporters, military officers, the few surviving liberal politicians, and the king himself reached the conclusion that Mussolini must go. The Grand Fascist Council met for the first time in three years on July 24, 1943, and voted overwhelmingly to remove him from power and place him under arrest.

A government was formed under Marshal Pietro Badoglio, who initiated secret negotiations with the Allies. The Allied invasion of the mainland of Italy at the beginning of September provided the impetus for Italy's surrender on September 8, 1943. Four days later, Hitler had German special forces rescue Mussolini. German troops already in Italy then moved to disarm the remnants of the Italian army and established a government called the Republic of Salò in northern Italy, with Mussolini as its figurehead. However, Italian communist partisans captured and executed Mussolini in April 1945.

The War in the Pacific

When the Japanese invaded the Philippines beginning in December 1941, the limited U.S. and Filipino forces put up stiff resistance in jungle fighting. Outnumbered, however, they surrendered their positions on the Bataan Peninsula on April 9, 1942. The command headquarters surrendered at Corregidor Island nearly a month later. The resulting sixty-mile forced march to an internment camp led to the deaths of more than a quarter of the estimated eighty thousand Allied prisoners and became known as the Bataan Death March. Over the course of the war, the Japanese held approximately 140,000 Allied troops under severe conditions at various camps in the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and on the Japanese home islands. By the end of the war, as many as thirty thousand had perished there.

Five months into 1942, the Japanese had gathered a significant portion of Burma, Malaya and the Straits Settlements, Indonesia, French Indochina, and the Philippines into the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. While deconstructing White colonial rule, the Japanese began to systematically exploit the liberated areas for their resources in support of a greater Japan. However impressive the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere was on paper, the Japanese military and civilian administrators were hard-pressed to solve significant problems. The extent of the area under control and the size of the captive population presented governance issues, while geography severely strained communication and transportation networks. Puppet regimes were an attempt to solve some of these problems, such as the collaborationist regime in China under Wang Jingwei in 1940, the Ba Maw government in Burma during the Japanese occupation, and the administration of José P. Laurel in the defeated Philippines.

Successes were short-lived, however, because in June 1942, the United States decisively won what became the turning point of the war in the Pacific—the Battle of Midway, which stopped Japan's advance. The Japanese lost four aircraft carriers and a heavy cruiser, and other ships were severely damaged. The balance of power clearly shifted toward the Allies, and the Japanese navy never recovered its momentum.

Pursuing an island-hopping campaign to roll back Japanese seizures of land, the United States frequently had to engage the Japanese in dense jungle terrains. For years, the Japanese army had relied on a doctrine that heroic determination would overcome the technology and other advantages of any foe. Thus, fierce Japanese resistance extended these battles, as in the Battle of Guadalcanal, which raged on the Pacific island for six months between August 1942 and February 1943 before Japan finally retreated.

The Japanese military made many missteps across the Pacific. An early attempt to capture part of the Aleutian Islands failed. The defensive perimeters of Japan's home islands were constantly redrawn over 1942 and 1943. Without reevaluating its strategies, Japan transferred forces from China to plug holes punched in this perimeter. Its total losses in the China campaign, from its initial invasion in 1937 to its surrender in 1945, approached 500,000. (The Chinese lost as many as ten million. Historians disagree regarding how many millions of people were displaced by the war.) An attempted Japanese invasion of India beginning in March 1944 was called off after massive losses in July 1944. The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere began to evaporate into chaos and confusion. Because Prime Minister Hideki Tojo was the face of the war party both abroad and at home, it seemed clear that no peace settlement with the Allies was conceivable if he were in power. Therefore, in July 1944, having lost the support of the emperor for the failure of his strategies, Tojo was forced to resign.

Though the war proved devastating to China, with a severe loss of population, it was able to continue its fight against the Japanese. The western Allied powers hoped China could play a major role in defeating the Axis powers. To that end, Chiang Kai-shek was invited to a conference in Cairo along with other Allied leaders in 1943. In the last phase of the war, Chinese forces were able to advance through Burma and reopen the major road between China and India. Further offensives took back other Japanese-held territory. By the end of the war, China had reclaimed all the land Japan had occupied and emerged as a significant country in world affairs.

As Japan moved through Southeast Asia, it promised the inhabitants that it ultimately supported independent governments there. In fact, new governments were established in Vietnam, Burma, and other places, and though they were always clearly under the thumb of the Japanese military, there was some optimism that "Asia for Asians" might prove to truly work.

In many ways, however, the colonial experience continued for these areas, because their natural resources were simply redirected to the Japanese government's needs rather than to Europe's. Japanese occupation proved abusive and high-handed, marked by the denigration of local religions and customs and sometimes by physical abuse, such as against workers building the Burma-Thailand Railway. It became clear to many nationalists that they now had an enemy in the Japanese. In Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh raised his nationalist (and communist) forces against the Japanese in a guerrilla war aided by the United States. In Malaysia, similar guerrilla movements developed to oust the Japanese.

Germany Surrenders

Tehran was the site of the first of the World War II conferences between the "Big Three": Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin. From November 28 to December 1, 1943, the Tehran conference addressed relations between the Allies, relations between Turkey and Iran, operations in Yugoslavia, the fight against Japan, and plans for the postwar settlement. A protocol signed at the conference pledged the Big Three's recognition of Iran's independence. The Big Three also agreed on a cross-channel invasion of Europe scheduled for May 1944, in conjunction with a Soviet attack on Germany's eastern border. Stalin dominated the conference, using Soviet victories to get preliminary agreements on the borders of Poland after the war. Churchill and Roosevelt also consented to the USSR setting up governments sympathetic to itself in the Baltic states. Roosevelt and Stalin continued their discussions of a general international organization that had been proposed a few months earlier.



Figure 5.2.3: From left to right: Joseph Stalin, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill on the portico of the Soviet Embassy during the Tehran Conference, November 28, 1943. (CC BY 1.0; U.S. Signal Corps via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

As Allied troops marched toward the German border, however, their coalition began to fray. On a visit to Stalin late in 1944, Churchill signed the Percentages Agreement in which the two decided to divide up eastern Europe into spheres of influence, with Britain getting a 90 percent share of Greece, the USSR getting 90 percent of Romania, and both holding 50 percent of the political power in Hungary and Yugoslavia. Churchill thought Stalin should burn the document afterward because “it might be thought rather cynical if it seemed we had disposed of these issues, so fateful to millions of people, in such an offhand manner.”

Finally, several months after the Soviet victory at Kursk, General Eisenhower prepared to open a second front in the European theater of the war. By May 1944, the German military was facing a dilemma. The Soviet Red Army was relentlessly rolling back German positions in the east, and it seemed obvious that the British and U.S. troops were preparing for an invasion of the continent. Given the brutality of the battles on the eastern front, the Germans chose to retain 228 divisions to counter the Soviets and assigned the defense of Europe to fifty-eight divisions, only fifteen of which were in the vicinity of Normandy, France.

Normandy, however, was the secret site of the coming invasion. After months of assembling and training troops, the Allies began their invasion of France at 2 a.m. on June 6, 1944—D-Day. Having assumed responsibility for nearly every detail but not convinced he had done enough, Eisenhower wrote a letter of resignation the night before in case things did not go well. But they did. By the second day of the operation, approximately 160,000 Allied troops with considerable armor were linking up in a continuous line through Europe and punching holes in German defenses. Paris was liberated just two months later.

A race to capture Berlin then began, with Allied generals vying for the honor of getting there first. As British and U.S. troops approached from the west, the Soviets closed in on the city from the east. While clearing out German forces west of the Rhine River, Eisenhower decided to pause for resupply and prepare for the final push to Berlin.

Hitler believed there might still be hope for a German victory if he could divide the Allied armies from each other. Four days later, he committed 200,000 troops, one thousand tanks, and large numbers of aircraft to the Battle of the Bulge in a forested region of the western front. Eisenhower later admitted the Germans had indeed achieved a tactical surprise in this offensive by penetrating Allied defenses by some fifty miles. Despite the German successes, however, he felt that by capitalizing on their fatigue, he could stem the tide of the war. Germany had in fact suffered major losses in what proved to be their final European offensive and another turning point in the war.

With the conflict nearing its end, the Big Three met again to plan the peace at the Yalta Conference in the Soviet Crimea from February 4 to 11, 1945. Roosevelt’s agenda asked for Soviet support in the U.S. Pacific War against Japan, specifically in invading Japan. He also hoped for support for the creation of a new institution—the United Nations—that would be modeled on the premise of collective security but would be a stronger body than the League of Nations had been. Churchill pressed for free elections and democratic governments in eastern and central Europe (specifically Poland), while Stalin demanded a Soviet sphere of political influence in eastern and central Europe.

Stalin promised free elections in Poland, despite having recently installed a government in Polish territories occupied by the Red

Army. His preconditions for the Soviet Union's declaring war against Japan were U.S. recognition of Mongolian independence from China and of Soviet interests in the Manchurian railways and Port Arthur. These were agreed upon without Chinese representation or consent, and Stalin promised that the Soviet Union would enter the Pacific War three months after the defeat of Germany. Roosevelt met Stalin's price in the hope that the USSR could be dealt with after the war via the United Nations, which the Soviets had agreed to join.

In the Declaration on Liberated Europe, the three leaders agreed that all original governments would be restored in the invaded countries (except France, Romania, and Bulgaria and the Polish government-in-exile in London), and that all displaced civilians would be repatriated. Other key points of the meeting were reaffirmation of the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany, and of the division of Germany and Berlin into three occupied zones (later expanded to four).

Germany was to undergo demilitarization and denazification and make reparations, partly in the form of forced labor by German prisoners of war and others who would work in agricultural and industrial roles in both Eastern and Western Europe after the war. At the same time, Nazi war criminals were to be hunted down and brought to justice. Stalin insisted that given the pain and destruction the Germans had visited upon the Soviet Union, reparations ought to go to the nation that had suffered the most. Resolution of this issue was postponed to a future conference. After Yalta, Eisenhower conferred with Moscow and laid out a plan, adhering to the Yalta Agreement, for the exact placement of the postwar occupation zones in Berlin. Eisenhower knew the German leaders were preparing to move to another city, making Berlin of only psychological significance.

On April 30, 1945, Hitler and his wife of one day, Eva Braun, committed suicide. Various German commanders then began surrendering to Soviet or Allied forces. Hermann Göring surrendered on May 6, and the next day the chief of staff of German forces, General Alfred Jodl, unconditionally surrendered all German forces. Victory in Europe had been achieved.

Advancing Soviet armies had begun the process of liberating the death camps in July 1944, and in January 1945, they freed those held in Auschwitz. In April, U.S. and British units liberated Buchenwald, Bergen-Belsen, and Dachau. Eisenhower and his staff went into the camps on a number of occasions. To make sure the world became aware of German inhumanity, Eisenhower arranged for American and British reporters to tour the camps as well.

The Allied leaders agreed to demilitarize Germany and to divide the conquered nation and its capital of Berlin into four occupation zones: three in the west to be controlled by Britain, France, and the United States, and one in the east for the USSR. An Allied Control Council was created to administer occupied Germany, though the choice to make the council's decisions unanimous later proved unrealistic. The German economy was to be decentralized and focused on agriculture and nonmilitary industries.

The debates about reparations stemming from the Yalta Conference were settled with a plan to exchange Germany's western industrial production for its eastern agricultural production. In practice, however, this plan led to economic policies being instituted and managed by zones rather than for the nation as a whole, creating further disunity among the Allies. Finally, a program of denazification for Germany and Austria was confirmed that included punishment of war criminals. The settlement of the final borders of Poland was postponed, but Britain and the United States agreed to the transfer of designated German territory to Poland.

The Development of Nuclear Weapons

Few developments were more dramatic than the massive mobilization of scientific and civilian resources for the building of the atomic bomb. In December 1938, German physicists Otto Hahn and Fritz Strassmann accidentally split atoms and discovered nuclear fission. A few months later, the Germans established a secret weapons program called the Uranium Club to create an atomic bomb. Seeing the implications of Hahn's work, German-Swiss physicist Albert Einstein who was Jewish and who had recently immigrated to the United States to flee Nazi repression, sent a letter to President Roosevelt that had been written by physicist Leo Szilard, warning Roosevelt of this research and urging an increased U.S. commitment to conducting its own.

By the late 1930s, British and other scientists became convinced that an atomic bomb was possible, and teams of physicists, some of them refugees from Nazi Germany, assembled and began experiments with nuclear chain reactions, the catalysts of an atomic explosion. In August 1942, the U.S. government boosted this effort with its top-secret Manhattan Project. At dozens of sites across the United States, from Los Alamos in New Mexico to Oak Ridge in Tennessee and Hanford in Washington State, 600,000 workers embarked on a frenetic race to build the world's first atomic bomb. Meanwhile, Germany and Japan were also attempting to build their own. The German effort was hindered by technical and other problems. For example, top German scientists had fled Germany, and some were assisting the Manhattan Project. Further, Hitler preferred to support the development of V2 bombers for the air war with England rather than an atomic bomb. In 1941, the Japanese commissioned physicist Yoshio

Nishina to begin working on an atomic bomb, calling the project Ni-Go. But lacking any information shared by the Germans and suffering under successful U.S. air raids, the project did not make much progress.

Eventually, in July 1945, the Manhattan Project bore fruit, and a bomb was successfully detonated in the Trinity Test at Alamogordo, New Mexico. William L. Laurence, the official historian of the project, described this first successful trial of an atomic weapon: “On that moment hung eternity. Time stood still. Space contracted to a pinpoint. It was as though the earth had opened and the skies split. One felt as though they had been privileged to witness the Birth of the World—to be present at the moment of Creation when the Lord Said: Let there be light.” President Roosevelt had died suddenly in April 1945, succeeded by Vice President Harry S. Truman. It fell to Truman to decide whether to use the new weapon or not.

The War Ends

Between July 17 and August 2, 1945, the final Allied summit conference took place at Potsdam, a suburb of Berlin. This time, Harry S. Truman replaced the late Franklin Roosevelt, and Winston Churchill was replaced by Britain’s newly elected prime minister Clement Attlee. Truman was already troubled by Soviet actions in Europe. He disliked the concessions Roosevelt had made that allowed the Soviets to install a communist government in Poland. He also disapproved of Stalin’s plans, made known at the Yalta Conference, to demand large reparations from Germany. Truman feared the resulting burden on Germany might lead to another cycle of rearmament and aggression.

Early in 1945, the Japanese army and navy agreed to adopt the first joint operational plan in their histories. Operation *Ten-go* (“heaven”) called for suicide attacks by land and air units for defense in the Pacific, and a month later these attacks were combined with the *shukketsu* (“bleeding”) strategy in the Battle of Iwo Jima. Throughout the war, the Japanese had believed that high casualties would dishearten U.S. troops, who they felt could not tolerate suffering and loss. On Iwo Jima, the Japanese sacrificed twenty-one thousand soldiers and inflicted twenty-six thousand casualties on U.S. Marines (seven thousand were killed and the rest wounded). But the U.S. troops persisted and again absorbed high casualties as they later captured Okinawa. Japan’s struggle for Okinawa included the use of the island’s civilians, resulting in the death of 100,000 and demonstrating the resolve to be expected from the Japanese in defense of their main islands.

The slogan *gyokusai* (“honorable death”), combined with *shukketsu* and commitment to the emperor, was exemplified by the kamikaze or suicide pilots, essentially human bombs trying to fend off U.S. naval forces. In the face of such near-fanatical defensive efforts, U.S. secretary of war Henry L. Stimson and General George C. Marshall, the U.S. Army chief of staff, estimated that an invasion of Japan could cost between 500,000 and one million U.S. casualties and last well into 1946. President Truman was briefed on these estimates, and they were widely discussed among the military planning circles and staff. Japan’s leaders, however, refused to consider an unconditional surrender that, among other things, may have led to the emperor’s being tried for war crimes. They came to the conclusion that an invasion of the home islands was inevitable. Private and secret initiatives were floated to persuade the Soviet Union to mediate with the United States and Britain to end the war.

Truman had known little about the Manhattan Project before becoming president and now relied on the advice of his experts. They shared a widely held faith in the justice of the U.S. cause and accepted technological approaches to ending the war. Informed of the success of the Trinity Test while at the conference, Truman noted his thinking about using the bomb in his July 25, 1945, diary entry. He favored using it only against military targets, not civilian ones. The bomb was used, first against Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, and three days later on Nagasaki, both cities populated by civilians including women and children.

A variety of factors likely influenced Truman in making his decision. The desire to save American lives perhaps played the greatest role. The desire to justify the expense of the Manhattan Project also likely influenced him. Some have suggested that Truman hoped to demonstrate to the Soviet Union the technological superiority of the United States. Others believe that a desire for revenge for Pearl Harbor also played a role. Some have suggested that a long history of anti-Asian sentiment in the United States made the use of the atomic bomb against Japan seem less horrific than its use against Europeans would have been.

Little Boy, as the first atomic bomb was called, was dropped on Hiroshima from the U.S. bomber the *Enola Gay*. Survivors referred to August 6 as “the day of two suns”; the blast was so bright that it burned the shadows of victims into walls and concrete. More than seventy thousand people were killed instantly. Immediately afterward, the sky turned purple and gray, even black, from the dust and debris suspended in the air. Hundreds of wooden and paper houses were ignited. Thousands of shocked and confused people whose flesh had burned off began roaming about, almost instinctively moving toward any pool or stream of water. Over the following days, months, and even years, people continued to succumb to their wounds and injuries, bringing the total deaths to more than 100,000. Three days later, Fat Man, the second bomb, similarly descended upon Nagasaki, killing forty thousand Japanese immediately. Including the aftermath, deaths there totaled seventy thousand.

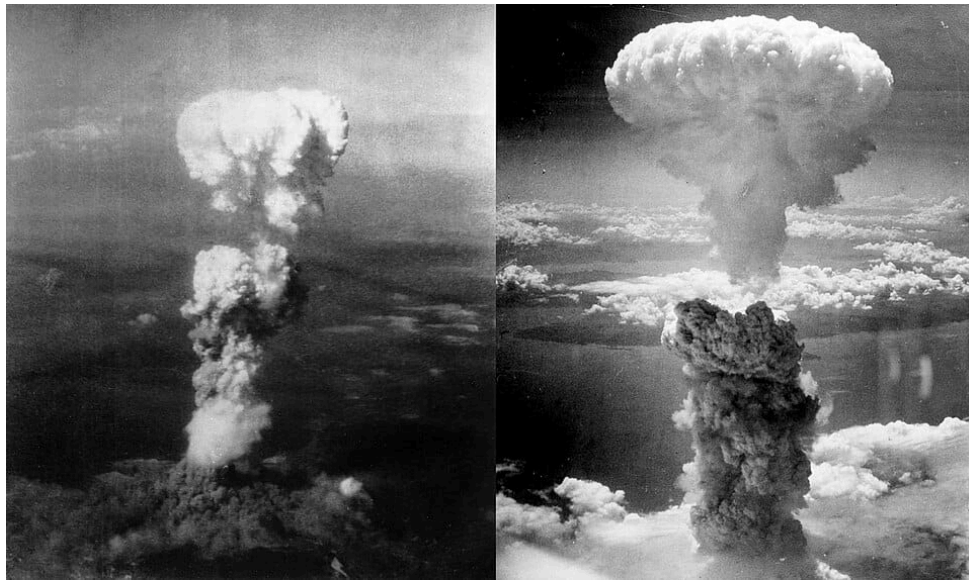


Figure 5.2.4: Mushroom clouds over Hiroshima and Nagasaki following the atomic bombings of August 1945, which contributed to the end of World War II. (PD; George R. Carson & Charles Levy via [Wikimedia Commons](#)). [Detailed Description of Figure 5.2.4.](#)

Meanwhile, keeping the promise made at Yalta, after the bombing of Hiroshima the Soviets broke their nonaggression pact with Japan and invaded Manchukuo and Korea. Japanese defenses there quickly crumbled in the face of tens of thousands of casualties, ending any hope that the Soviets might act as an intermediary in some negotiated settlement with the Allies. Japan surrendered shortly after.

The War's Global Impact

The end of the war saw the world grapple with the conflict's astronomical human toll. Germany had suffered 5.5 million military deaths and lost as many as three million civilians. Japan lost 2.1 million military and another million civilians. China's military deaths can only be approximated but may have been as high as four million, with another sixteen million civilians. The United States and the United Kingdom emerged less battered, with 416,000 American and 384,000 British deaths. However, their ally the Soviet Union arguably suffered more than any other single country. Soviet military deaths were estimated at 8.8 to 10.7 million, and more than thirteen million civilian deaths were attributed to the war. Some of these deaths were the result of military actions; other Soviet civilians died of starvation or disease caused by wartime conditions. The German and Japanese surrenders ended the combat phase of the war. However, much work was needed to rebuild the world as the victors thought it should be.

On August 10, 1945, in the wake of the atomic attacks and the Soviet invasion of Manchukuo, Japanese Emperor Hirohito had informed his Privy Council that he accepted the Potsdam Declaration regarding Japan's unconditional surrender, and soon thereafter the Allies were informed to that effect. Hirohito himself followed up on August 15 with the first public broadcast any emperor had ever made to the Japanese people, saying he would bear the pain of defeat and accept the Allied terms. A month later on September 2, General Yoshijirō Umezu, the army's chief of staff, signed a surrender document aboard the USS *Missouri* at anchor in Tokyo Bay.

As supreme commander for the Allied powers, General Douglas MacArthur was ordered to exercise authority during the Allied occupation of Japan through the Japanese governmental system, including Emperor Hirohito. MacArthur charged the Japanese government to immediately repeal the Peace Preservation Law, which allowed for the arrest of anyone perceived to be posing a threat to—or critical of—the Japanese government, and to begin open and free discussion of the entire Imperial government and its institutions. Political prisoners were released, and the Special Police were disbanded. On New Year's Day 1946, the emperor publicly disclaimed his divine status: "The ties between us and our people have always stood upon mutual trust and affection. They do not depend upon mere legends and myths. They are not predicated on the false conception that the Emperor is divine and that the Japanese people are superior to other races and fated to rule the world."

In Tokyo, the International Military Tribunal for the Far East emerged from the Potsdam Declaration. (Since the Soviet Union had not declared war on Japan at that time, it was not a party to the agreement.) The trials began in 1946 and lasted until November 1948. Eighteen members of the Japanese military and nine senior politicians were indicted. All were found guilty but one, who was found mentally unfit to stand trial; six were executed and the rest sentenced to prison.

For six years, from 1946 to 1952, the United States dominated the occupation of Japan. General MacArthur and his occupation authorities partnered energetically in almost all aspects of Japanese politics, economics, and society to try to reform and rebuild Japan. The overall goals of the occupation were demilitarization, democratization, and the fostering of respect for fundamental human rights. The Constitution imposed by MacArthur and his Government Section in 1947 was the sort of fundamental change no single group in Japan itself could have effected. The fact that it has survived virtually unchanged suggests that the Japanese themselves came to terms with it and bent the system to reflect their habits of mind and politics. The emperor was made a figurehead, “the symbol of the State and of the unity of the people.” Real sovereign power was vested in the people via the Diet, an elected two-chamber legislature. An extensive Bill of Rights guaranteed academic freedom, women’s suffrage, the right to choose residence, collective bargaining, and full employment.

Demilitarization was immediately begun, and the Japanese accepted that a realistic appraisal of world conditions after World War II strongly suggested force was not a good way to protect Japan and secure access to economic resources. The preamble to the Japanese Constitution begins, “We, the Japanese people, desire peace for all time.” Land reform began to make more small farmers owners of their farms instead of renters, and union membership was supported in the industrial sector, but many large corporations remained and were deliberately not broken up. Japan was severely limited militarily; no Japanese army was allowed, nor was Japan permitted to go to war in the future.

Attempts took place across the globe to achieve some form of just and lasting peace. One glimmer of hope was the United Nations, an international body agreed to by the Allied leaders during wartime conferences and finally established in New York City in April 1945. The United Nations was pledged to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small . . . to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.”

Judicial actions in both Germany and Japan were the beginning of attempts to define such concepts as genocide and crimes against humanity, as a way to counter the possibility that the conflict had actually normalized total war, mass violence, brutalization, and totalitarianism. The war had also brought into stark view the cruel consequences of racism and racist ideologies. Even liberal democracies could be poisoned by such thinking, as was revealed in the United States by the groundless displacement of Japanese residents and nationals and Japanese American citizens into internment camps.

As another aftermath of the war, women worldwide found themselves enjoying some of the freedoms and responsibilities of their fuller citizenship and participation in their nation’s fortunes. And populations in Africa and Asia, feeling they had earned liberation from prewar colonialism, began to reach for more self-determination and national legitimacy. It was widely felt that the struggles and sacrifices of so many could not and should not have been in vain.

5.3: The Holocaust and Aftermath

The Holocaust

The term “genocide” was adopted in the immediate aftermath of World War II out of the need to designate, to *name*, the most horrendous crime perpetrated by the Nazi regime: the systematic, state-run murder of the European Jews. The word itself means “murder of a people,” and while the act of genocide was not invented in the twentieth century - forms of genocide have occurred since the ancient world - never before had a government carried out a genocide that was as far-reaching, as bureaucratically-managed, or as focused as the Holocaust. While much of the Holocaust took the form of blood-soaked massacres, akin to the slaughter of the Armenians by the inchoate state of Turkey in the early 1920s or the various mass killings of Native Americans in the long, bloody colonization of the Americas by Europeans, the Holocaust was also distinct from other genocides in that much of it was industrialized: run on timetables, with the killing occurring in gas chambers built by Nazi agents or private firms contracted to do the work. In short, the Holocaust was a distinctly and horrifyingly *modern* genocide.

World War II would “just” be the story of a horrendously costly war if not for the Holocaust. The term itself refers to early Jewish rituals of sacrifice by fire, in which offerings were made to God and burned in the ancient Temple of Solomon (long since destroyed by the Romans) in Jerusalem. Today, the term is mostly used in the United States; the rest of the world largely uses the term *Shoah*, which means “catastrophe” in Hebrew. Its core definition is simple: the ideologically-motivated, brutal murder of approximately 6,000,000 Jews by the Nazi regime, representing two-thirds of Europe’s Jewish population at the time, and one-third of the entire global Jewish population. Thus, in addition to its modern character, the Holocaust stands out among the history of genocides for its shocking “success” from the perspective of the Nazi leadership: they set out to kill every Jew, theoretically in the entire world, and were horrifyingly successful at doing so in a very short time period.

In addition to the murder of the Jews, millions more were killed by the Nazis in the name of their ideology. While estimates vary, at least 250,000 Romani (“Gypsies”) were murdered. At least 6,000 male homosexuals were murdered. Many thousands of ideological “enemies,” from Jehovah’s Witnesses to various kinds of political leftists, were murdered as well. In addition, while not normally considered part of the Holocaust per se, almost 20,000,000 civilians in the Slavic nations - Poles and Russians especially - were murdered by the Nazis in large part because of Nazi racial ideology. Slavs too were “racial inferiors” and “subhumans” according to the Nazi racial hierarchy, and thus civilian populations in the Slavic countries were either killed outright or subjected to treatment tantamount to murder. Thus, while the Holocaust is, defined primarily as the genocide of the European Jews by the Nazis, it is still appropriate to consider the other victims of Nazi ideology as an aspect of Nazi mass murder as a whole.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the causes and global impact of the Holocaust
- Understand the origins and purpose of the United Nations

Jewish people had been deeply assimilated into German society and culture since the Enlightenment. But anti-Semitism had been an undercurrent in European history for centuries, and anti-Jewish propaganda and scapegoating began to surface after Germany’s defeat in World War I. It continued through the encouragement of the Nazis in the 1920s and 1930s. Joseph Goebbels was the master of Nazi propaganda, charged with convincing Germans that Jewish people were an existential threat. A constant drumbeat in all forms of media began, persuading Germans to accept three propositions meant to morally justify anti-Jewish actions. First, Jewish people were a problem. Second, they were like vermin (a tactic of dehumanization). Third, eliminating them would make for a better Germany and a better world.

The Nazis implemented anti-Jewish racial laws, known as the Nuremberg Laws, in 1935. Those laws defined “full” Jews as having three or four practicing Jews as grandparents, and those with two or one as being distinct categories of “mixed” (*Mischlinge*) Jews, the latter of whom received some exemptions from anti-Semitic laws. Jews were deprived of their citizenship and banned from various professions. For the next four years leading up to the war, the goal of the Nazi government was to force Jews to emigrate from the Reich, while extracting as much wealth from them as possible. The state imposed a “Reich Flight Tax,” meant

to fleece fleeing Jews of as much of their wealth as possible, and in 1938, the Nazis forced all Jews to register their property, which was then expropriated in a campaign dubbed “Aryanization.”

In November of 1938 the Nazis initiated a nationwide pogrom known as the Night of Broken Glass (*Kristallnacht*) in which some 90 Jews were killed and 177 synagogues burned to the ground, after which 20,000 Jewish men were arrested for “disrupting the peace” and incarcerated in prison camps - this represented the first mass roundup of Jews simply for being Jewish. Hermann Göring, at the time the second most powerful Nazi leader after Hitler, then demanded one billion Marks from the German Jewish population for the damage caused by the riots. After *Kristallnacht*, many of the remaining German Jews desperately sought asylum outside of Germany, but were all too often rebuffed by countries which, in the midst of the Great Depression, allowed in only a trickle of immigrants each year (Jewish or otherwise). Approximately half of the 500,000 German Jews did manage to flee before the war despite the incredible difficulty of doing so at the time.

When the Wehrmacht streamed into Poland in 1939 and encountered the largest Jewish population in the world, the Nazis had the opportunity to begin the genocide known as the Holocaust on a huge scale. As German armies advanced into Soviet territory in 1941, they were followed by four teams of *Einsatzgruppen* - mobile killing squads - charged with killing Jews, Gypsies, Communists, and the disabled. The *Einsatzgruppen*'s technique for murdering their victims consisted of marching Jews into the woods or fields and systematically shooting them. The victims would be forced to dig mass graves or ditches, to strip, and to watch as their entire community was slaughtered. Mothers would be forced to strip, then undress their children, watch their children be murdered, and then join them in the mass graves. The *Einsatzgruppen* and the local helpers they recruited were responsible for approximately 1 million deaths over the course of the war. The *Einsatzgruppen* were aided by regular *Wehrmacht* (German army) units and by battalions of the Order Police, a hybrid of police force and national guard mobilized for the war effort. In other words, many “regular soldiers,” not just Nazi party members, were responsible for killing innocent men, women, and children, often for days at a time and at point-blank range. This aspect of the Holocaust is today referred to as the “Holocaust by bullets,” one that was largely overlooked by historians for many decades after the war.

There were various logistical problems with this technique, however. It was hard to generalize it in urban areas already under Nazi control. Many members of the *Einsatzgruppen* suffered from mental breakdowns from murdering innocent people day after day. There were never very many *Einsatzgruppen* to begin with: four teams with about 6,000 soldiers assigned to them in total. Out of necessity, they made heavy use of auxiliary troops to do much of the actual shooting, recruited from Ukrainian, Latvian, Lithuanian, or Estonian POW camps. These auxiliaries were called “Hiwis,” an abbreviation of *Hilfswilligen* (“helpers”), by the Nazis. Soon, both members of the SS's army, the *Waffen SS*, as well as regular soldiers of the *Wehrmacht* were assigned to “Jewish Actions,” the euphemism for organized massacres.

At some point between the late summer and fall of 1941, the top Nazi leadership decided to abandon earlier experiments with forced deportations and to search instead for more efficient methods of murder. Almost immediately after the implementation of the *Einsatzgruppen*, the head of the SS, Heinrich Himmler, ordered experiments with better means of mass murder, which resulted in Nazi technicians devising “gas vans” that killed their victims through carbon monoxide poisoning. By late fall of 1941, killing facilities were being built in the concentration camps of Majdanek and Auschwitz, both of which had been built as slave labor camps in 1940. There, the first experiments with the infamous pesticide Zyklon B were carried out on Soviet POWs.

Many concentration camps were simultaneously labor and death camps. In 1941, Adolf Eichmann, a leader of the German SS (the Nazi Party's elite paramilitary corps), noted the challenges of the coming winter: “the Jews can no longer be fed. It is to be seriously considered whether the most humane solution might not be to finish off those Jews not capable of labour by some sort of fast-working preparation.” In January 1942 at the Wannsee Conference, the Final Solution to the “Jewish question” was discussed. It was decided that German state policy would be to eliminate European Jewish people by working them to death, starving them, or otherwise exterminating them. They were persecuted in place or sent to specially constructed death camps.

Auschwitz in western Poland was the largest of the death camps, originally constructed in 1940 to hold Polish political prisoners. It became a death camp in 1941 when large numbers of Polish and Soviet prisoners were executed there. That same year, a new camp (known as Auschwitz II or Birkenau) was built nearby. Its main purpose was to kill Jewish people who were brought on freight trains from all over Europe. Other camps also existed at Auschwitz, including labor camps where prisoners worked for the chemical company I.G. Farben. Some 1.3 million people were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau before Heinrich Himmler, the leader of the SS, ordered the camp closed and evacuated in January 1945 as the Soviet army rapidly advanced on it. Of these 1.3 million, 1.1 million would die there. The vast majority, nearly one million, were Jewish. Most were murdered with poisonous gas, usually immediately upon arrival. Others were shot or beaten to death or died from disease, starvation, or exhaustion caused by hard labor.

Other gas chambers were constructed at Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka in 1942, and arriving prisoners deemed unsuitable for work were usually sent almost directly to the “showers,” actually gas chambers. The systematic implementation of these policies

required the collaboration of tens of thousands of people from across Europe, which culminated in the murder of more than six million Jewish people and at least three million members of other minority groups, including gay and Roma people, communists, socialists, and Jehovah's Witnesses, before the war was over. Historians disagree about exactly how many died in the camps, and the true number will likely never be known, but it was in the millions.

There were many instances of resistance, such as the Warsaw ghetto uprising in 1943. This was ruthlessly crushed by the Germans, however, resulting in the deaths of thirteen thousand Jewish people. Unsuccessful uprisings also took place in three of the concentration camps, one of which, in Sobibor, perhaps saved some lives by forcing the closure of the camp. Beginning in 1942, Irena Sendler, a member of the Polish Underground Resistance, participated in the Great Action in the Warsaw ghetto to smuggle out Jewish children. She is credited with saving some 2,500 children before she was discovered. Oskar Schindler, a member of the Nazi Party, ran a factory in Poland and worked to shield his Jewish workers from the Nazis, saving the lives of thousands. Loukas Karrer, the mayor of the Greek island Zakynthos, saved the island's entire Jewish population of 275 by refusing to surrender them and then hiding them. In Bulgaria, Dimitar Peshev, the deputy speaker of the National Assembly, had supported anti-Semitic legislation, but he refused to accept the German request to deport forty-eight thousand Jews and got the government to rescind the order. Still, the Nazis sent millions to their deaths.

The liberation of the camps was horrifying to the Allied soldiers who discovered them in the closing months of the war. Dwight Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander of the forces that had carried out the D-Day invasion, ordered that British and American troops alike document what they discovered - the huge mounds of corpses, the open graves, the emaciated survivors, and the gas chambers - lest those horrors be dismissed as "propaganda" at some point in the future. Likewise, Soviet forces preserved the evidence discovered in the eastern death camps where most of the killings took place including Auschwitz itself. As the war in Europe finally ended, Allied troops and agents immediately embarked on an enormous effort to locate, catalog, and preserve the documentation having to do with the Holocaust in German army, state, and SS offices as they prepared the groundwork for war crimes trials.



Figure 5.3.1: Young and old survivors in Dachau cheer approaching U.S. troops, 1945. (CC BY 1.0; E.H. Hart via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

The scope of the Holocaust shocked even battle-hardened troops who were already aware of German depredations against civilians. At the the Nuremberg Trials, organized to legally prosecute the Nazi leadership, Nazi leaders were charged with Crimes Against Humanity, a completely new category of crime designed by the victorious Allies to try to deal with the enormity of what they still called "Nazi atrocities." Thanks to SS documentation, the Allies correctly calculated that the death toll of Jews murdered by the Third Reich amounted to roughly six million individuals, and the basic mechanisms of deportation, slavery, and gassing were also clear.

Even though Allied authorities were able to piece together the basic characteristics of the Holocaust, various aspects remained obscure for decades. Most survivors were deeply hesitant to talk about what they had been through, and even in the newly-founded Jewish state of Israel, most of the focus was on the symbolically-important acts of resistance like a famous uprising of the Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1944, rather than on the millions who were killed. For decades, most survivors tried to make new lives, often thousands of miles from their former homes, and many non-Jews were completely ignorant of the breadth, scope, and organized nature of the genocide.

The United Nations

The inability of the League of Nations to stop German, Italian, and Japanese aggressions caused many to question whether any global organization or agreements could ever ensure world peace. This included Franklin Roosevelt, who, as Woodrow Wilson's undersecretary of the navy, witnessed the rejection of this idea by both the American people and the Senate. In 1941, Roosevelt believed that postwar security could be maintained by an informal agreement between what he termed the Four Policemen—the United States, Britain, the Soviet Union, and China—instead of a rejuvenated League of Nations. But others, including secretary of state Cordell Hull and British prime minister Winston Churchill, disagreed and convinced Roosevelt to push for a new global organization. As the war ran its course, Roosevelt came around to the idea. And so did the American public. Pollster George Gallup noted a “profound change” in American attitudes. The United States had rejected membership in the League of Nations after World War I, and in 1937 only a third of Americans polled supported such an idea. But as war broke out in Europe, half of Americans did. America's entry into the war bolstered support, and, by 1945, with the war closing, 81 percent of Americans favored the idea.

Whatever his support, Roosevelt had long shown enthusiasm for the ideas later enshrined in the United Nations (UN) charter. In January 1941, he announced his Four Freedoms—freedom of speech, of worship, from want, and from fear—that all of the world's citizens should enjoy. That same year he signed the Atlantic Charter with Churchill, which reinforced those ideas and added the right of self-determination and promised some sort of postwar economic and political cooperation. Roosevelt first used the term *united nations* to describe the Allied powers, not the subsequent postwar organization. But the name stuck. At Tehran in 1943, Roosevelt and Churchill convinced Stalin to send a Soviet delegation to a conference at Dumbarton Oaks, in the Georgetown neighborhood of Washington, D.C., in August 1944, where they agreed on the basic structure of the new organization. It would have a Security Council—the original four main powers (the US, Britain, the Soviet Union, and China), plus France—which would consult on how best to keep the peace and when to deploy the military power of the assembled nations. According to one historian, the organization demonstrated an understanding that “only the Great Powers, working together, could provide real security.” But the plan was a kind of hybrid between Roosevelt's policemen idea and a global organization of equal representation. There would also be a General Assembly, made up of all nations; an International Court of Justice; and a council for economic and social matters. Dumbarton Oaks was a mixed success—the Soviets especially expressed concern over how the Security Council would work—but the powers agreed to meet again in San Francisco between April and June 1945 for further negotiations. There, on June 26, 1945, fifty nations signed the UN charter.



Figure 5.3.2: Eleanor Roosevelt holding a poster of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations. (CC BY 2.0; FDR Presidential Library & Museum via Wikimedia Commons). Detailed Description of Figure 5.3.2.

5.4: Alternative Text Description

Figure 5.1.1: Japanese Occupation in China, 1940

This image is a political map of China labeled “China, 1900–1949: Japanese Occupation, 1940.” It shows the extent and pattern of Japanese control within China during that time.

China is outlined with provincial boundaries and major cities labeled, including Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Wuhan, and Guangzhou. Surrounding regions such as Outer Mongolia to the north, Xinjiang to the northwest, Tibet to the southwest, and Korea to the northeast are also labeled, providing geographic context.

A large, continuous shaded region marks areas under Japanese occupation. This occupied zone covers much of northeastern China (Manchuria) and extends southward and inland along major transportation corridors and population centers. The occupied territory includes key coastal regions along the eastern seaboard and extends inland through central China.

A clearly marked boundary line encloses the occupied territory. This boundary is irregular and follows major rivers, railways, and strategic cities. The shape indicates that Japanese control was not uniform across the entire country but concentrated in economically and militarily important areas.

Major cities within the occupied region, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, and Guangzhou, are included inside the boundary, showing their strategic importance. Areas outside this boundary represent regions that were not under direct Japanese control at that time.

The map emphasizes the extent, concentration, and geographic pattern of Japanese occupation by contrasting occupied regions with the rest of China and by showing how control spread along key routes and urban centers.

Figure 5.1.2: Italian troops marching in Ethiopia

This image is a black-and-white historical photograph showing a large group of uniformed soldiers moving in formation across a dry, open landscape.

In the foreground, several soldiers walk toward the viewer along a dirt path. These soldiers wear helmets and carry rifles and packs, indicating that these individuals are actively traveling with full gear. Some soldiers are mounted on horses, suggesting the presence of mixed foot and mounted units.

In the mid-ground, a long line of additional soldiers follows the same path, extending diagonally from the lower right area of the image toward the upper left. This continuous line shows coordinated troop movement along a single route.

In the background, the line of soldiers continues into the distance, gradually becoming smaller and less distinct. The terrain appears uneven and sparsely vegetated, with no visible buildings or infrastructure, indicating a rural or undeveloped environment.

The overall composition emphasizes the scale and organization of the group. The presence of weapons, equipment, and mounted units indicates that this is a military movement, likely part of a larger campaign or repositioning effort. The long, continuous column highlights the number of personnel involved and the sustained nature of the march across the landscape.

Figure 5.2.4: Atomic Mushroom Clouds

This image presents two photographs showing large mushroom clouds rising high above the landscape after atomic bomb explosions in Japan during World War II. Dense columns of smoke and debris extend upward into broad cloud formations. The photographs illustrate the immense scale and destructive power associated with nuclear weapons.

Figure 5.3.2: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights Document

This image shows a person standing indoors, holding a large printed document angled toward the viewer. The person supports the document with both hands, with one hand near the top edge and the other near the lower edge, indicating the sheet is oversized and requires support.

The document is the central focus of the image. At the top of the sheet, there is a prominent heading that reads “THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS.” Above the title appears a circular emblem. Below the heading, the page is divided into multiple columns of densely arranged printed text, organized into sections or articles. The layout resembles a formal, official publication, with clear structure and uniform spacing.

The person is positioned to the left of the document, facing toward it, suggesting they are examining or presenting its contents. The document occupies most of the right side of the image and extends vertically and diagonally, emphasizing its large size and importance.

The background includes a plain wall and a curtain, which do not contain additional information and serve to keep attention on the person and the document.

Spatial relationships and function: The large size of the document relative to the person highlights its significance as a formal declaration. The act of holding and displaying the document suggests its use for public communication or education. The visible title and structured text indicate that the image is representing an important written statement outlining principles or rights, emphasizing how such documents are physically presented and read in real-world contexts.

5.5: Chapter Themes to Discuss

This page offers different themes that appear throughout the sections in this chapter. The themes are meant to provide a framework in which discussion questions can be developed to inspire further exploration of the topics covered.

1. The reasons for military build-up and aspirations of territorial expansion that led to war in Asia and Europe.
2. The events that created an alliance among the United States, Great Britain, and Soviet Union.
3. The role of nuclear weapons in the war.
4. The post-war world order and the reasons for the decline of the U.S., British, and Soviet alliance.

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5.6: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials to Enhance the Chapter

These materials are provided to help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction. Some resources are openly licensed, while others may require institutional access or individual review before use in class.

Web Resources

These websites may help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction.

- [World History Encyclopedia](#) – Provides overviews of important people, places, and events throughout history. This resource can be useful for finding concise, expert-informed background information.
- [Fordham University Internet History Sourcebooks Project](#) – Provides translated, transcribed, and digitized primary sources. This resource can support source-based instruction, though instructors should review links carefully because some materials may be incomplete or less suitable for classroom use.

Articles

These articles provide additional scholarly context for this chapter. Access may depend on your institution's JSTOR subscription.

- Borgwardt, Elizabeth. "A New Deal for the Nuremberg Trial: The Limits of Law in Generating Human Rights Norms." *Law and History Review* 26, no. 3 (2008): 679–705. [Access article in JSTOR](#)

Videos

These videos can be used to explore a specific topic in the chapter in more detail and as an entry to further discussion on chapter topics.

- [TED-Ed: Ugly History: Japanese American incarceration camps](#)

Length: 5 minutes, 45 seconds

On December 7, 1941, 16 year-old Aki Kurose shared in the horror of millions of Americans when Japanese planes attacked Pearl Harbor. Unbeknownst to her, this shared experience would soon leave her family and over 120,000 Japanese Americans alienated from their country, both socially and physically. Densho explores the racism and paranoia that led to the unjust internment of Japanese Americans.

6: THE COLD WAR AND DECOLONIZATION

Introduction

This chapter explores the emergence of the Cold War, the decline of traditional empires, the formation of new nations, and the rise of non-alignment movements. It also examines how race, revolution, development, and liberation movements influenced global politics after 1945. The main focus is on how people in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, the Middle East, and other regions attempted to navigate, oppose, or go beyond the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. Essentially, it looks at how the Cold War and decolonization, occurring simultaneously, transformed the modern world.

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6.1: Beginning of the Cold War

Postwar Order

The postwar order that emerged after 1945 was not created all at once. It took shape through conferences, treaties, military occupations, economic programs, international organizations, and growing mistrust between former allies. The United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union had cooperated to defeat Nazi Germany, but their alliance was fragile. They had different ideas about security, political authority, economic recovery, and the future of Europe. They also had different memories of the war.

The United States and the Soviet Union each saw themselves as the rightful leader of the world emerging from the ashes of the war. Although they had united to defeat Hitler, their deep-seated differences now returned to the fore. For the United States, the ideal world was one in which nations would coexist peacefully, enjoying economic prosperity thanks to capitalistic endeavors. In the Soviet Union's vision of the future, communism would lead the world's countries to a peaceful, prosperous future, and it would never again fear invasion from the lands to its west. The latter goal was the reason Stalin insisted on establishing satellite states in Eastern Europe, countries the Soviet Union would control by installing communist, pro-Soviet governments within them.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain how the wartime alliance between the United States and the Soviet Union became a Cold War rivalry.
- Describe the policies, alliances, and institutions that divided Europe into Eastern and Western blocs.
- Analyze how containment, propaganda, espionage, and nuclear weapons shaped early Cold War politics.

At the Moscow Conference of 1944, which U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt did not attend, Prime Minister Winston Churchill agreed to let Stalin install Soviet-allied communist parties to control the governments of Romania and Bulgaria, which had been German allies during the war. In exchange, Stalin promised to leave control of the Balkans to the British. By the time the victorious Allies met in Potsdam in the summer of 1945 to finalize plans to partition Germany and its capital city of Berlin, Churchill no longer wished Stalin to exercise so much power in Eastern Europe. He warned the new U.S. president, Harry Truman, who was unaware of what had been agreed to at the Moscow Conference, of the danger of allowing the Soviets to control the region. But Stalin was able to consolidate his grip on Eastern Europe by putting in power or supporting pro-Soviet governments in place across the region (the presence of the Red Army occupying these territories meant there was in fact little the US or Britain could do to oppose them).

In March 1946, in a speech in Fulton, Missouri, Churchill told his audience that “an iron curtain” had cut Europe in two, trapping half the continent under Soviet domination. This division of the world into United States–allied and Soviet–allied halves characterized the Cold War, a contest for ideological, social, economic, technological, and military supremacy that lasted until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The war was “cold” because it did not include actual fighting between U.S. and Soviet forces. (A “hot” war is a conflict in which countries engage in armed conflict with one another.)

The splintering of Europe that Churchill described deepened in 1948, when a government composed of both communists and non-communists in Czechoslovakia was toppled and replaced by an all-communist government loyal to Moscow. In 1949, Hungary also came under the control of a communist party closely allied with the Soviet Union. While Stalin and his allies were not democrats in any sense of the word, communist parties and movements had significant appeal across Europe as they were nearly the only organized underground military resistance against the Nazis and their allies. The bravery and heroism of these resistance fighters lent significant charisma to their postwar movements and meant a lot in a Europe only recently coming out from under the destruction and horrors of the Germans war and brutal rule.

The chief strategy of the United States in the Cold War was containment—an effort to confine Soviet influence to Eastern Europe. Containment was first mentioned by George F. Kennan, a U.S. diplomat stationed in Moscow, in a message to the State Department known as the Long Telegram. Kennan described the Soviet government as paranoid and committed to a war against capitalism. Soviet leaders, he believed, could not be moved by reason and understood only force. Their attempts to spread communism must thus be met with strong resistance.

The foreign policy goals of the Soviet Union following World War II were directly opposed to those of the United States. The USSR sought to protect itself and bolster its economy by strengthening its control over the communist states of Eastern Europe. It also encouraged communist revolution in other countries and maintained close ties with communist parties throughout the world. The Soviet Union regarded itself as the chief opponent of European and U.S. imperialism, and in this role, it supported independence movements in colonies in Asia and Africa. To the Soviet leadership, the United States was an aggressor nation bent upon world domination, and the spread of communism reduced the threat of future wars. To protect its own interests and those of its allies, the Soviet Union needed to be militarily and technologically superior.

Containment and the Truman Doctrine

The first test of U.S. resolve to counter the advance of communism came in 1947 in an unexpected place—Greece. During World War II, resistance to the German army occupying Greece had come from both supporters of the country's Communist Party and loyalists of its monarchical government. In 1944, shortly after the withdrawal of the Germans, the occupying British forces and Prime Minister George Papandreou, who had returned from exile, jointly called for the disarmament of these resistance groups, and violence erupted. In 1946, following the triumph of monarchists in an election the Greek communists boycotted, civil war broke out. Communist forces sought the overthrow of King George II and his government who had spent the war abroad and not faced German occupation. To prevent this, Britain provided the government with economic and military assistance, an extension of the aid it had given during the war. In 1947, however, Britain announced that it would no longer do so, most likely because it was experiencing economic problems.

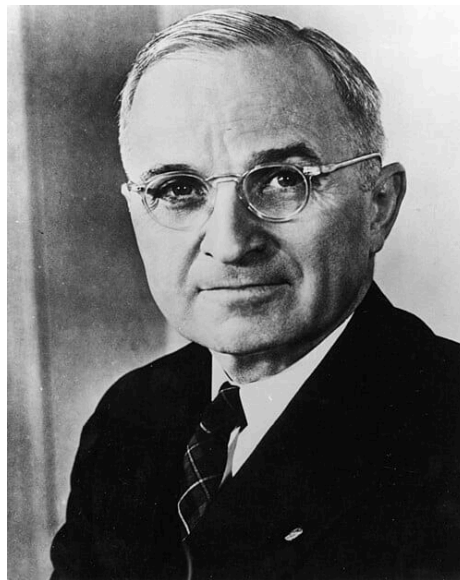


Figure 6.1.1: A portrait of former U.S. President Harry S. Truman. (CC BY 4.0; Kheel Center via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

The events in Greece worried the U.S. government. Neighboring Turkey was regarded as the gateway to the Middle East and its crucial supplies of petroleum, upon which Western industry and transportation depended. Truman feared that, should Greece become a communist country, a communist uprising might occur in neighboring Turkey as well. This belief—that the neighbors of communist countries would in turn become communist themselves—is known as the domino theory.

Both the United Kingdom and the United States were wary of Soviet activity in this region. In 1946, the Soviet Union had demanded that Turkey allow it to take shipping through Turkish-controlled straits from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. When Turkey refused, the Soviets increased their naval presence in the Black Sea and sent troops to the Balkans. The Soviet Union backed down and withdrew its forces when the U.S. bolstered its own naval presence in the region.

However, Truman was mistaken in assuming all communists acted under the direction of the Soviet Union. The communist governments of Albania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia extended aid to the Greek communists, but most evidence indicates that the Soviet Union did not. The Soviets were largely uninterested in Greece, and at the Moscow Conference of 1944, Stalin had given control of Greece to Britain in exchange for the concessions that allowed him to decide the fate of Romania and Bulgaria. There is little to suggest that Stalin violated this agreement about Greece—until the United States got involved. Once the fate of Greece became of interest to Truman, Stalin took note of it as well.

On March 12, 1947, Truman addressed Congress and requested aid for the governments of Greece and Turkey. He framed the appeal as part of the struggle against communism and argued that it was the duty of the United States to oppose what he called “totalitarian regimes.” Congress approved his request for \$400 million (approximately \$5 billion in today’s money). The president’s pledge to help what he called “free peoples” resist communist expansion, a promise that became known as the Truman Doctrine, formed the basis of U.S. foreign policy throughout the Cold War. Following the proclamation of the Truman Doctrine, Stalin channeled material support for the civil war to Greece’s communists, but covertly.

The Marshall Plan

The U.S. effort to combat the expansion of communism also led to the creation of the European Recovery Program, named the Marshall Plan for Secretary of State George C. Marshall. In 1947, Marshall called for economic assistance to rebuild postwar Europe. Realizing the attractions of communism to impoverished, war-ravaged Europeans, as well as the edge the communists had in their long history of anti-fascist underground resistance, Congress approved the Economic Cooperation Act in 1948 to pump an eventual total of \$12 billion into Europe’s economy (about \$147 billion today). The funds were vital in assisting Western Europe as a whole to rebuild their infrastructure and restore their industrial capacity. Because necessary materials often needed to be purchased from the United States, aid given through the Marshall Plan also helped ensure that the U.S. economy did not slide into an economic depression now that the war had ended.

U.S. aid was offered to all European nations, including Germany and the Soviet Union. However, the aid came with strings attached about how countries could structure their economies and government. Stalin and the communists therefore, rejected it and forbade Eastern Europe’s communist-governed states within the Soviet sphere of influence to accept it. Instead, the USSR proposed the Molotov Plan, which gave aid to and established trade agreements with the communist nations of Eastern Europe: Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and the Soviet zone in Germany that later became the German Democratic Republic, commonly known as East Germany. Finally, in 1949, the United States developed the Point Four Program to provide technical assistance to industrializing countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia for improving their standard of living with a similar anticommunist aim in mind.

Western and Eastern Blocs

The tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union that had built up slowly through the later 1940s came to a head in 1948. Believing a strong Germany was vital to Europe’s economic recovery and a necessary bulwark against the spread of communism, the United States, Britain, and France planned to reunify the three zones of Germany they had occupied since the end of World War II. United, these zones would dwarf the Soviet zone in size, population, and wealth and, by sharing a single currency, play a major role in Europe’s postwar economy.

The Soviet Union, and Stalin in particular, hoped to keep Germany disunited and weak and thus objected. In March 1948, it withdrew from the Allied Control Council that coordinated Allied actions in Germany. In June, the United Kingdom and the United States introduced a new currency, the Deutschemark, into their zones as well as into the western portions of Berlin they controlled, in order to dispense Marshall Plan funds. Infuriated, the Soviet Union cut off all ground routes into West Berlin. No food or fuel could enter the city by road, railroad, or canal. The Soviets planned to starve the Western Allies out, forcing them to abandon their sections of Berlin and thus their toehold within the Soviet zone.

Realizing that air was their only way around the blockade, the United Kingdom and the United States swiftly formulated plans to supply the isolated city by plane. For nearly a year, they carried out the Berlin Airlift, an extensive operation that at one point had a British or U.S. plane taking off from Berlin’s Tempelhof Airport every forty-five seconds. Recognizing they could not defeat the resolve of the Western Allies, the Soviets ended the blockade in May 1949. Two weeks later, the Western Allies unified their occupation zones to form the new country of the Federal Republic of Germany, usually referred to as West Germany, with the city of Bonn as its capital.

The Western Allies then took another step to solidify their bloc militarily. In 1948, Belgium, France, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom had signed the Treaty of Brussels, forming a military alliance in case of war against the Soviet Union. In 1949, shortly before the Berlin blockade ended, the United States joined those nations as well as Canada, Portugal, Italy, Denmark, Norway, and Iceland to form the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), an alliance for military assistance and mutual defense. Should one of the member nations be attacked, the others agreed to come to its aid. The capitalist countries that joined NATO formed a bloc, a group of countries united for a common purpose, that became known as the Western Bloc. The Western Bloc opposed communist expansion in Europe by the countries of the Eastern Bloc, composed of the Soviet Union and its allies.

In 1955, when West Germany also joined NATO in response, the Soviet Union formed a military and political alliance of its own, the Warsaw Treaty Organization or the Warsaw Pact. Its other members were the communist nations of Eastern Europe: Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), formerly the Soviet occupation zone. The Soviets regarded the pact as a vital defense against a united Western Europe and resurgent Germany. NATO and the Warsaw Pact represented the nations on opposite sides of the Iron Curtain and hardened the lines that had been drawn between them. The Western and Eastern Blocs soon faced off against one another, not only in Europe but in the rest of the world as well.

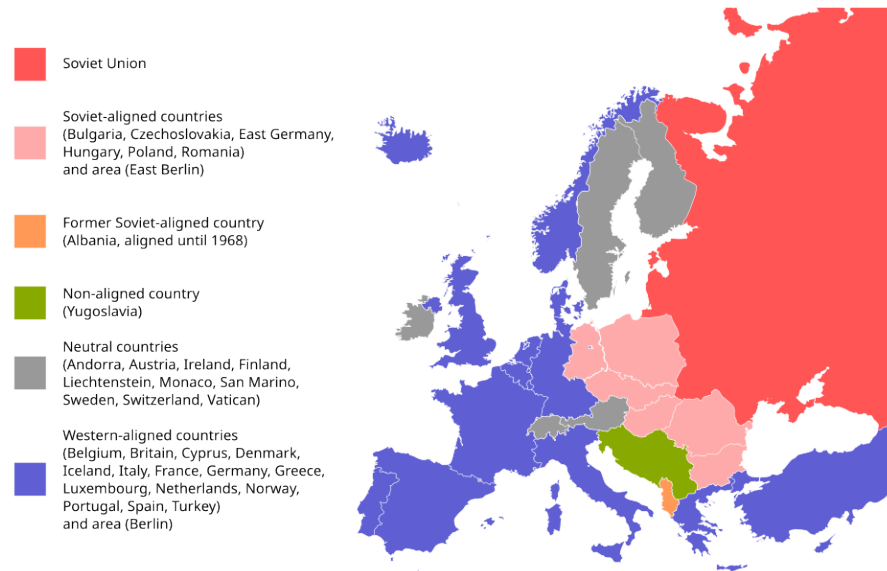


Figure 6.1.2: Europe during the Cold War was divided into Eastern and Western blocs, with some countries remaining neutral or non-aligned. (CC0 1.0; modification of work “Allegiance of European countries during the Cold War” by “UserGoldsztajn” via [Wikimedia Commons](#)). Detailed Description of Figure 6.1.2.

China and Korea

Asia was one of the first major regions where the postwar collapse of empires became visible. Between the mid-1940s and the 1950s, countries and territories across the continent moved from colonial rule, wartime occupation, or foreign domination toward independence, revolution, partition, or division. But decolonization in Asia followed different paths. In some places, independence came through negotiation. In others, it came through civil war, guerrilla struggle, or the collapse of wartime occupation. And in the two cases explored here, Korea and China, sovereignty was immediately entangled with the Cold War. This raises the question of whether a new state would align with capitalism, communism, non-alignment, or some other political project.

China’s revolution was not a decolonization project in the same formal sense as India’s or Indonesia’s, because China was not a single colony ruled by a single European empire in 1945. But it was deeply shaped by imperialism, foreign occupation, civil war, and anti-imperialist politics. Since the 1920s, two groups had contested for control of China: the Guomindang (GMD) or Nationalist Party, and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). During World War II, the GMD, led by Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi) had attempted to fight the Japanese from their wartime capital in Chongqing, while the CCP led by Mao Zedong battled the invaders from their base in Yan’an, a town in northern Shaanxi Province. With the exception of a brief period of truce between the two parties, the CCP and the GMD fought with one another as well.

In 1949, the CCP’s People’s Liberation Army decisively defeated the forces of the GMD, who retreated to the island of Taiwan. On October 1, 1949, Mao proclaimed the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in a ceremony in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square. The United States refused to recognize the CCP’s government as legitimate and maintained that Nationalist-led Taiwan was the “real” China. Mao was undeterred. He pledged industrial development, universal education, equality between the sexes, land reforms for peasants, and civil liberties for all, including freedom of expression. Mao and the CCP moved quickly to enact their promises, beginning immediately on the task of giving peasants ownership of the land they worked.



Figure 6.1.3: Máo Zédōng proclaims the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, marking a major turning point in Asian and Cold War history. (CC0 1.0; Orihara1 via Wikimedia Commons).

Along with making changes in China's domestic policy, Mao also plotted a new course for China in foreign policy. In February 1950, the PRC and the Soviet Union signed the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance. Under its terms, they were to combat any renewed Japanese aggression, work to advance their mutual interests, and refrain from entering into any alliances that were hostile to the other party. All this was part of China's new "Lean to One Side" foreign policy position, in which the country would favor socialist nations and assist those seeking to free themselves from control by imperialist powers. China soon found its new commitments tested by the need to support a fellow communist nation and counter a threat to its own borders in Korea.

On August 15, 1945, the nation of Korea, which had been occupied by Japan during World War II and had been a Japanese colony for many years before that, was divided in half at the thirty-eighth parallel of latitude. The United States assumed responsibility for disarming the southern part of the Korean peninsula, and the Soviet Union took on the task of disarming the northern half. At the Moscow Conference held in December 1945, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Soviet Union agreed that they and China would jointly govern Korea for a period of five years, after which it would be reunified and given its independence. The Korean people's opposition to the division of their nation and its subjection to foreign rule was ignored.

With the country now seemingly permanently divided and troops wanted elsewhere, the Soviet Union withdrew its forces from Korea, and the United States moved most of its troops out as well. Without the forces of the two superpowers, which had each wished to avoid provoking the other, border clashes occurred between North and South Korean troops from 1948 to 1950. North Korean forces hoped to encourage uprisings by communists in the South, and South Korean forces fought to keep Northern troops out to prevent the overthrow of the South's government.

On June 25, 1950, the Korean People's Army (KPA) of North Korea invaded South Korea, confident of welcome. The ROK troops were unable to halt their advance, and within two days Seoul, the capital of South Korea, had fallen. The United States was taken by surprise. South Korea was not considered of vital importance to U.S. security. However, Japan was, and President Truman, in keeping with the domino theory, believed a stable non-communist Korea was necessary to protect Japan. Unwilling to see another Asian country fall to communism, he also feared U.S. reluctance to respond would send a signal to the Soviet Union that it was free to act aggressively in Europe, the area of greatest U.S. interest. Accordingly, Truman approached the United Nations asking for a condemnation of North Korea's actions and requesting the assistance of member nations in South Korea's defense.

The UN Security Council responded quickly. It condemned North Korea's invasion of South Korea, and after a brief debate, on June 27 it issued Resolution 83, calling on the UN's members to resist North Korean aggression (the only reason the resolution passed the Security Council was because the USSR was boycotting the body over its refusal to recognize mainland communist China as the legitimate government of the country and the one who should hold the seat at the Security Council). The United States suspected the invasion of South Korea had been a ploy by the Soviets to test the U.S. response to an act of armed communist aggression. But Stalin had in fact warned Kim against it. Unwilling to start a war with the United States in Asia, he advised Kim to seek assistance not from Moscow but from Mao, whose CCP forces North Korea had aided in the Chinese civil war. Thus, while the United States immediately dispatched air and naval forces to Korea, the Soviet Union sent nothing. Initially

Kim did not need assistance, though, and North Korean troops swiftly overran nearly the entire Korean peninsula, with ROK, UN, and U.S. forces clinging to the area around the port of Pusan in the south.

The situation was reversed in September 1950 when U.S. troops led by General Douglas MacArthur landed behind KPA lines at Incheon. Seoul was swiftly retaken, and Rhee returned to power. With his original objective met, MacArthur was given a new goal: to reunify Korea under Rhee's control if possible—and if the attempt did not lead to Chinese or Soviet intervention. Despite a warning by China that its forces would enter the war should the thirty-eighth parallel be crossed, MacArthur's forces, with permission from the UN (minus the Soviets), did just that, chasing KPA troops northward toward the Yalu River, North Korea's border with China.

Although not all prominent members of the Chinese Communist Party approved of committing troops to a war in Korea, Mao favored sending aid to Kim. Chinese forces had been gathering with the intention of invading Taiwan and defeating the Nationalist government there, but when the United States moved its Seventh Fleet into the straits between Taiwan and the Chinese mainland, China's opportunity was lost. Its forces that might otherwise have gone to Taiwan now entered the fray in Korea, crossing the Yalu River on October 19, 1950. By December, Chinese and North Korean forces had sent UN and U.S. troops into retreat, back across the thirty-eighth parallel into South Korea. A cease-fire proposed by the UN was rejected by the Chinese forces, and fighting raged through the harsh Korean winter.

By July 1951, the war had turned into a deadly stalemate near where it began, along the thirty-eighth parallel. Both sides, exhausted, began to discuss peace on July 10. Negotiations dragged on for two years as the two sides fought to gain as much territory as possible before a cease-fire was finally proclaimed. On July 27, 1953, the Korean Armistice Agreement was signed. To prevent the recurrence of hostilities, a Korean Demilitarized Zone was established, roughly along the thirty-eighth parallel, to be patrolled by North and South Korean forces, and U.S. troops remained in South Korea to support their ally.

Like many of the proxy wars of the Cold War, in which the troops of nations allied with the United States and the Soviet Union faced off against one another rather than risk direct conflict between the superpowers, the Korean War was futile. Approximately three million people died in the three-year conflict, most of them Korean civilians who either were caught in the crossfire or became victims of starvation and disease, and all Korea's cities lay in ruins. No territory was gained by either side, and no political transformation occurred in either the North or the South. The country remained divided, with North Korea adopting an isolationist policy that left it cut off from the West.

Cold War Strategies

The Cold War between West and East was fought on many fronts with many strategies. Both sides provided aid and technical assistance to countries in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, many of which had been European colonies until the end of World War II. Through such aid, the United States hoped to contain the spread of communism by depriving countries of an economic reason for aligning themselves with the Soviet Union. Communism was attractive to many poor people. It promised that a nation's wealth would be used to provide for all its citizens, and under the Soviet system, people were provided with jobs, housing, education, health care, and public transportation. Although the standard of living was lower than in the West, for poor people who lived with the constant threat of hunger and homelessness and saw no chance of improving their situation, communism was an attractive alternative. What is more, the Soviet Union could claim with significant evidence that it had developed a useful path for how to transform a country from an overwhelmingly agrarian, illiterate, rural country into a world power within a generation.

Propaganda in the form of literature, visual imagery, and films was also used by each side to shore up support for its policies and political ideology, and to damage the credibility and prestige of the other side. In 1950, the U.S.-funded Radio Free Europe began broadcasting news to the countries of the Eastern Bloc, and in 1953, Radio Liberty began broadcasting to the Soviet Union. Radio Free Europe and the Free Europe Committee, an organization of American business executives and lawyers established by the U.S. government, printed leaflets and posters touting the superiority of life in capitalist countries and dropped them from weather balloons over East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary.

Soviet propaganda stressed the USSR's desire for world peace and praised the communist ideals of a classless society in which people were treated equally regardless of race or gender. This message had a strong appeal for people in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Some African Americans, confronted by the harsh realities of racism and segregation in the United States, were also attracted by these promises. Indeed, opponents of the civil rights movement in the United States often denounced it as communist in nature.

Both sides highlighted their ingenuity and technological achievements. The two countries competed to dominate space. In 1957, the United States suffered a serious blow to its pride when the Soviet Union launched *Sputnik*, the first satellite. In response, in

1958 President Dwight D. Eisenhower called on Congress to establish an agency to explore space. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) was established that year. In 1961 the Soviet Union sent the first astronaut into space. In 1969, although it had already lost the space race in the eyes of much of the world, the United States put the first humans on the surface of the moon.

Espionage was another important tool, carried out by the United States through the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) formed in 1947, and by the USSR with its spy agency the KGB. Besides surveilling the other nation, these agencies also plotted, assisted in, and carried out acts of sabotage and the assassination of those deemed enemies of their country. Both the CIA and the KGB fomented discontent in foreign nations as well, trained fighting forces, and encouraged revolution and insurgency to topple foreign governments and install leaders who would be friendly to their respective countries. The CIA, for example, trained Cuban insurgents with the goal of overthrowing the Caribbean island's communist government under Fidel Castro in 1961. Similarly, the KGB gave assistance to Vietnamese communists attempting to defeat the government of South Vietnam during the Vietnam War.

The most dangerous venue for competition, however, and the two sides' chief means of reining in aggression on the part of the other, was the stockpiling of massive nuclear arsenals. In 1949, the Soviet Union detonated an atomic bomb, ending the U.S. monopoly on nuclear weapons. In 1952 the United States took the next step, one opposed by some of the same atomic scientists who had worked on the Manhattan Project during World War II, and developed the hydrogen bomb, testing it on the Pacific atoll of Eniwetok in 1952. This missile was one thousand times more powerful than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. U.S. development of such a weapon meant the Soviet Union needed to do the same.

In the 1950s, both the United States and the USSR developed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) as well. Now missiles armed with nuclear warheads could be launched from within the home country's own territory or within the borders of satellite nations; an air force capable of intercepting bomb-bearing planes was no longer sufficient to protect against nuclear attack. Although countries in both the Western and Eastern Blocs prepared for potential war by creating shelters to protect citizens in the event of nuclear war, neither side put great faith in its ability to emerge victorious. Both the United States and the USSR quickly came to believe that the key to survival lay in building an immense retaliatory capacity, the ability to unleash devastation so great that the other side would never detonate the first bomb for fear of its own annihilation. In the United States, this defense policy came to be referred to as "mutually assured destruction" (MAD). Should these nuclear stockpiles prove unsuccessful at deterring a conflict, the large military forces the rivals built up during the Cold War, along with billions of dollars' worth of battleships, submarines, and fighter jets, ensured they possessed the capacity to fight a conventional war as well.

6.2: Decolonization

Why Empires Fell

In 1950, Aimé Césaire argued that Europe was morally and spiritually indefensible. He described Europe as a decadent, stricken, and dying civilization because of its failure to address the problems it caused, overlook its most urgent issues, and its convenient or misleading application of principles. Césaire listed the colonial problem as one of the two issues that Europe's existence has created (the other being the proletariat). A striking example, according to this Afro-Martinian politician, is Hitler. The European outrage surrounding him was not because of his crime against humanity (the literal word in Césaire's discourse is "man"), the humiliation of human beings, but because he applied to Europe "colonialist procedures" that had previously been used only against "the Arabs of Algeria, the coolies of India, and the blacks of Africa."

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain why European empires weakened after World War II.
- Compare different paths to decolonization, including negotiated independence, partition, armed liberation, revolution, and non-alignment.
- Analyze how decolonization became entangled with Cold War politics in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America.
- Explain why newly independent states often faced unresolved problems of borders, dependency, racial hierarchy, and foreign intervention.

The defeat of Germany and Japan freed the people of the nations these two would-be empires had conquered, but it also caused people dominated by older empires to question the legitimacy of imperialism. In many of Europe's and the United States' imperial possessions, the struggle for independence began long before World War Two, however. European and American justifications for empire included the claim that people such as Britain's subjects in India and the America's in the Philippines were unprepared to stand on their own as independent nations. This claim was undermined by the effectiveness of the Indians and Filipinos in World War II. The leaders of national liberation often came out of these experiences reasoning that since they were already experienced at running their own nations as administrators for the empires, it was time for the imperialists to leave. After the war, the nations that had been targeted by Germany (Britain, France, and the Netherlands) all attempted to separate their reaction to this attack from the response of colonial populations to their return.

The timing of national liberation was complicated by the growing conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, which was both a competition to dominate territory and control alliances as well as an ideological struggle between capitalism and communism. This conflict was known as the "Cold War," since the two countries never directly attacked one another. Instead they fought a series of proxy wars that occurred within the context of decolonization. Each superpower competed to recruit more new nations to their side, pouring military and economic aid into the new developing countries.

Despite the Cold War, at times the process of independence was peacefully achieved through mutual agreement. In the Philippines, for example, the U.S. government handed over power to a local Filipino government within a year of ending the war with Japan. President Harry Truman recognized the independence of the Philippines on July 4, 1946. In the days leading up to the announcement, the American and Filipino governments worked out arrangements allowing the U.S. to retain dozens of military bases and for American businesses to have preferential access to the raw materials and markets of the newly independent nation.

Sometimes, peaceful political pressure from organized movements also led to liberation. Indian independence, examined below, is the first and prime example of how non-violent protest, boycotts, and moral suasion could result in freedom. However, there are also many cases in which independence could only be achieved through a more violent guerrilla struggle, as European imperialists were unwilling to let go of their colonies despite the desires of the colonized.

Independence, Partition, and the Problem of Borders

The British withdrawal from India was an early example of decolonization affecting a large part of the world after World War

II. Since the 19th century the Indian National Congress had played a leading role in the push for independence. Over 700,000 Indians fought for Britain in World War I, and more than 2.5 million in World War II. The Muslim League supported British recruitment again, but Congress demanded independence before helping. In 1942, Congress launched the “Quit India” campaign, leading Britain to imprison leaders until 1945, including Gandhi, who was released in 1944 due to health issues.

British war strategy caused a 1943 famine in Bengal, killing 3 million. The Japanese invasion of Burma led 500,000 Hindu refugees to Bengal. British policies in southern Bengal included burning boats and destroying crops to prevent Japanese capture, with little concern for Bengali suffering. Churchill, aware of Gandhi and India's importance to the war effort, showed callousness, reportedly asking, “Why hasn't Gandhi died yet?” Britain borrowed billions from India and relied on it for resources, transforming India into a major industrial power by 1947 and setting the stage for independence.

However, Indian independence was complicated by internal divisions worsened by the British, who encouraged Hindu-Muslim splits by sending troops to police each group. Religious divides also influenced the independence movement. Gandhi wanted a united India, but Jinnah and the Muslim League pushed for two states, proposing Pakistan as an Islamic “Pure Land.” Hindu nationalists supported this to rid their country of Muslims. As independence neared, escalating violence threatened civil war, with Muslims and Hindus attacking each other in towns. Congress leader Nehru, soon India's first Prime Minister, accepted partition, creating Pakistan with its current territories, including what is now Bangladesh.

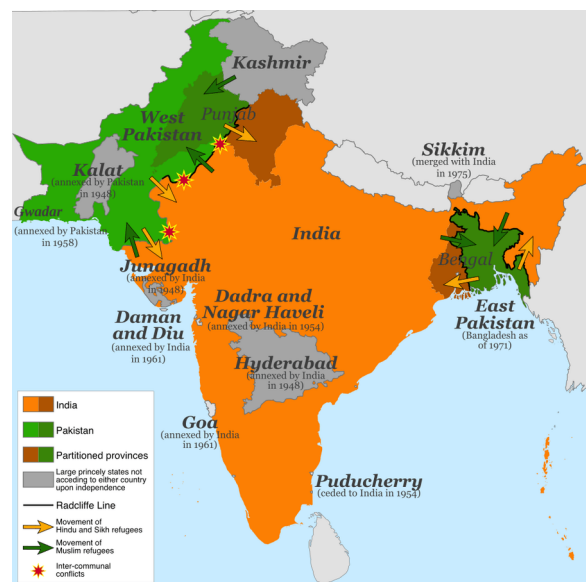


Figure 6.2.1: The partition of British India created India and Pakistan, producing massive refugee movements, communal violence, and unresolved border disputes. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Unknown via Wikimedia Commons). Detailed Description of Figure 6.2.1.

After 1947 independence, partition created a Hindu nation with borders into Muslim Pakistan to the east and west. These borders displaced 12 million people, with many dying during migration and refugee crises. Some Hindu nationalists, including the extremist who assassinated Gandhi in 1948, saw partition as insufficient. The borders were hastily drawn, and Kashmir remains disputed; a Hindu prince chose to join India, leading to protests by Pakistan and Kashmiris. Now nuclear nations, India and Pakistan's Kashmir conflict endures as a legacy of imperialism, risking regional and global peace.

Palestine and Israel

After World War I, Britain was given a mandate to govern Palestine and resource-rich regions of Arabia and Iraq. During the interwar years, Britain allowed Zionists, advocating a Jewish homeland, to buy land and migrate to Palestine, where Zionist immigration began in the late 19th century. This wave included socialists creating cooperatives called kibbutzim and Europeans building cities like Tel Aviv, influenced by Bauhaus architecture. However, increased Zionist migration heightened tensions with local Palestinian Arabs, leading to riots in 1921 and a revolt from 1936 to 1939 over land, water, and political power.

The Nazi Holocaust seemed to confirm the Zionist view: Jews would never be safe in Europe and needed their own homeland. Britain considered allowing 100,000 Nazi camp survivors to resettle in Palestine but hesitated due to Arab opposition. Zionist settlers had formed the *Haganah* in the 1920s. After the war, the *Haganah* engaged in sabotage against the British and organized illegal arms shipments. Breakaway radical groups like the *Irgun* formed, bombing the British HQ at the King David Hotel in 1946,

killing 91, and attacking Deir Hassin in 1948, killing over a hundred. Despite apologies, the Deir Hassin massacre remains a rallying cry and justification for Palestinian terrorist attacks.

In 1947, Britain transferred their mandate over Palestine to the UN, which sought to create a Jewish homeland—the new state of Israel. Zionists gained more land and resources than justified by their population. As Britain withdrew in May 1948, Israel declared independence based on UN borders, rejected by Arabs and neighboring countries. Arab states immediately declared war, but Israel, with powerful allies, fought back and expanded its borders. Israel claimed it needed a wider perimeter and argued many Arab towns were abandoned, expecting Arab victory. Israel destroyed over 500 Arab villages and displaced over 800,000 Arab refugees, seeking shelter elsewhere. Conflicts continued in 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1982. With tenacity, strong organization, and aid from the U.S. and Europe, the Israelis maintained their stance in conflicts and expanded settlement policies, creating “facts on the ground.” The Arab world viewed Israel as a Western-made, arbitrary creation and refused recognition. Peace agreements included Egypt in 1979, returning Sinai, and Jordan in 1994, relinquishing claims to the West Bank.



Figure 6.2.2: A map showing the shrinking of Palestinian land and the expansion of Israeli control over time. (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0; Unknown via Visualizing Palestine). Detailed Description of Figure 6.2.2.

Armed Liberation: Vietnam, Kenya, and Algeria

Although Great Britain peacefully retreated from India and Palestine, resistance was strong elsewhere, notably in Africa, especially Kenya. By early 20th century, 30,000 settlers owned prime land, leaving 5 million Kenyans landless. The 1952 Mau Mau revolt began as Kenyans resisted colonial rule; settlers owned most fertile land, and natives had little. Britain responded harshly to the revolt, confining many Kenyans and torturing suspected fighters. The uprising ended in 1963 as white settlers hesitated to leave. Power shifted to native leaders like Jomo Kenyatta, who became Kenya’s first Prime Minister and President, promoting national unity, economic growth, and education. Kenyatta sought to balance capitalism and social welfare and was a Pan-Africanist hero.

The British weren’t the only Europeans to lose colonial empires. France, defeated by Germany, aimed to regain colonies like Algeria. Algerian revolutionaries had resisted French rule since before WWII, with violent clashes occurring in 1945 when French settlers attacked local Algerians who were peacefully protesting the Allied victory in WWII. With French military support in a series of massacres and bombings called the Setif massacres the settlers and French military killed thousands of civilians and resistance fighters. In 1954, Algerians launched widespread attacks, inspired by France’s loss in Indochina. The main resistance organization called the FLN used guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and torture to attempt to push out the French. France responded brutally, deploying over 400,000 troops; casualties included over a million, comprising soldiers, civilians, and Algerian fighters. Algerian independence was recognized in 1962, and the country joined the United Nations.

France aimed to regain control in its colonies in French Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia), but the local population had different ideas. Revolutionaries were led by Ho Chi Minh (1890-1969), who as a young man worked as a kitchen helper on a steamship from Saigon to Marseille in 1911. Ho applied to the French Colonial Administrative School in Marseille, but was rejected. He then worked on ships and traveled for five more years, visiting the U.S. several times and claiming to meet Black nationalist Marcus Garvey. Between 1913 and 1919, he worked in England and France, joined Vietnamese nationalists in Paris, and petitioned

at the Versailles peace talks for Vietnamese civil rights, citing Wilson's "14 Points". Ho wrote to Wilson, but was ignored.

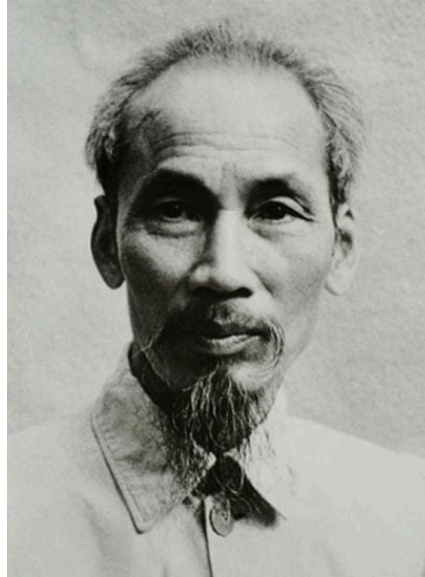


Figure 6.2.3: Hồ Chí Minh, a Vietnamese revolutionary and nationalist leader associated with anticolonial struggle and Cold War-era conflicts in Southeast Asia. (CC0 1.0; Unknown via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

In 1938, Ho returned to China as an advisor to the Chinese Communist army. By 1941, he led the Vietnamese independence movement. The Japanese invasion gave independence fighters, aided by the U.S. Office of Strategic Services (OSS), a chance to resist. After WWII, Ho wrote a Vietnam declaration based on the US Declaration of Independence. He petitioned Truman to recognize Vietnam, citing the Atlantic Charter, but got no response. British and Chinese troops occupied Vietnam to support France, local Vietnamese rioted, killing about a hundred French citizens. French retaliation armed Japanese prisoners and massacred over 6,000 Vietnamese, reflecting colonial empire tactics.

Kenya, Algeria, and Vietnam weren't the only places where imperial powers and their allies responded violently to colonized movements. For example, in 1947, France killed 80,000 in Madagascar supporting independence. The Indonesian War of Independence started in 1945, with about 8,000 Dutch troops and 100,000 Indonesians killed, ending with Dutch recognition of Indonesian independence in 1949. Fears of communism also led the United States to support some of the actions of imperial powers.

Revolution and Nationalism in the Middle East

Independence in Middle East Arab countries came gradually. Kingdoms like Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Jordan solidified between the world wars, and Arab republics emerged in Syria and Lebanon. In the 1950s, Egypt exemplified regional politics and symbolized Arab hopes. It was a land of poverty beside wealth, with a vibrant political scene under an outdated monarchy. Most Egyptians were landless farmers or fellaheen under pasha landlords. Urban dwellers toiled, while a cosmopolitan class relaxed in European-style cafes and casinos in Cairo. King Farouk's misrule alienated him from his people, government, and military. In 1952, revolutionary officers known as the Free Officers Movement ousted the king, declared Egypt a one-party republic, and suppressed other political groups. Eventually, Gamal Nasser became president.



Figure 6.2.4: Gamal Nasser, an Egyptian leader associated with Arab nationalism, non-alignment, and postcolonial state-building. (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0; Zeinab Mohamed via Flickr).

Nasser and officers transformed Egypt by breaking up cotton estates for landless farmers and nationalizing major businesses to shift toward self-sufficiency. Rural Egyptians gained landownership, while aristocrats, industrialists, and foreigners lost wealth. Islam was marginalized, and religion became private, though Nasser claimed devoutness. State factories offered profit-sharing and set hours. Nasser supported urban poor via subsidies, price controls, and expanded social services like healthcare and education.

Nasser attempted to develop the economy through policies like the Aswan Dam on the Nile, providing flood control, electricity, and a national reservoir. The US initially offered aid but withdrew in 1956 due to distrust. Nasser then nationalized the Suez Canal, which was operated by a joint British-French corporation, hoping to use the tolls to fund the dam. Britain and France, angry and viewing Nasser as a dictator, sought UN intervention but secretly planned to retake the canal with Israel's help.

In 1956, Israeli troops invaded during the Suez Crisis after Egypt seized the canal. Britain and France landed troops to reoccupy the canal, claiming to protect it amid the conflict. Secretly, France had persuaded Israel and Britain to attack Egypt, using Israel's invasion as cover. The world responded strongly. The Soviet Union threatened nuclear attack, and the U.S. cut aid to Britain and France. Britain and France withdrew under pressure from superpowers, revealing their decline in global power. Egyptians united behind Nasser, expelled foreigners, and erased Cairo's cosmopolitan image. UN troops secured the canal and the Egypt-Israel border, in the end it was a pivotal moment that marked the decline of the old imperial powers and the rise of a new international order.

After the Suez Crisis, admiration for Nasser grew across the Arab world. His success in modernizing Egypt and challenging the West fueled belief in Pan-Arabism—the unification of Arab nations—and positioned Egypt as the regional leader. Egypt's rapid economic growth symbolized a future of industrial, secular, socialist progress. Voice of the Arabs Radio from Cairo promoted anti-imperialism and Pan-Arabist revolution to poor, illiterate Arabs via cheap radios. This inspired military coups in Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Tunisia, and Yemen in the 1950s and 1960s, some successful.

Unlike Nasser's secular Pan-Arabism, King Faisal prioritized Islamic solidarity, focusing Saudi foreign policy on Islam and a united Muslim world. Sharing a Muslim identity allowed Saudi Arabia to align with Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, bolstering Faisal's authority. Traditionally, the Saudi ruling family shared power with religious scholars (Ulema), but Faisal sought to limit their role, positioning himself as the patron of the Islamic world. He secured the Ulema's allegiance to his modernization efforts while they remained influential.

Egypt was drawn into the Israel issue, uniting with Arab nations in hostility to Israel's establishment. In the 1960s, clashes occurred between Israel and Syria and Jordan, while Palestinian fedayeen (guerilla fighters) launched raids on Israeli settlements. A UN peacekeeping force maintained relative peace on the Egypt-Israel border, but Nasser faced pressure to challenge Israel, especially after Egypt modernized the military with Soviet help. In 1967, Soviet false claims of an Israeli invasion prompted Nasser to deploy troops and demand that UN peacekeepers withdraw.

Israel launched a surprise attack, destroying Egypt, Syria, and Jordan's air forces in hours. With air superiority, Israeli forces captured Sinai, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights, defeating the Egyptian army. Nasser announced his resignation, but citizens rallied to urge him to stay. The war ended Pan-Arab dreams and the vision of a united Arab Middle East.

National Liberation in Africa

African anticolonial movements drew strength from various sources. The Atlantic Charter promised self-determination in WWII, inspiring activists to challenge colonial rule. In 1945, the Fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester united activists from Africa, the Caribbean, the US, India, Sri Lanka, and Central America, calling for an end to colonialism. They argued freedom was universal, linking local struggles to a shared African and Black political destiny. This fostered leaders who viewed independence as part of a broader continental and global movement.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, Ghana was the first to gain independence after World War II. Then called the Gold Coast, the society pressed for self-rule. Colonial schools created English-speaking students from all ethnic groups, united in shared hardships and hopes. Farmers who protested British trade monopolies believed independence would give them direct access to markets. Urban slum dwellers and rural migrants sought modern amenities, fueling discontent. Veterans protested for better pensions. Kwame Nkrumah unified diverse groups into the Convention People's Party, gathering support through rallies, strikes, and riots, despite his imprisonment. This pressured Britain to start elections and independence steps. In 1951, after winning over 90%, Nkrumah was released to lead a transitional government. Over six years, he built infrastructure, negotiated with leaders, and planned a national economy. Ghana declared independence in 1957, joining the UN, signaling a promising future for Africa.

Kwame Nkrumah epitomized a new breed of African leader in the 1950s-60s—eager, charismatic, and skilled at rallying support domestically and internationally. Educated in the US and Europe, often inspired by Pan-Africanism, these elites used colonial legacies and embraced socialism to modernize their nations. However, resisting authoritarianism was easier for them as revolutionaries than when in power, as Nkrumah exemplified by declaring Ghana a one-party state in 1960 and himself president for life.

In 1960, Nigeria celebrated independence from Britain. With Africa's largest population, many believed Nigeria would become a leading power. Its borders united diverse communities and three main ethnic groups: the Muslim Hausa/Fulani in the north, with a feudal Islamic order; the Yoruba in the west, wealthy from palm oil and commerce; and the Igbos in the east, influenced by missions, mainly Christian, serving as civil servants, engineers, and teachers. By independence, regional political parties had solidified Nigeria's divisions into Western (Yoruba), Eastern (Igbo), and Northern (Hausa/Fulani) regions.

Proponents of national unity persisted, but as initial joy over independence faded, fear and dysfunction entered the government. Southerners from both regions worried politicians would divert wealth to the Muslim north and Islamize the country. Northerners feared southern advantages would subordinate the north and resented Igbo civil servants. In 1966, a failed coup killed northern politicians, leading to pogroms against Igbos, killing thousands and displacing many. When the government failed to protect citizens and further pogroms occurred after a second coup placed northern military leaders in power, the Igbos declared secession as Biafra.

A three-year civil war exemplifies the secession challenge faced by newly independent states in the mid-20th century. Countries like Nigeria, Indonesia, Pakistan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo faced secessionist movements. For groups like the Igbos of Biafra, despite claims to self-determination, obstacles included fighting well-equipped armies, establishing states, and gaining international recognition. When Biafra declared independence, almost all African countries and the UN refused recognition. By the 1960s, most African states accepted colonial borders to curb secession, and while the UN supported decolonization, it argued self-determination alone didn't justify border changes if a people were already represented. The possibility of newly independent states being as oppressive as empires troubled the world. Without a modern army or international support, Biafra collapsed. The Nigerian government pursued reconciliation, but military rule continued for 30 years.

In the Belgian Congo, Cold War tensions fueled violence. When Belgium promised independence in 30 years, groups like the Congolese National Movement and the Alliance of Bakongo demanded it immediately. Black Congolese protested, often rioting and refusing to pay taxes. White residents formed militias and attacked Black residents. Seeing the strength of protests, Belgium agreed to grant Congo independence on June 30, 1960. The violence did not end there. After Émile Janssens, the White commander of the Force Publique, made clear to Black troops that White officers would stay in charge, soldiers mutinied. Patrice Lumumba, the elected prime minister and leader of the Congolese National Movement, replaced Janssens with a Black commander and promoted Black soldiers. Despite these changes, the mutiny persisted, and White people were attacked nationwide, leading Belgian forces to invade for protection.

During chaos, Congo's Katanga province declared independence. Lamumba appealed to the UN to stop secession, but they refused, citing non-interference in internal matters. He asked the U.S. for help, but was denied, then turned to the Soviet Union, which supplied weapons and advisers. His Soviet support branded him a communist. Exploiting the chaos, Colonel Mobutu, the chief of the Army and the President Joseph Kasa-Vubu deposed Lamumba and handed him over to the secessionists. Lamumba was later killed by Katangese troops with CIA support.

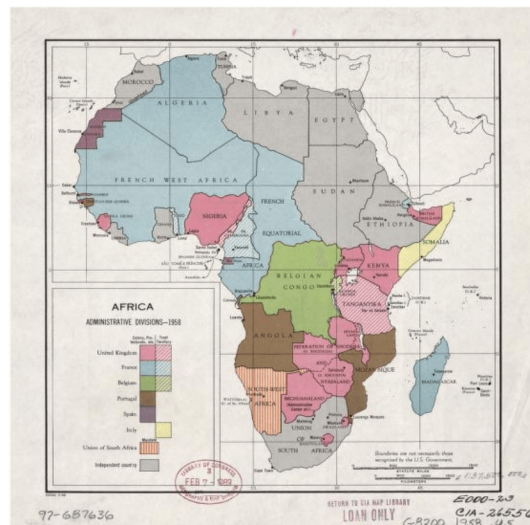


Figure 6.2.5: Africa in 1958 remained largely divided among European colonial powers, even as independence movements were rapidly reshaping the continent. (CC0 1.0; CIA via [Library of Congress](#)). [Detailed Description of Figure 6.2.5.](#)

Unlike Britain, France, and Belgium, Portugal refused to give up its colonies. The nationalist, quasi-fascist Second Portuguese Republic, in power since 1933, saw them as part of Portugal and believed Portugal ensured order and civilization in Africa. Independence movements emerged in Portugal's colonies of Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique. Some aimed for Western-style self-government, others for communism. In Angola, Portuguese troops fought the FNLA, MPLA, and UNITA, representing different regions and ideologies. Mozambique's Marxist Mozambique Liberation Front sought independence, as did Guinea-Bissau's African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde.

The Cold War affected the fight in Portuguese colonies. The USSR, China, Romania, Cuba, and Yugoslavia aided independence groups, while the US did not, as Portugal was a NATO member. In 1974, Portuguese military officers overthrew the government and established a democracy. They granted independence to Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Cape Verde, and São Tomé and Príncipe. Violence continued, with Angola's 1975 civil war, where the US supported UNITA and FNLA against MPLA.

Violence erupted in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). White residents, opposed to British plans for majority rule, declared independence in 1965 with Ian Smith as prime minister, which Britain opposed. Civil war ensued between the White government and Black nationalist groups ZAPU (led by Joshua Nkomo) and ZANU (led by Robert Mugabe). The USSR supported ZAPU, China supported ZANU. After years of violent resistance to White minority rule an independent Zimbabwe was recognized in 1980. Mugabe became prime minister, and Nkomo's followers faced repression until their parties merged in 1987.

Similar to Rhodesia, Black Africans in South Africa fought for independence against White Africans, not European powers. In 1909, the British Cape Colony, Natal, and Boer republics of Transvaal and the Orange Free State formed a self-governing dominion within the British Empire. Only Whites ruled, with Africans barred from voting, owning land in most areas, or living in certain regions, often being forcibly relocated to "homelands." In 1948, a system called apartheid, formalized racial segregation, and in 1950, the Suppression of Communism Act banned the anti-apartheid South African Communist Party and actions to end racial discrimination. When the UK allowed a 1960 referendum on remaining a dominion, most Africans couldn't vote. In 1961, South Africa became a republic, but the liberation movement continued.

From its start, groups like the ANC (African National Congress) and PAC (Pan-Africanist Congress) fought apartheid, initially through peaceful protests. After protesters were killed in Sharpeville and both groups banned in 1960, activists turned to sabotage, attacks, and strikes. In 1976, protests erupted in Black townships against a law requiring Black students to learn Afrikaans, leading to police firing on students in Soweto, killing over one hundred. Over decades, many activists were arrested, imprisoned, or executed, including one prominent leader named Nelson Mandela. By the 1980s, opposition, sanctions, boycotts,

and condemnation pressured the regime into forcing an end to White minority rule and apartheid in 1991. In 1994, South Africa held its first racially inclusive elections, with the ANC winning and Mandela becoming president.

Latin America: Revolution, Intervention, and Dependency

In the 1930s and 1940s, the U.S. practiced what it termed the “Good Neighbor Policy,” avoiding intervention in Western Hemisphere nations, which had been a hallmark of US policy in the region previously. However, in the 1950s and 1960s in the name of anticommunism, Washington again adopted interventionist policies in Latin America and the Caribbean. In 1944, Guatemala overthrew dictator Jorge Ubico, in power since 1931. Juan José Arévalo became the first democratically elected president in 1945, succeeded by Jacobo Árbenz in 1951, who pushed land reforms and legalized a communist labor union, the Guatemalan Party of Labor. Árbenz did not aim to align with the Eastern Bloc, but Soviet influence was active elsewhere.

Some in the U.S. argued that Guatemala was drifting toward communism, especially those with close connections to the United Fruit Company, a U.S. firm with banana plantations across Central America. As Guatemala's largest landowner, United Fruit opposed land limits and saw Árbenz's land reforms and support for the labor party as threats to their profits. It lobbied the Truman and Eisenhower administrations to oust Árbenz. Eisenhower, John Foster Dulles, and CIA head Allen Dulles, all with strong links to United Fruit, played key roles. In 1954, CIA-backed forces led by Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas deposed Árbenz, and established a dictatorship that banned opposition and targeted unions.

In 1952, Fulgencio Batista seized power in Cuba in a U.S.-backed coup, controlling the island with secret police, silencing opponents, and protecting wealthy landowners, including U.S. sugar executives. Opposition was led by to brothers Fidel and Raul Castro. Fidel and his brother organized opposition to Batista rooting their support in Cuba's working class. They launched an uprising on July 26, 1953, with attacks on military bases, but failed, and the Castros were imprisoned. Two years later, they fled to Mexico, trained with Ernesto “Che” Guevara, and planned their return. In 1956, Fidel and followers returned to Cuba, led the 26th of July Movement, and fought Batista's regime. After two years, Batista fled to the Dominican Republic, and on January 2, 1959, the rebels entered Havana triumphantly.



Figure 6.2.6: Fidel Castro signs the agrarian reform law. (CC0 1.0; Unknown via [Wikimedia Commons](#)). Detailed Description of Figure 6.2.6.

Initially, the U.S. recognized Cuba's new government. Fidel Castro appeared on The Ed Sullivan Show after his forces' victory and sought aid from the U.S. His UN speech declared Cuba non-aligned and denied being communist. Despite protests, Castro worried some in the U.S. government and corporate elite who had deep investments in Cuba and began land reform, forbade foreign ownership, and appointed communists like Che Guevara to government posts. In August 1960, Cuba nationalized foreign companies, many of them were U.S.-owned. Wealthy Cubans fled to the U.S., just 90 miles away. The U.S. imposed sanctions on the island. Without U.S. aid, Castro turned to the Soviet Union. On April 17, 1961, the CIA-sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion ended in failure after three days, humiliating the U.S. and boosting support for Castro and Cuban nationalism. It also led Castro to seek Soviet protection.

Non-Alignment and the “Third World”

The Cold War is described as a conflict between Western and Eastern blocs led by the U.S. and Soviet Union. Many countries didn't want this choice, especially new nations in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Caribbean, who aimed to protect sovereignty after imperial rule. Non-alignment arose to create space for these countries to avoid becoming satellites or battlegrounds. The term “Third World” originated here, initially signifying a political stance outside U.S.-aligned “First World” and Soviet-aligned “Second World,” not poverty. Over time, it linked to development issues, but originally described countries striving to escape colonial and Cold War influence, showing the world couldn't be understood through Washington and Moscow alone. Non-alignment wasn't neutrality; it refused subordination to either bloc while taking strong positions on issues like colonialism, racism, nuclear weapons, and sovereignty. Leaders could accept aid but tried to prevent dependence. Some became authoritarian or shifted closer to one bloc, others used non-alignment as diplomacy. The idea challenged superpowers' right to organize the world around rivalry.

After World War II, European nations mostly aligned with the Western or Eastern Bloc, except Yugoslavia. In 1942, communist partisans formed a government, AVNOJ, and drove out the Germans, Italians, and defeated their local allies, establishing Democratic Federal Yugoslavia with Tito as prime minister in 1943. In 1945, monarchy was abolished, and Tito's leadership was recognized through an election. Yugoslavia was a communist state and co-founded the Cominform in 1947 to coordinate European communist efforts against anti-communism, with the Soviet Union as the leading force.

Tito and Stalin clashed early, as Tito wanted to include Bulgaria, Albania, parts of Greece, Italy, and Austria in Yugoslavia, but Stalin opposed these claims. Yugoslavia supported Greek communists, which Stalin also disapproved of, fearing Western backlash. Tito refused a secondary role, insisting Yugoslavia should be treated as an equal since it liberated itself from the Axis. In 1948, the Cominform expelled Yugoslavia. Tito turned to the U.S., which helped Yugoslavia survive despite limited trade with Eastern neighbors. To avoid becoming a U.S. puppet however, Yugoslavia became economically independent in the 1950s and traded with both blocs. In 1960, Tito urged non-aligned nations to unite for decolonization, disarmament, and economic equality. Yugoslavia's non-alignment made it unique in Europe, though many former colonies sought to balance between superpowers.

In April 1955 representatives from twenty-nine such countries in Asia and Africa gathered at a conference in Bandung, Indonesia. Their goal was to be able to rely on one another as they strove to industrialize and avoid the need to turn to Europe, the United States, or the Soviet Union for assistance. This aim formed the basis for the Non-Aligned Movement, an attempt by newly independent nations to stay out of the orbit of either the Western or the Eastern Bloc.

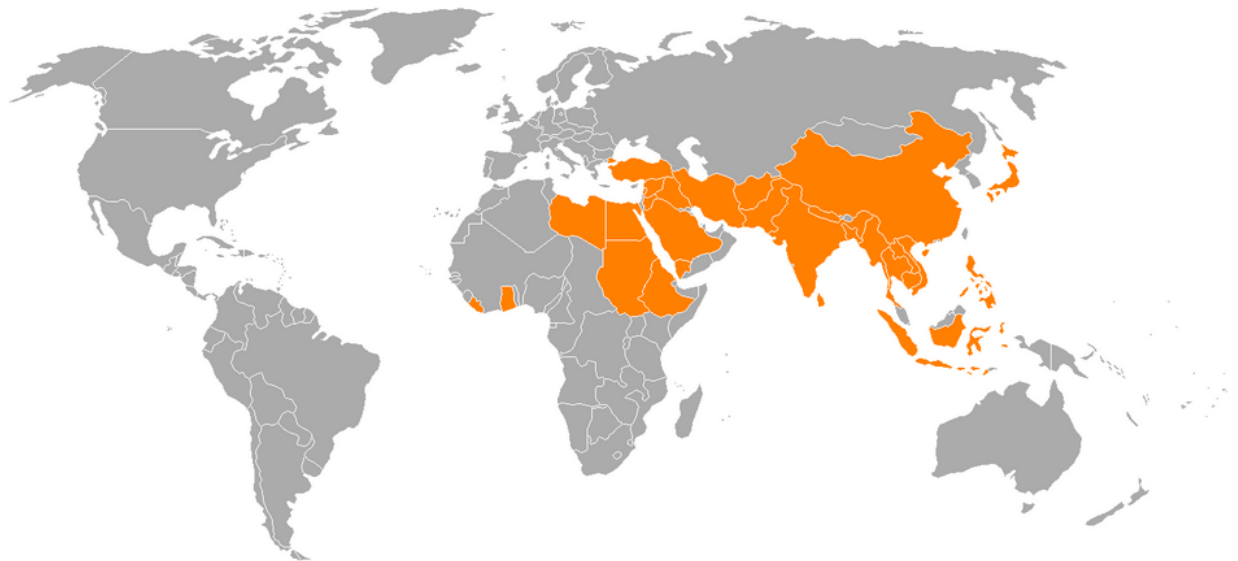


Figure 6.2.7: Twenty-nine countries attended the Bandung Conference, representing more than half of the world's population. (CC BY-SA 4.0; 23prootie via [Wikimedia Commons](#)). [Detailed Description of Figure 6.2.7.](#)

6.3: The Late Cold War

A Changing Cold War

China and the Soviet Union had once been firm allies. The Soviet Union had supported the Chinese Communist Party since its founding and had signed the Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance in 1950. It had given China both money and valuable technical assistance as the latter sought to build its industrial capacity. However, because Mao had greatly admired Stalin, he disapproved of Khrushchev's 1956 denunciation of him. He also believed that as China's leader since 1949, he had "seniority" over Khrushchev, in power only since 1953. In Mao's eyes, he himself, not Khrushchev, should be the leader of world communism.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain how the Cold War changed during the 1970s and 1980s.
- Compare proxy wars, revolutions, counterinsurgency, and state violence in different regions.
- Analyze how human rights, anti-apartheid activism, and democratic movements challenged Cold War politics.
- Explain how the Soviet bloc began to unravel by the end of the 1980s.

The "Sino-Soviet split" widened when Khrushchev, fearing Mao's insistence on attacking Taiwan might provoke war with the United States, refused to provide China with nuclear weapons. Khrushchev's actions were representative of Mao's chief criticism of the Soviet Union after the death of Stalin. The Soviets, Mao believed, had become too comfortable as leaders of the communist world and were no longer willing to risk confrontation with the United States or other imperialist powers if this would jeopardize their position. The USSR was doing too little, in the eyes of China, to support decolonization struggles in Africa and Asia and wars of independence. Indeed, far from being anti-imperialist, to some it appeared that the Soviets had created their own empire in Europe. Other issues contributed to the rift. In the clash between India and China in 1962, for example, the USSR supported India; in 1969, Soviet and Chinese forces clashed in a dispute over their shared border. In the late 1960s, China cut back its financing of North Vietnam's war against the South, and North Vietnam turned to the Soviet Union to fill the gap.

The United States was eager to capitalize on the Sino-Soviet split in hopes of securing several advantages. In 1972 Nixon visited China, the first sitting U.S. president to do so, and met with Mao. This effort to improve U.S. relations with China threatened to isolate the Soviet Union, so in turn the Soviets agreed to hold a Moscow Summit meeting between Brezhnev and Nixon in May 1972. The United States then used the Soviet desire for closer relations to exert pressure on North Vietnam. In March 1972, after the North launched an offensive against the South, Nixon threatened to call off the Moscow Summit if the Soviets did not force North Vietnam to the peace table.

In the end, the United States' efforts to extricate itself from the war were successful. At the peace talks in Paris, North Vietnam and the United States agreed to the U.S. withdrawal from South Vietnam in 1973. The war continued until 1975, however, when North Vietnam defeated South Vietnam, and the country was reunified under a communist government. All told, the war had cost the lives of more than one million people.

China after Mao

The excesses of the Cultural Revolution in China spelled the end of both Mao Zedong's power and, to some, the Chinese Revolution. By the time of Lin Biao's death in 1971, China had suffered badly. The economy was in shambles and the government had difficulty fulfilling basic functions. As Mao retreated into depression and ill health, his role was increasingly taken over by "The Gang of Four," consisting of Mao's wife Jiang Qing, his chosen successor Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao, and Yao Wenyuan. However, they were primarily concerned with ensuring ideological purity and the continuation of "revolutionary" political thought. Crucial matters such as the economy were left in the hands of Premier Zhou Enlai.

Zhou, however, was dying of cancer and needed help, so with Mao's permission he returned Deng Xiaoping to power to assist him. Zhou and Deng managed the government and the economy, with more of the work falling to Deng as Zhou withdrew from

public life. Following Zhou's death in January 1976, the Gang of Four managed to oust Deng Xiaoping from power once more, but this time he did not remain away for long.



Figure 6.3.1: Deng Xiaoping and Jimmy Carter at the arrival ceremony for the Vice Premier of China, 1979. (CC0 1.0; U.S. National Archives and Records Administration via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

Following Mao's death on September 9, 1976, his successor as Chairman of the Communist Party, Hua Guofeng had the Gang of Four arrested and Deng returned to power. Deng was made vice premier in 1977 and used his position to reverse many policies of the Cultural Revolution. In 1978, he replaced Hua as leader of China and argued that the country needed to focus on modernizing and building its economy instead of continuing to pursue radical revolutionary upheaval. He instituted a policy of *Boluan Fanzheng* ("correct the wrong/return to normal"), in which the reputations of those imprisoned under Mao were "rehabilitated," and those still alive were returned to power. The Chinese system of higher education returned to normalcy as Deng reinstated entrance examinations, which had been suspended during the Cultural Revolution. He declared that scientists and intellectuals were deserving of respect because modernization could not proceed without their contributions.

Deng also instituted a sweeping set of economic reforms based on the "Four Modernizations" of agriculture, industry, defense, and science and technology. Collective farms were broken up and replaced with a system where farmers met a government quota and then sold their surplus for personal profit. Entrepreneurs were also encouraged to start their own businesses. The country was opened to foreign investment, and foreign companies were invited to open Chinese branches. In the 1980s and 1990s, a few elements of capitalism were introduced. Private management of many state industries was allowed, and although the largest remained under government control, people's incomes and the Chinese standard of living swiftly improved. Along with economic changes, alterations took place in foreign policy. In the 1980s, China decreased its support for revolutionary activity in other countries, with some exceptions, such as its support for anti-Soviet forces in Afghanistan and for Cambodians fighting the Vietnamese invasion. Beginning in the late 1980s, relations with the Soviet Union also began to improve, and trade between the USSR and China increased.

In 1980, Deng called for political reform as well. He criticized the cumbersome Chinese bureaucracy and called for term limits on political positions and a redrafting of the constitution. However, he had no intention of allowing opposition to the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In 1986, university students began a series of protests in major Chinese cities. The government suppressed their actions, but in 1989 protests broke out again.

Beginning on April 17, students in Beijing gathered at Tiananmen Square to mourn the recent death of party official Hu Yaobang, who had supported them. They called for democratic reform, an end to government censorship, greater rights to protest, and more money for education. They and other protesters also decried corruption in the CCP and what they perceived as mismanagement of China's economy. Reforms had improved life for farmers, but industrial workers and urban dwellers had not benefited. In the coming weeks, some students marched through the streets in angry protest, while others refused to abandon the square. On the evening of June 3, 1989, tanks entered Beijing, and over the next several days armed troops and tanks cleared the square, killing anywhere from several hundred to several thousand people. On June 9, Deng denounced the students for attempting to overthrow the government. In other Chinese cities, the protests ended peacefully.

The Limits of U.S. Power

Although the United States offered the *mujahideen* guerilla fighters support to combat the Soviets in Afghanistan, it found itself the enemy of another group of Islamic fundamentalists, this time in Iran. Since the 1950s, the United States had provided funds and weapons to the leader of Iran, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. With U.S. aid, the Shah had built one of the largest armies in the Middle East and SAVAK, one of the most feared secret police forces. He allowed no dissent, and the secret police spied upon, arrested, and tortured anyone suspected of opposing him. The Shah's efforts to modernize and Westernize Iran by granting women the right to vote, outlawing their wearing of veils, and providing them equal opportunities for education angered many traditionalist Muslim religious leaders. They also disliked the messages contained in the Western movies and music the Shah had allowed into Iran. In contrast, although liberal Iranians approved of these actions, they disliked the lack of political freedom. Nearly all Iranians resented the enormous wealth the Shah and his closest friends had amassed as a result of U.S. assistance. The Shah had few supporters.

One of his most outspoken critics was the Shiite religious leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Despite being repeatedly arrested, Khomeini continued to criticize both the Shah and his patron, the U.S. government. In 1964, Khomeini was expelled from Iran. This did not end his influence, however, and tape-recorded messages from him encouraging opposition to the Shah were smuggled into the country. Beginning in 1977, Khomeini exhorted Iranians to go on strike and refuse to pay their taxes. In 1978, waves of protests and strikes by government and oil industry workers were punished with attacks by government forces. Each was followed by a larger wave of protest. Followers of Khomeini were not the only organized opponents of the Shah, radical left-wing movement who objected to his capitalist approach to development and anti-imperialists who opposed the continued domination of foreign capital in the country also organized paramilitary groups and strikes.

On January 16, 1979, the Shah and his family fled the country, and two weeks later Ayatollah Khomeini returned. He was greeted enthusiastically by the vast majority of Iranians, and in mid-February 1979, Shapur Bakhtiar, the prime minister appointed by the Shah, was replaced by Mehdi Bazargan, selected by Khomeini. In December 1979, the Iranian people voted to adopt a constitution making the country an Islamic republic. Islam became the nation's official religion, and the constitution ordained that all laws passed must conform to Islamic law.

On October 22, 1979, the Shah entered the United States for medical treatment. Many Iranians feared this meant Washington was about to take steps to return him to power. On November 4, Iranian students stormed the U.S. embassy in the Iranian capital of Tehran and took its staff and Marine guards hostage, demanding the Shah be returned to Iran for trial and execution. Their actions were widely supported within Iran, including by Khomeini, which led the moderate prime minister to resign. Although female and African American hostages were released within a few days, the others were held for 444 days, to be set free on January 20, 1981, the day President Carter left office.



Figure 6.3.2: Ali Khamenei speech during a Clerics Sitdown strike in the University of Tehran, 1979. (CC BY 4.0; Khamenei.ir via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

Fearing that Iraqi Shiites would be radicalized by events in neighboring Iran, the Sunni-dominated government of Iraq, controlled

by the Arab socialist Ba'ath Party, sent its troops to invade Iran. Iraq also hoped to resolve long-standing border disputes between the two nations and replace Iran as the dominant nation in the region, which had not been possible when Iran was receiving U.S. military and economic support. The United States provided economic and technological support to Iraq. The Iran-Iraq war ended in August 1988 with a cease-fire arranged by the United Nations and no real gains by either side.

Despite its support of Iraq in its war against Iran, the chief concern of the United States in the 1980s was not violence in the Middle East but the destruction of the Soviet Union. Jimmy Carter was followed in office by President Ronald Reagan, who considered the Soviet Union an "evil empire" and vowed to eliminate communism. He believed the United States should negotiate with the Soviets to ensure world peace but should do so from a position of strength. To this end, he ordered a buildup of the country's abilities to fight both a conventional and a nuclear war. His successor in office, George H.W. Bush, continued those policies.

Proxy Wars and Counterinsurgency

Afghanistan is a landlocked, ethnically diverse country at the crossroads of Asia and the Middle East. It borders Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China. Kabul is the capital and largest city. The population includes Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Aimak, Turkmen, and Baluchi. After defeating the British in the Anglo-Afghan Wars, Afghanistan gained independence and became a constitutional monarchy in 1926. During WWII, it remained neutral. In 1964, political parties, including the communist PDPA, emerged. The PDPA split in 1967 into Khalq and Parcham factions. When the radical faction took power they also began to undertake policies of rapid modernization, which upset many in the country, especially religious and traditional elites whose power would be undercut by these changes. Resistance to the local communists quickly developed and the Afghan government begged for military assistance from their Soviet allies to end the insurgency. At first Moscow hesitated to give military support, but when the situation grew dire in the capital of Kabul, the Soviets relented and invaded in support of their communist allies in late 1979.



Figure 6.3.3: President Reagan meeting with Afghan Mujahideen in the White House to discuss Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. (CC0 1.0; Michael Evans via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

President Carter wrote a strongly worded letter to Premier Brezhnev condemning Soviet aggression. Following the invasion, the Carter administration began arming Afghan resistance, imposed sanctions, called for a 1980 Olympics boycott, and increased aid to Afghan insurgents. The Reagan administration inherited and continued covert military aid to the Mujahideen, supported by UK, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, and China. The resistance movement forced Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev to withdraw from Afghanistan in 1989, ending a costly war that contributed to the USSR's disillusionment and collapse in 1991. The Afghanistan war, the longest of Soviet involvement, damaged Soviet internal trust, especially among non-Russian populations, and revealed Moscow's potential unreliability as an ally. By 1985, with Gorbachev's rise, Soviet resources were drained, and the withdrawal marked a failure to sustain military and economic strength. After the Soviets left, civil war ensued, with the Taliban, supported by Pakistan, taking control.

El Salvador, the smallest and most densely populated Central American country, lacks a Caribbean coast and is called the "Land of

Volcanoes" due to its active volcanoes. Fertile volcanic ash supports high-quality coffee production, which began in the late 19th century and became the main export by 1920. Coffee production was controlled by a small elite, Las Catorce, who also expanded into banking and industry. By 1970, El Salvador was the fourth-largest coffee exporter in the world, but land was concentrated in six families. Privatization of indigenous communal lands increased this concentration. Rising inequality led peasants, workers, and community leaders to demand reforms. Public discontent fueled support for guerrilla groups. The propertied elite, allied with the military, resisted reforms increased its repressive apparatus. ORDEN, a rural pro-planter paramilitary group, was formed to suppress opposition. In 1972, amid economic turmoil, opposition parties supported José Napoleon Duarte against the oligarchy's candidate. Duarte won by 72,000 votes, but the military declared his opponent Arturo Molina the winner, arresting and exiling Duarte. To placate unrest, Molina hosted Miss Universe in 1975, which led to protests and police violence. A fraudulent 1977 election installed General Carlos Romero which led to protests. On Feb 15, 1977, police shot over 200 protesters at a church in San Salvador, a pivotal event for Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was ordained in 1942, rising to archbishop in 1977.

In 1979, President Carlos Romero was overthrown by a military coup, and the Revolutionary Government Junta (JRG) took power. The Carter administration supported the JRG despite human rights abuses by the Salvadoran military. In 1980, Archbishop Oscar Romero called for an end to US military aid, condemning its use to murder civilians. He urged soldiers to disobey orders and stop the killings. Romero was assassinated on March 24, 1980, during mass, likely ordered by Roberto D'Aubuisso of the far-right ARENA party, as such an order would have had to come from the military top. By the mid-1980s, US support for the Salvadoran government, over \$200 million, was highly unpopular due to costs, human rights abuses, atrocities, and the deaths of clergy and technicians. Between 1980-81, death squads reportedly killed 30,000 civilians. Violence, malnutrition, failed land policies, and unemployment caused over 500,000 Salvadorans to flee to the US. In 1980, guerrilla groups formed the FMLN, demanding land reform, industry nationalization, and reduced US influence. They fought a US-backed army with limited resources for over a decade, receiving aid from Cuba, Nicaragua, and the USSR. Despite civilian support, the rebels lacked the capacity for a full-scale takeover. The civil war, one of the bloodiest in the 20th century, killed over 75,000 and displaced over a million of the 5 million population. It ended in 1992 with the UN-brokered Chapultepec Peace Accords, leading to elections and the FMLN becoming a legal political party. A Truth Commission attributed most abuses to the armed forces and paramilitaries, with the UN playing a key role in the peace process.

Angola, a resource-rich African nation, endured Africa's longest, bloodiest war from 1975 to 2002, fueled by its natural resources like oil, iron, and diamonds. A former Portuguese colony, Angola's capital, Luanda, is on the Atlantic coast. Portugal's 1974 coup ended colonial rule, leading Angola's main parties—MPLA, FNLA, and UNITA—to sign the Alvor Agreement, establishing a transitional government. Power struggles erupted after Portuguese withdrawal, transforming Angola into a Cold War battleground with superpower support. Gaining independence on November 11, 1975, Angola's colonial history politicized ethnicity, causing a power struggle among liberation groups, igniting a civil war that lasted until 2002.

The United States supplied aid and training to FNLA and UNITA, with Zaire troops assisting FNLA. China sent military instructors to train the FNLA, while the Soviet Union provided training and equipment for the MPLA. The MPLA also had ties with Cuba. UNITA, supported by the US, sought military aid from South Africa, which the U.S. encouraged but downplayed its link to the apartheid regime. Early in the war, MPLA secured victories, taking the capital and forming a de facto government. Fighting intensified in the 1980s, notably the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale.

As the Cold War ended, the 1994 Lusaka Accords set the stage for ceasefire, troop withdrawals, and elections overseen by the UN. The accords collapsed in 1998 after a four-year ceasefire, and war resumed until the 2002 killing of Jonas Savimbi, which led to peace negotiations, ending a 27-year civil war. MPLA remains the ruling party. Although much infrastructure has been rebuilt, the war's scars persist. Angola ranks low in human development, with less than 40% having access to clean water. The generation born in 1975 experienced 27 years of war; nearly one million died, and millions were displaced or maimed, disrupting family life.

State Terror and Human Rights

During the Cold War, a Latin American ideology called Peronism was targeted by the US and its allies along with communism because its nationalist and socialist ideas appealed to the working class and labor unions. Peronism challenged the traditional power structures in Argentina, which were dominated by the military and landed elite. In March 1976, the military, under the leadership of General Jorge Rafael Videla, overthrew Isabel Perón's government and launched a campaign called the "Process of National Organization." It was part of a larger series of political coups called "Operation Condor," a campaign sponsored and supported by the United States. Argentina was the headquarters for a special Condor program, code-named Teseo, and the mission was to eliminate potential targets in Europe. For seven years, from 1976 to 1983, the army embarked on a mission to wipe out all vestiges of Peronism and its organizations, along with the last remnants of democratic, civil society. These military leaders argued that the democratic government failed to solve Argentina's economic problems. Their goal was to eliminate all communist dissidents and optimize the efficiency and security of the country. What was hidden behind this argument of efficiency and "Dirty

War” was the brutality of the state terror that accompanied it. The military junta was extremely paranoid and deployed police, military, and paramilitary forces against segments of the population they perceived as a threat. This included trade union workers, intellectuals, journalists, lawyers, students, poor citizens, and priests.



Figure 6.3.4: Oath of Jorge Rafael Videla as President of Argentina, 1976. (CC0 1.0; Unknown via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

A major invention of the Argentine military government was the practice of forced disappearances. Argentina was divided into “defense zones,” which allowed for repression to be carried out systematically. Government agents kidnapped suspected dissidents at night and took them to one of 340 clandestine detention centers (CDCs), where they were tortured, killed, and their bodies disposed of. In other words, people “disappeared” without a trace, and all opposition was silenced. This form of extrajudicial killing was particularly brutal because families were unable to get any information on the whereabouts of “disappeared” members, since the perpetrators were state agents. It is estimated that approximately 30,000 people, mostly below the age of 35, were victims of forced disappearance. The “Dirty War” in Argentina was different from other conflicts and human rights abuses in several ways: the scale and intensity of human rights violations was particularly severe; the military targeted not only armed opposition groups but also civilians, including students and journalists; and the “Dirty War” left an indelible impression on Argentine society and politics.

During the darkest period, from 1976 to 1982, the lone voices of public opposition belonged to a few mothers who began to gather in the plaza in front of the presidential palace, called the Casa Rosada. They began marching at first on Sundays and later every Thursday, demanding to know the fate of their disappeared children. Wearing white scarves as a symbol of their children’s diapers and carrying photographs of their young adult sons and daughters, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo began to draw international attention to the brutal repression the military had unleashed. They exposed the blind eye of most world governments in relation to human rights abuses in Argentina and denounced the cozy relationship between the US government and the Argentine generals.

Meanwhile, the military dictators were unable to resolve the economic crisis. A record number of bankruptcies occurred in 1982; inflation soared, and the international debt skyrocketed. The economic crisis added to general disquiet at home, and mounting criticism from abroad over human rights abuses and highly publicized cases of disappearances. News that the children of pregnant detainees were being sold for international adoption or turned over to military families after their mothers were killed was especially damaging to the military regime. To win popular support, the military launched, in April 1982, a drive to take back the Malvinas/Falkland Islands from the British, who had acquired them from the Spanish in 1833. Argentina’s claim that the islands should have reverted to them along with the rest of the territory when the country achieved independence from Spain had languished in international courts for years. General Leopoldo Galtieri, the military officer who launched the attack on the sparsely inhabited islands over 500 miles off the coast of Argentina, never thought Great Britain would defend their possession; he thought it would be a “cake walk.” Britain sent a small, but extremely well-equipped force, including nuclear-powered submarines, and dislodged the Argentine invaders in a matter of weeks.

In 1983 the Radical Party candidate Raúl Alfonsín won the presidency and began the process of rebuilding the devastated economy and political structures. Alfonsín successfully prosecuted and imprisoned many of the previous military rulers and their collaborators but was not able to turn around the economy or stem hyperinflation. In 1989 conservative Peronist candidate Carlos Saúl Menem was elected president. He promptly pardoned many top military officers convicted of human rights violations and

adopted a subservient stance toward the neoliberal policies of the IMF and World Bank in hopes of rehabilitating the economy, including a disastrous scheme of pegging the value of the peso directly to the dollar. Not only was Menem personally dishonest, but corruption permeated every branch of his administration. His government and those that immediately followed oversaw the further demise of Argentina's once rich and stable democracy.

Anti-Apartheid and Global Liberation

In the 1980s, activists worldwide united against apartheid, the system of racial discrimination in South Africa. Inspired by Black South Africans and global decolonization waves, they demanded justice. After World War II, many countries gained independence, including 44 in Africa between 1946-1970, amid a global push for freedom. The South African Black majority, influenced by these movements, sought equality, but the white minority resisted. In 1948, the National Party, driven by racism, legalised apartheid, intensifying Black oppression. Some of these laws included:

- Classifying all South Africans into racial categories: “white,” “black,” and “colored” (mixed race).
- Making it illegal for people to marry across those categories, or even to have sexual relations.
- Mandating segregation (separation of races) in schools and all public facilities.
- Moving all Black South Africans into small areas referred to as “homelands” or Bantustan. In total, 30 million Black South Africans—over 70 percent of the population—were moved onto 13 percent of South Africa's land.
- Restricting freedom of movement, requiring Black South Africans to always carry a “pass book” showing their assigned race and “homeland.” Being outside of one's “homeland” was cause for arrest.
- Forbidding Black South Africans from owning land outside of the Bantustans.
- Forbidding Black labor unions from striking.
- Making it illegal to protest, or to gather in groups large enough to start a protest.
- Denying Black people the right to vote, except for local authorities in their Bantustans.

Historians compare laws similar to Jim Crow, which enforced segregation and disenfranchisement of African Americans in the US, to apartheid in South Africa, which imposed similar rules on Black South Africans. As the Civil Rights Movement grew in the US, the government began dismantling these laws, but South Africa's government codified inequality further. The anti-apartheid movement included parties like the ANC, SACP, and others, which initially used nonviolent protests but later organized strikes, boycotts, and protests. In 1955, they issued the Freedom Charter, demanding an end to apartheid, education and jobs for all, and worker control of industry, advocating for shared land and wealth.

The Freedom Charter was controversial. Some Black activists disliked the references to all people having rights, wanting it to focus exclusively on the rights and freedoms of Black Africans. Others were uncomfortable with the charter's socialist language. They feared that any link to socialist or communist ideas would discredit the entire anti-apartheid movement. The white minority government sounded the alarm that all activism—protests, strikes, and boycotts—was communist-inspired. Governments, as well as some dictators, were using the excuse of “fighting communism” to crush rebellions of workers who rose up to battle poverty and injustice. It was easy for the National Party to do the same. They claimed that their brutal tactics against Black activists were simply attempts to stop a communist takeover.

As opposition to apartheid grew, the government used armed police and military force, violently suppressing protests like the 1960 Sharpeville shootings that killed 69 people and the 1976 Soweto protests where over 100 students died. Nelson Mandela, imprisoned in 1962, inspired future activists with his “I Am Prepared to Die” speech, spending 27 years in prison but continuing the fight. Stephen Biko led the Black Consciousness Movement, promoting Black pride and empowerment, influencing both African Americans and young Black Africans. Biko's death in custody made him a martyr, with 20,000 attending his funeral.

Nelson Mandela was beloved. His imprisonment symbolized South African repression. Youth resistance in Soweto and globally expanded the anti-apartheid movement into an international network. Awareness grew, prompting actions like banning South African teams from Olympics, FIFA World Cup, and Rugby World Cup in the 70s and 80s. Activist groups, especially students in America and Europe, called for divestment—pressure on companies to stop doing business in South Africa and for boycotts of non-compliant firms. Students staged protests, urging Americans to cut ties with South African businesses.

Inspired by the Black community's struggle in South Africa, people worldwide aimed to change the country. TV reports of protests and government retaliation kept attention on apartheid. Many institutions demanded its end, though leaders like Reagan and Thatcher resisted, accusing activists of supporting communism. Nonetheless, the international movement prevailed. Support strengthened South Africans' political power as the government became isolated. In 1990, Nelson Mandela and others were released, and apartheid laws began to fall. Mandela became president in 1994, officially ending apartheid. Despite ongoing issues like poverty and discrimination, South Africa's transition exemplifies how collective action and global support can overcome

injustice, raising questions about the importance of global struggles in an era of decolonization.

6.4: Alternate Text Descriptions

Figure 6.1.2: Europe during the Cold War

This map of Cold War-era Europe shows the political alignment of countries in relation to the Eastern Bloc and Western Bloc. A legend identifies the Soviet Union in dark red and USSR-aligned countries in light red, including Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania. Albania is shown in orange as a former USSR-aligned country that remained aligned until 1960. Yugoslavia is shown in green as a non-aligned country. Finland and Switzerland are shown in gray as neutral countries, while Austria, Ireland, and Sweden are shown in purple as neutral countries that generally aligned with the West. Western-aligned countries are shown in blue and include Greece, Norway, Iceland, the United Kingdom, France, Denmark, West Germany, Italy, Turkey, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg.

The Soviet Union occupies the eastern portion of the map. A band of USSR-aligned countries extends across Central and Eastern Europe between the Soviet Union and Western Europe. West Germany and East Germany are shown in different colors, illustrating Germany's division during the Cold War. Western-aligned countries occupy much of Western Europe and parts of the Mediterranean region. The map demonstrates that Europe was divided into more than two opposing blocs. In addition to the Soviet-aligned and Western-aligned countries, several nations maintained neutral positions, while others, such as Yugoslavia, followed a non-aligned path outside direct Soviet control.

Figure 6.2.1: The partition of British India

This map of the Indian subcontinent shows the partition of British India in 1947 and the territorial and demographic changes that followed. The newly independent states of India and Pakistan are distinguished on the map, with Pakistan divided into West Pakistan in the northwest and East Pakistan in the east. East Pakistan is also identified as Bangladesh after 1971. A boundary known as the Radcliffe Line marks the division between India and Pakistan established at partition.

The provinces of Punjab and Bengal are shown as divided between the two countries. Areas of these provinces that were split by the new border are highlighted to illustrate the impact of partition on existing administrative regions.

Several princely states and territories are labeled with notes describing their later political status. Kashmir is identified as a large princely state that had not yet acceded to either India or Pakistan at the time of partition. Other labeled territories include Hyderabad, Junagadh, Goa, Daman and Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Puducherry, Kalat, Gwadar, and Sikkim, along with annotations indicating annexation, merger, cession, or integration in subsequent years.

Directional arrows show major refugee movements associated with partition. One set of arrows represents the migration of Hindu and Sikh refugees into India, while another set represents the migration of Muslim refugees into Pakistan. The arrows illustrate the large-scale exchange of populations across the new international border. Star-shaped symbols identify locations of intercommunal violence and conflict, particularly in Punjab and along major migration routes.

The map demonstrates that partition involved more than the establishment of a new border. It triggered one of the largest population migrations in history, contributed to widespread violence, left several territories with disputed political status, and created challenges that continued to influence relations in South Asia after independence.

Figure 6.2.2: The shrinking of Palestinian land

This infographic, titled "Palestine Shrinking, Expanding Israel," presents four map-like panels labeled 1918, 1947, 1960, and 2011. The panels compare land areas identified in the infographic's legend as Palestinian land and Jewish settlements or Israeli settlement areas over time. The background is dark gray, and each year appears in large vertical numerals behind the corresponding map.

In the 1918 panel, most of the territory is designated as Palestinian land, with relatively small scattered areas identified as Jewish settlements. The accompanying text states that during the late Ottoman period, Zionist organizations, including the Jewish National Fund, purchased land for Jewish settlement.

In the 1947 panel, Palestinian-designated land still occupies most of the territory, but settlement-designated areas appear more numerous and widely distributed, particularly in northern and central regions. The accompanying text states that during the British Mandate period, land transfers and sales contributed to the expansion of Jewish settlement areas.

In the 1960 panel, areas designated as Israeli-controlled or settlement areas occupy much of the territory, while Palestinian-designated land appears in several separate regions. The accompanying text states that following the 1948 Arab–Israeli war and the establishment of the State of Israel, large areas of land formerly associated with Palestinians came under Israeli control.

In the 2011 panel, the territory identified as Palestinian land appears as multiple separated and fragmented areas surrounded by larger areas designated as Israeli-controlled or settlement areas. The accompanying text states that following Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, additional land was designated for Israeli settlements.

The infographic's overall visual message is that areas identified as Palestinian land become smaller and more fragmented across the four time periods, while areas identified as Israeli-controlled or settlement land become more extensive. This trend is illustrated through the progression of the four maps from left to right.

Figure 6.2.5: Africa in 1958

This image is a historical political map titled “Africa: Administrative Divisions—1958.” The map displays the African continent divided into territories according to the governing colonial power or independent status in 1958.

A legend identifies the administrative categories using different colors and patterns:

- United Kingdom
- France
- Belgium
- Portugal
- Spain
- Italy
- Union of South Africa
- Independent country

Large portions of French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa are shown under French administration. Other French-controlled territories include areas within present-day Algeria and Madagascar.

British-administered territories include regions labeled Nigeria, Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland, Bechuanaland, Basutoland, and Swaziland.

Belgian administration is represented primarily by Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi.

Portuguese territories include Angola, Mozambique, Portuguese Guinea, and smaller coastal possessions.

Spanish territories include Spanish Sahara, Ifni, Spanish Morocco, and Spanish Guinea.

Former Italian colonial areas are shown in the Horn of Africa, including territories associated with Somalia.

Independent countries shown on the map include Egypt, Libya, Ethiopia, Liberia, the Union of South Africa, and several newly independent states such as Sudan, Morocco, Tunisia, and Ghana.

The instructional purpose of the map is to illustrate the political geography of Africa in 1958 and to show the extent of European colonial administration immediately before the rapid wave of African independence movements that occurred during the 1960s.

Figure 6.2.6: Historical Photograph of a Document Signing

This black-and-white historical photograph shows a group of people gathered closely around a wooden table in an indoor setting. At the center of the image, one seated individual is writing or signing a document placed on the table. Several others stand nearby and observe the activity.

Many of the individuals wear military-style uniforms, while others wear civilian clothing. The group is arranged around the table, drawing attention to the act of writing or signing the document. No visible text on the document can be read from the image.

The setting appears informal, with wooden walls and simple furnishings visible in the background. The photograph emphasizes the collective nature of the event, with numerous people assembled around the central figure and document.

The image appears to document a significant meeting, agreement, declaration, or administrative action. The focal point is the written document and the group gathered to witness or participate in the event.

Figure 6.2.7: Highlighted Countries Across North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia

This world map highlights a group of countries across North Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. Highlighted countries are shown in orange, while all other countries are shown in gray.

The highlighted region stretches from North Africa through the Middle East and into Asia. Countries highlighted in North Africa include Libya, Egypt, and Sudan. In the Middle East, highlighted countries include Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Iran, and Afghanistan.

In South Asia, highlighted countries include Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. In Southeast Asia, highlighted countries include Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, and the Philippines. In East Asia, China and Japan are also highlighted.

The highlighted countries form a broad belt extending from the eastern Mediterranean and North Africa across South Asia and into East and Southeast Asia. The map's purpose appears to be identifying a specific set of countries within this region and showing their geographic distribution relative to the rest of the world.

6.5: Chapter Themes to Discuss

This page offers different themes that appear throughout the sections in this chapter. The themes are meant to provide a framework in which discussion questions can be developed to inspire further exploration of the topics covered.

1. The political, economic, military, and ideological forces that transformed the wartime alliance between the United States and the Soviet Union into the Cold War.
2. The ways decolonization reshaped global politics through independence movements, partition, armed liberation, revolution, and non-alignment.
3. The relationship between local struggles for land, sovereignty, race, class, and political power and the wider Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union.
4. The limits of formal independence and Cold War claims of “freedom,” especially for people facing foreign intervention, racial hierarchy, dictatorship, state violence, economic dependency, and apartheid.

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6.6: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials to Enhance the Chapter

These materials are provided to help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction. Some resources are openly licensed, while others may require institutional access or individual review before use in class.

Web Resources

These websites may help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction.

- The Wiston Center's [Cold War International History Project](#). – Provides materials on diplomacy, intelligence, nuclear politics, communism, decolonization, and proxy conflicts. This resource is especially useful for comparing perspectives beyond the United States.
- [National Security Archive](#), The George Washington University – Provides declassified U.S. government documents related to foreign policy, intelligence, military interventions, and Cold War conflicts. This resource can be useful for teaching state secrecy, covert operations, and the relationship between official policy and historical evidence.

Articles

These articles provide additional scholarly context for this chapter. Access may depend on your institution's JSTOR subscription.

- Connelly, Matthew. "Taking Off the Cold War Lens: Visions of North-South Conflict during the Algerian War for Independence." *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 3 (2000): 739–69. [Access article in JSTOR](#)
- Lumumba-Kasongo, T. Rethinking the Bandung conference in an Era of 'unipolar liberal globalization' and movements toward a 'multipolar politics'. *Bandung: Journal of Global South* 2, 9 (2015).
- Westad, Odd Arne. "Rethinking Revolutions: The Cold War in the Third World." *Journal of Peace Research* 29, no. 4 (1992): 455–64. [Access article in JSTOR](#)

Videos

These videos can be used to explore a specific topic in the chapter in more detail and as an entry to further discussion on chapter topics.

- [TED-Ed: The history of the Cuban Missile Crisis](#)
Length: 4 minutes, 51 seconds
Imagine going about your life knowing that, at any given moment, you and everyone you know could be wiped out without warning at the push of a button. This was the reality for millions of people during the forty-five year period after World War II now known as the Cold War. Matthew A. Jordan explains the history behind the peak of all this panic — the thirteen days of the Cuban Missile Crisis.
- [TED-Ed: How did South African Apartheid happen, and how did it finally end?](#)
Length: 6 minutes, 51 seconds
For 46 years, South Africans lived under Apartheid, a strict policy of segregation that barred the country's Black majority from skilled, high-paying jobs, quality education, voting, and much more. So, how did these laws come to be? And how did this era of institutionalized discrimination finally come to an end? Thula Simpson explores how colonization led to the national trauma of Apartheid. Lesson by Thula Simpson, directed by Aya Marzouk, Giraffics.
- [United Nations: Decolonization: Past to Present](#)
Length: 6 minutes, 52 seconds
Since the United Nations was established in 1945, more than 80 former colonies have gained their independence. Today, the United Nations assists 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories across the globe. The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs supports the work of the General Assembly, particularly its Special Committee on Decolonization, in the eradication of colonialism.

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7: THE MODERN ERA

Overview

The Cold War that dominated global events since 1945 came to an end in 1991. Leaders around the world contemplated if a path to world peace was feasible in a post-Cold War world, yet continued tension and conflict persisted, some of which were a direct result of the Cold War's end, and others remained continuations of decades-long disagreements and distrust. The emergence of new technologies and the advent of the "Information Age" had a profound impact on the development of the global economy as it continued to evolve into the modern world.

[7.1: The End of the Cold War](#)

[7.2: The Modern Global Economy](#)

[7.3: Geopolitics and Modern Conflict](#)

[7.4: Alternative Text Description](#)

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[7.6: Teacher Resources](#)

7.1: The End of the Cold War

The Decline of Communism in Eastern Europe

When the new leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, came to power in 1985, discontent was simmering in the Soviet Union and in the countries of Eastern Europe. Gorbachev was convinced that the only way for the Soviet system to survive was through real, meaningful reforms - the kinds flirted with by Khrushchev in the 1950s but swiftly abandoned. To that end, Gorbachev introduced two reformist state policies: *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*. Glasnost means “openness” or “transparency” in information. It represented the relaxation of censorship within the Soviet system, one that was most dramatically demonstrated in 1986 when Gorbachev eventually allowed an accurate appraisal in the press of a horrific nuclear accident at the Chernobyl nuclear plant. The idea behind Glasnost was to allow frank and honest discussion, to end the ban on truth, in an effort to win back the hearts and minds of Soviet people and to get their buy in to improve their own government and social system.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain why the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc collapsed
- Discuss the effects of the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe

Gorbachev is, in some ways, the most important of the Communist leaders other than Lenin, as it was he who was responsible for overseeing the destruction of the Soviet Union and the death of communism as the political system in that country. When Gorbachev came to power in March of 1985, it was clear to many that changes would have to be made and that there were issues that needed to be dealt with immediately. In April of that same year, the Warsaw Pact treaty was renewed for another 20 years; given the recency of Gorbachev's elevation to power, it is unlikely that this involved any discussion. Reagan, who had been elected to a second term in November 1984, and Margaret Thatcher, the prime minister of Britain, felt that Gorbachev was someone they could work with.

While the changes in domestic policy were significant, Gorbachev did not neglect foreign affairs. One of the first steps that he took was to open communication with the West regarding the weaponry that both sides had accumulated during the Cold War. The debacle of the decade-long Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, combined with the awareness of the mutually assured destruction capabilities of both sides of the Cold War (essentially, that both sides had more than enough weapons to destroy each other), led Gorbachev to seek solutions to ending the arms race. He was not the first president to do so, although he was the first on the Soviet side; Brezhnev had primarily desired a build-up of arms, and neither of Gorbachev's immediate predecessors had reigned long enough to make any significant inroads. All of these were intended to keep the communists firmly in power; Gorbachev himself was a dedicated communist and wanted to maintain the party's control while raising its prestige. Gorbachev also continued the process of de-Stalinization, which had largely been ended under the Brezhnev era, although Lenin continued to be glorified.

Collapse of the Soviet Union

Unfortunately for Gorbachev, very few of his plans worked. The war in Afghanistan, which had begun when the USSR invaded in 1979, continued to drain resources, and as a result the Soviet economy, rather than recovering, continued to plunge. In April 1986, one of the nuclear reactors at Chernobyl, in Ukraine, exploded. Initially, the Soviets did not want to ask for assistance, but when it became clear that they could not deal with the catastrophe and that the toxic air was spreading to Western Europe, Gorbachev finally asked for help from the West. The explosion, and the subsequent problems, glaringly illustrated many of the problems in the Soviet Union; it also exposed those problems in detail to the West for the first time, and the ramification for this continues to plague Belarus, Ukraine, and much of central Europe. In addition, *glasnost* had led to increased questioning of what the government was doing, not only within the Russian Socialist Republic but also in the other Soviet republics and the satellite nations in the Warsaw Pact.

In response, independence and anti-communist movements became increasingly powerful throughout Central and Eastern Europe. *Solidarity*, in Poland, led by Lech Walesa and supported by Pope John Paul II, himself Polish, is probably the most

famous of these movements, although there were also significant movements in Czechoslovakia, Romania, and East Germany. Gorbachev realized that he had a series of revolutions brewing, but rather than ordering troops into those countries, he publicly broke from the traditions of the past 80 years and refused to suppress the revolts. Additionally, the United States and other NATO powers supported these countries; Ronald Reagan famously demanded that Gorbachev, “Tear down this wall” (in reference to the militarized border that separated East and West Berlin) during a visit to the city.

The result was a landslide of change across Eastern Europe. Over the course of 1989, one country after another held free elections and communists were expelled from governments. Rapidly, new constitutions were drawn up. The Berlin Wall fell in November of 1989 and Germany was reunified less than a year later. Likewise, the USSR itself fell apart by 1991, torn apart by nationalist movements within its borders as Latvians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Kazakhs, and other national minorities of the USSR demanded their independence from Moscow's dominance. An attempted counter-revolution led by Soviet hardliners failed in the face of mass protest in Moscow, and the first free elections since 1917 were held in Russia.

A Post-Cold War World

When the Soviet Union dissolved on December 31, 1991, most in the West celebrated the end of the Cold War, believing that a new world that would uniformly embrace liberal democracy and capitalism was in the process of being born. Political scientist Francis Fukuyama even published a book on the idea in 1992 called *The End of History and the Last Man*. The argument presented in the book was that the world had been marching toward a Western liberal democratic future for centuries, and with the Soviet Union gone, it had reached the inevitable end of its “ideological evolution.” With the United States as the only remaining superpower, many also assumed the Cold War’s bipolar world would soon evolve into a mostly unipolar one based on U.S. military, cultural, and economic dominance.

With this idea in mind, U.S. president Bill Clinton drafted a foreign policy platform geared to revising and expanding the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the military alliance forged by the United States and its allies in Europe during the Cold War. Clinton aimed to strengthen relationships in Asia, bring post-Soviet Russia into the international community, and address ethnic and political strife in the Middle East, the Balkans, Northern Ireland, Latin America, and East Africa. Clinton believed that these goals occasionally required using the country's military, such as in 1995 when he sent a force of twenty thousand to the Balkans as part of a NATO operation to enforce a cease-fire and protect upcoming elections.

One of the most pressing concerns for the United States and the world, however, was the need to secure the thirty-five thousand nuclear weapons then installed in thousands of sites around Eurasia. Many were in states that had separated from the former Soviet Union such as Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus. Because these countries were going through a difficult period of transition and instability, many feared that non-state actors, meaning terrorist groups not tied to a specific country, might gain access to the armaments or the material necessary to make them and cause catastrophic damage. Some of the work had begun even before the Soviet Union collapsed. In the summer of 1991, the United States and the Soviet Union had signed the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), agreeing to each reduce their arms stockpiles by more than 80 percent.

After the disintegration of the USSR, however, the need to secure these stockpiles became more pressing. The solution proposed by the United States and supported by Russia was to denuclearize those states that had split from the former Soviet Union but still possessed nuclear weapons. While successful, the effort did run into some difficulties, particularly in Ukraine, where some believed that preserving its nuclear weapons would be the best way to deter Russian belligerence in the future. Only after it had secured assurances from the international community that its borders would be respected did Ukraine allow its nuclear weapons to be removed and disassembled in Russia.

7.2: The Modern Global Economy

New Political and Economic Policies

While the far right has gained strength in many European countries over time, of greater overall impact was perhaps the changed identity of mainstream center-right conservatism. This form of conservatism is often called "neoconservatism" to differentiate it from the earlier form of postwar center-right politics. By far the most important change within neo-conservatism was that the center-right belatedly came to reject the welfare state. The compromise between left and right that had seen a broad endorsement of nationalized industry, free health care and education, subsidies for housing, and strong unions definitively collapsed starting in the mid-1970s. Neoconservatives blamed the welfare state and unions for exacerbating the economic crisis of the 1970s, arguing that the state was always inefficient and bloated compared to private industry, and they promised to do away with unneeded and counterproductive regulation in favor of unchecked market exchange.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain how trade agreements and attempts to regulate world trade have shaped the global economy since the 1990s
- Analyze the way multinational corporations have affected politics, workers, and the environment in developing nations
- Discuss the way globalization has affected workers around the world

The iconic neo-conservative politician was the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who held office from 1979 to 1990. Thatcher acquired the nickname "the Iron Lady" for her blunt manner of speaking and her refusal to compromise. While prime minister, Thatcher privatized a number of industries in Britain, most importantly the railways. She took a hard line with unions, shutting down northern English coal mines rather than giving in to the demands of the coal miners' union (the English mining industry simply shut down as a result - it has never recovered). She slashed government subsidies for various industries and social programs resulting in an explosion of unemployment and poverty in manufacturing areas.

The sectors of the British economy that benefited from Thatcherite policies were financial in nature: banks in particular thrived as regulations were dropped and banks were legally allowed to pursue vast profits through financial speculation. Britain began its transition toward what it is in the present: the dynamic, wealthy financial and commercial center that is London surrounded by an economically stagnant and often politically resentful nation. Thatcher herself was a polarizing figure in British society - while she was reviled by her opponents, millions of Britons adored her for her British pride, her hard-nosed refusal to compromise, and her unapologetic, Social Darwinist contempt for the poor - she once advised the English that they ought to "glory in inequality" because it was symptomatic of the strong and smart succeeding.



Figure 7.2.1: Informal cooperation between Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher in 1984 during the Cold War, reflecting efforts to strengthen political alignment and shared strategies during a period of global tension. (CC0 1.0; Unknown via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

The British economy began to recover as a whole in the early 1980s, but the major reason that Thatcher stayed in power was her success in selling an image of strength and trenchant opposition to British unions, which had reached the height of their influence in the mid-1970s. A brief war over the (strategically and economically unimportant) Falkland Islands in the Pacific between Argentina and Britain in 1982 also buoyed her popularity with patriotic citizens. Finally, the British Labour party was in disarray, split between its still genuinely socialist left wing and a new more moderate reform movement that wanted to abandon socialist rhetoric in favor of straightforward liberalism. Thus, Thatcher remained in power until 1990, when her own party decided she was no longer palatable to the electorate and replaced her with a somewhat forgettable English politician named John Major.

Outside of Britain, the essential characteristics of western and central European politics were in place by the 1980s that remain to this day. Center-right parties from Italy to Germany and from France to Britain correspond to the Thatcherite neo-conservative model, embracing the free market and trying to limit the extent of the welfare state (although none of these parties advocate getting rid of the welfare state entirely; generations of Europeans, including people who vote for center right parties, expect free health care, education, and social benefits). Most center-right parties outside of Britain have been less willing to truly gut the welfare state than was Thatcher and her conservatives, but the general focus on the market remains their defining characteristic overall.

On the other side of the political spectrum, the major change within left-wing parties was a general abandonment of Marxist ideology. Again, Britain provides the iconic example: the triumph within the Labour Party of a centrist faction that created "New Labour," a political philosophy that supports the welfare state but also accepts the position that the free market is the essential motor of economic growth. The iconic figure of New Labour was the prime minister Tony Blair, who held office from 1997 - 2007. Even in countries whose major leftist parties had the word "socialist" in their titles - France's Socialist Party, for example - the whole notion of revolution was gone by the 1990s. Instead, the center-left parties came to be the custodians of the welfare state while belatedly joining the center-right in favoring market economics in the private sector.

Broadly speaking, the defining argument between mainstream leftist and mainstream rightist parties leading up to the present is about how much free market deregulation to embrace. Many Europeans have become attracted to the far-right parties mentioned above as much because the two sides of mainstream politics are almost indistinguishable; to many Europeans, the far-right seems like the only "real" alternative. In turn, with revolution off the agenda, the far left in Europe is represented now by the Green parties. Green parties (the strongest of which is Germany's) are very strong supporters of environmental legislation and are the most hostile to free market deregulation of any political faction, but they remain somewhat limited in their electoral impact.

Russia

Since the collapse of the USSR, some Eastern European countries (e.g. the Czech Republic, Poland) have enjoyed at least some success in modernizing their economies and keeping political corruption at bay. In Russia itself, the 1990s were an unmitigated economic and social disaster as the entire country tried to lurch into a market economy without the slightest bit of planning or

oversight. Western consultants, generally associated with international banking firms, convinced Russian politicians in the infancy of its new democracy to institute “shock therapy,” dismantling social programs and government services. While foreign loans accompanied these steps, new industries did not suddenly materialize to fill the enormous gaps in the Russian economy that had been played by state agencies. Unemployment skyrocketed and the distinctions between legitimate business and illegal or extra-legal trade all but vanished.

The result was an economy that was often synonymous with the black market, gigantic and powerful organized crime syndicates, and the rise of a small number of “oligarchs” to stratospheric levels of wealth and power. One shocking statistic is that fewer than forty individuals controlled about 25% of the Russian economy by the late 1990s. Just as networks of contacts among the Soviet apparatchiks had once been the means of securing a job or accessing state resources, it now became imperative for regular Russian citizens to make connections with either the oligarch-controlled companies or organized crime organizations.

Stability only began to return because of a new political strongman. Vladimir Putin, a former agent of the Soviet secret police force (the KGB), was elected president of Russia in 2000. Since that time, Putin has proved a brilliant political strategist, playing on anti-western resentment and Russian nationalism to buoy popular support for his regime, run by “his” political party, United Russia. While opposition political parties are not illegal, and indeed consistently try to make headway in elections, United Russia has been in firm control of the entire Russian political apparatus since shortly after Putin’s election. Opposition figures are regularly harassed or imprisoned, and many opposition figures have also been murdered (although the state itself maintains a plausible deniability in cases of outright assassination). Some of the most egregious excesses of the oligarchs of the 1990s were also reined in, while some oligarchs were instead incorporated into the United Russia power structure.

Unlike many of the authoritarian rulers of Russia in the past, Putin was (and remains) largely popular among Russians. Media control has played a large part in that popularity, of course, but much of Putin’s popularity is also tied to the wealth that flooded into Russia after 2000 as oil prices rose. While most of that wealth went to enrich the existing Russian elites (along with some of Putin’s personal friends, who made fortunes in businesses tied to the state), it also served as a source of pride even for many Russians who saw little direct benefit. Further boosts to his popularity came from Russia’s invasion of the small republic of Georgia in 2008 and, especially, its invasion and subsequent annexation of the Crimean Peninsula from the Ukraine in 2014. While the latter prompted western sanctions and protests, it was successful in supporting Putin’s power in Russia itself.

A Global Economy

Even during the Cold War and decolonization, economic development and industrialization continued around the world. Japan and West Germany, destroyed and defeated in the 1940s, were striking examples. Each dove headlong into postwar rebuilding efforts that paid huge dividends. They invested heavily in their economies and saw industrial production and economic growth skyrocket over the 1950s and 1960s. By 1970, both had become economic powerhouses in their regions.

Similar, but smaller, economic miracles occurred in other places, especially in Europe. Spain underwent a period of spectacular growth fueled by imported technology, government funding, and increased tourism and industrialization in the 1960s. Italy began even earlier. By the early 1960s, its annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth—the increase in value of all the goods and services the country was producing—had peaked at just over 8 percent. France bounced back from the war years with a rise in population and an impressive new consumer culture that became accustomed to a high standard of living and access to modern conveniences like automobiles, televisions, and household appliances. Comparable growth occurred in Belgium, Greece, and the Netherlands.

Contributing to this postwar economic growth was the emergence of regional economic cooperation in Western Europe. The process began with the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951. The original member countries of the ECSC were West Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. To both foster economic integration and preserve the peace, these member states agreed to break down trade barriers between them by creating a common market in steel and coal. Across the six countries, these products were allowed to flow without restrictions, like customs duties.

The success of the ECSC eventually paved the way for further economic integration in Europe with the formation of the European Economic Community (EEC), also called the Common Market, in 1957. The EEC used the economic-cooperation model developed by the ECSC and greatly expanded it to remove trading and investment restrictions across its member states, far beyond just coal and steel. While generally successful, the EEC’s efforts at economic integration occasionally met resistance. Farmers who stood to lose economically protested the way it opened national markets to agricultural products produced more cheaply in other countries and sought protectionist policies. Yet despite these protests and concerns, the EEC continued to expand.

Although Britain supported the EEC’s economic goals, it was initially not interested in the political cooperation the group

represented. When it did signal its desire to join, Britain wanted special protections for its agriculture and other exceptions for its Commonwealth connections, such as Canada. This meant negotiating with France, then the EEC's most powerful member. Since decisions at that time were made unanimously and member countries had the power to unilaterally veto, France's approval was crucial. President Charles de Gaulle of France did not approve, however, and he cut off negotiations with Britain in 1960. Over the next several years, Britain officially applied for EEC membership twice: in 1961 and again in 1967. Both times de Gaulle worried that admitting Britain, with its strong ties to the United States, would transform the organization into an Atlantic community controlled by Washington. Britain was admitted in 1973 (along with Denmark and Ireland), when de Gaulle was no longer president of France. But many in the United Kingdom had wanted to stay out, especially those in the Conservative Party. It took a UK referendum in 1975 to confirm the country's EEC membership.

By 1993, the EEC had been integrated into the newly created European Union (EU), which had grown to fifteen member states by 1995 and in 2022 included twenty-seven member states. The EU was conceived as a single market for the free movement of goods, services, money, and people. Citizens of member countries can freely move to other EU countries and legally work there, just as they can in their own country. In 1999, the EU introduced its own currency, the euro. Initially used only for commercial and financial transactions in eleven of the EU countries, euro notes and coins had become the legal currency in the majority of EU countries by the start of 2002. The euro was not universally adopted by member states, though. The United Kingdom, Denmark, Sweden, and a few others kept their own currencies. The adoption of the euro was swiftly followed by a major expansion of the EU to include several Central and Eastern European countries including Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic.

In 2016, however, 52 percent of the citizens of the United Kingdom voted to leave the EU, and Britain officially cut its ties with the organization, its largest trading partner, on January 31, 2020. Some EU opponents in the United Kingdom had claimed the group was economically dysfunctional, especially after the recession of 2008, and that it reduced British sovereignty. Many also disliked the fact that its membership in the EU made it easier for people from elsewhere in Europe, including recent immigrants from the Middle East and Africa, to enter Britain. Those who wanted to stay argued that leaving would hurt British trade with Europe and make Britain poorer. Some also argued that losing the trade advantages that came with belonging to the EU could result in shortages in stores and more expensive products.

The breakup, colloquially known as "Brexit," was hardly amicable. In Britain, many who supported staying in the EU were shocked by the decision and demanded a re-vote, though none was taken. In Europe, the European Parliament, the EU's legislative body, was angry that Brexit might threaten the entire EU project. To show its displeasure and possibly to deter any other member states from leaving, the European Parliament wanted the separation to be as painful for the United Kingdom as possible, and many member countries supported this hardline stance. In today's post-Brexit world, there are new regulations on British goods entering the EU and no automatic recognition of British professional licenses in the EU. Britons seeking to make long-term stays in EU countries now must apply for visas.

Among the forces driving European economic integration was a desire for Europe to be more independent of the United States. This wish was understandable given the massive economic and political power the United States began wielding after World War II. Not only did the United States possess a huge military force with a global reach and growing installations in Europe and beyond, but its economic strength was the envy of the world. Having experienced the Great Depression in the years before the war, the United States emerged after it as an economic powerhouse with a highly developed industrial sector. More importantly, with the exception of the attack on Pearl Harbor, it had avoided the wartime destruction experienced in Europe and Asia. As a result, not only was it able to provide funds to war-torn nations to rebuild their economies and their infrastructure as part of the Marshall Plan, but U.S.-manufactured goods also flooded into markets around the world. By 1960, U.S. GDP had grown to \$543 billion a year (in current dollars). By comparison, the United Kingdom had the second-largest economy with a GDP of \$73 billion (in current dollars).

The economic might of the United States brought unprecedented growth and a rise in the population's standard of living in the decades after the war. With ready access to well-paying industrial jobs, the middle class boomed in the 1950s and 1960s. Their buying having been restrained during the war years because of the rationing of goods, consumers were eager to use their wartime savings to purchase new automobiles, televisions, household appliances, and suburban homes. Many enjoyed steady employment with new union-won benefits like weekends off and paid vacations. They also began sending their children to college in ever-greater numbers. By 1960, about 3.6 million young students were enrolled in higher education, an increase of 140 percent over the previous two decades. For many, access to higher education was the gateway to the middle or upper class.

By the 1970s, the U.S. economy began to cool, partially because of domestic inflation and increased competition from abroad. Oil embargoes by Arab nations belonging to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, in retaliation for U.S. support of Israel during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, and a general strategy by oil-producing nations to raise their prices, further stressed the economy by creating gas shortages for consumers. Other countries that had supported Israel, such as the Netherlands, also suffered from the embargo. Once dominant in most major industrial sectors, including the production of steel and automobiles,

around the world, by the end of the 1970s, U.S. manufacturers were suffering as a result of competition from Japan and Western Europe. This reality led to a number of difficult economic transformations in the United States. But it also encouraged some national leaders to seek regional international economic integration along lines similar to Western Europe's achievement. Beginning in the 1980s, the United States and Canada entered into negotiations to create their own regional free-trading zone. This appealed to some because Canada not only shared a long border with the United States but was also its largest trading partner. In 1988, the two countries agreed to the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (Canada-US FTA), which eliminated barriers to the movement of goods and services between the two.

Almost immediately, Mexico signaled its interest in creating a similar free trade agreement with the United States. U.S. president Ronald Reagan had floated the concept during his 1980 election campaign. But successful completion of the Canada-US FTA convinced Mexican leaders that the time was ripe to act on the idea. Ultimately, Canada joined the plan with Mexico as well, and by the end of 1992, all three countries had signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The intent of NAFTA was to reduce trade barriers and allow goods to flow freely among the three countries. Despite considerable resistance within the United States, largely from industrial workers who feared their factories and jobs would be relocated to Mexico where wages were far lower, the agreement was ratified by all three countries and went into effect in 1994.



Figure 7.2.2: President Bill Clinton addressing a North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) Products Event. (CC0 1.0; White House Photograph Office via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

The creation of Canada-US FTA and later NAFTA represented an important policy shift for the United States. Until the early 1980s, the country had largely avoided limited regional trading deals, preferring instead to seek comprehensive global agreements. Such efforts had begun relatively soon after World War II in the form of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), signed in 1947 by twenty-three countries. Initially conceived as a way to reinforce other postwar economic recovery efforts, GATT was designed to prevent the reemergence of prewar-style trade barriers, to lower trade barriers overall, and to create a system for arbitrating international trade disputes. Since its initial acceptance in 1947, GATT has undergone a number of revisions, completed in sessions referred to as rounds, to promote free trade and international investments.

In 1995, at the Uruguay Round, GATT transformed itself into the World Trade Organization (WTO) and cleared the path for free trade among 123 countries. Like GATT, the intent of the WTO was to support international trade, reduce trade barriers, and resolve trade disputes between countries. Unlike GATT, however, the WTO is not a free trade agreement. Rather, it is an organization that ensures nondiscriminatory trade between WTO countries. This means that trade barriers are allowed, but they must apply equally to all members. Many observers saw the creation of the WTO as a triumph of globalization, or the emergence of a single integrated global economy. China joined in 2001, a clear sign of its integration into global market systems.

Because the WTO is regarded as a major force for globalization, its meetings often attract protestors who oppose corporate power and the economic, political, and cultural influence of wealthy nations in the developed world on less-developed nations. In 1999, in Seattle, Washington, a diverse group of students, labor union representatives, environmentalists, and activists of many kinds protested the abuses associated with globalization. Police confronted activists staging marches and sit-ins with rubber bullets and tear gas, and trade talks ground to a halt. Meetings of the WTO continue to attract protestors.

As the creation of the EU and NAFTA demonstrate, the signing of international trade agreements like GATT, which was ratified by countries on six continents, did not prevent regions from establishing their own free trade blocs like MERCOSUR, the South American trading bloc created in 1991. Nor have such blocs been confined to the West. The most notable to emerge in Asia are the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

ASEAN had its beginnings in the 1960s when Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand agreed to cooperate economically to foster regional development and resist the expansion of communism in Asia. Largely successful, the organization expanded in the 1980s and 1990s to include more countries. By the early 2000s, it was openly advocating the creation of EU-style integration in the area.

APEC, launched in 1989, was in many ways a response to the growth of regional trading blocs like ASEAN and the EEC. Initially composed of twelve Asia-Pacific countries including Australia, the United States, South Korea, and Singapore, it has since grown to include Mexico, China, Chile, Russia, and more. It promotes free trade and international economic cooperation among its members.

The growing global economic integration represented by the rise of the WTO and regional trading blocs opened new opportunities for multinational corporations to extend their reach and influence around the world. A multinational corporation, or MNC, is a corporate business entity that controls the production of goods and services in multiple countries. MNCs are not new. Some, like the British East India Company and the Hudson's Bay Company, exerted great influence during Europe's imperial expansion in the early modern and modern periods. But with globalization and improvements in transportation and communication technology, MNCs have thrived, especially since the 1950s. They have used their growing wealth to lobby governments to create conditions favorable to their operation, enabling them to become even more powerful.

Multinationals have also benefited greatly from the lowering of trading barriers around the world. These developments have encouraged major automobile manufacturers like Volkswagen, Toyota, Chevrolet, Kia, and Nissan to build and operate assembly plants in Mexico, for example, where workers are paid lower wages than they are in countries like Germany, Japan, South Korea, or the United States. This translates to significant cost savings and thus higher profits for them. And because Mexico is part of a free trade bloc with the United States and Canada, cars made there can be exported for sale in the United States or Canada without the need to pay tariffs.

Supporters of MNCs claim that the benefits for workers in this arrangement are also substantial. They get access to better-paying and reliable industrial jobs not available before, and their paychecks flow into the local community and contribute to a general rise in the standard of living. The companies themselves invest in local infrastructure like roads, powerlines, and factories, and their presence often helps expand support industries like restaurants that cater to workers and shipping companies that employ them to move their goods. Technology spillovers also occur when MNCs either help to develop necessary job skills in local workers or introduce new technologies that ultimately become available to domestic industries in the host country. Finally, MNCs that focus on retail and establish branches in other countries, such as Walmart, Aldi, Costco, Carrefour, Ikea, and many more, provide access to high-quality consumer goods like clothing, appliances, and electronics at competitive prices, raising the standard of living in the countries where they operate.

There are drawbacks, however. Critics of MNCs note that while workers may be paid more than they could earn working for local businesses, they are still paid far less than the multinational can afford. Workers are often prevented from forming unions and forced to work long hours in unsafe environments. Furthermore, many multinationals are based in developed countries, mostly in the West, and they tend to express the interests and cultural norms of those countries. This bias has sometimes led to accusations of neocolonialism (the use of economic, political, or cultural power by developed countries to influence or control less-developed countries), particularly for the way MNCs have helped accelerate the homogenization of cultures around the world by exporting not only goods from the West but also ideas and behaviors.

One such idea is that countries should encourage the privatization of public services like utilities, transportation systems, and postal services. Privatization means delegating these services to mostly private companies that operate to earn a profit rather than such services being delivered by arms of the government. Organizations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have pushed for privatization believing it will make these public services more efficient. The World Bank is an international organization that offers financing and support to developing countries seeking to improve their economies. Founded in 1944 to rebuild countries after World War II, it later shifted its focus to global development. The IMF, also created in 1944, promotes global monetary stability by helping countries improve their economies with fiscal plans and sometimes loans. In exchange, it requires countries to adopt plans that often include privatizing public services and paying off their debts.

In some places, this privatization process has so far appeared successful. For decades after independence, for instance, India employed a mixed-economy strategy, with a combination of free-market policies and heavy intervention by the

government. The result, however, was that a large part of the public sector operated under cumbersome bureaucratic controls that critics complained slowed economic growth. Beginning in the 1990s, new leadership in India began pursuing economic liberalization by privatizing aspects of its large public sector including airlines, shipbuilding, telecommunications, electric power, and heavy industry. As expected, these efforts increased productivity and efficiency, but the public often was confronted by higher prices and loss of access to services.

The World Bank made similar efforts across Latin America. Some view privatization there as largely successful, noting that as the number of state-owned industries declined, the profitability and efficiency of the privatized companies increased. But sometimes, as in Bolivia, privatization came at considerable cost. In 1999, the Bechtel Corporation, a U.S.-based multinational, was awarded a contract by the Bolivian city of Cochabamba to improve the efficiency of the city's water delivery system. By January 2000, however, water delivery in Cochabamba had actually become worse. Service rates increased even for people who did not receive any water at all. This result led to large and sometimes violent protests later known as the Cochabamba Water War. The Bolivian government sided with the protestors, expelled Bechtel, and passed the Bolivian Water Law in April 2000. Water in Bolivia was no longer privatized. In the aftermath of the protests, which drew international media attention, the World Bank promised to study and revise its procedures and recommendations.

Multinationals have been crucial in the emergence of modern China as an economic powerhouse. Starting in the 1970s under Deng Xiaoping, the country began to pursue a market-based growth strategy, adopting some of the tools of capitalist economies without ending its communist ideology and party leadership. These economic changes, sometimes called the "Opening of China," vastly changed the country's role in the world's economy and improved a new generation's prospects for a higher standard of living. Factories constructed for MNCs in coastal cities like Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen were filled with workers from the Chinese countryside. Large ships stacked high with Chinese factory-made products crossed the Pacific and Indian Oceans and passed through the Suez and Panama Canals. With the world's largest population, China holds its largest group of consumers. In 2001 it joined the WTO, and in 2010 it became the world's second-largest economy, after the United States. As of 2022, China's economy was predicted to become the world's largest in 2030.

"Globalization"

Besides promoting controversial ideas like privatization, MNCs, many of which are headquartered in the United States, also are responsible for exporting elements of western culture, especially popular culture. Although many people around the world enjoy such things as western fashions, movies and television shows, popular music, and fast food, other people fear that such influences harm local cultures and contribute to the Americanization (and homogenization) of the world.

Few countries have been as culturally influential as the United States, thanks to its global dominance after World War II. U.S. troops at military bases around the world were often the first to expose their hosts in Europe and Asia to American traditions, sports, and norms. Consumers around the world purchased a wide range of "Made in USA" products, including Coca-Cola, Levi's jeans, and Hollywood movies, which, along with American music, helped to spread the American dialect of the English language.

Some early Americanization efforts were intentional, such as in Germany and Japan where the goal was to lay a foundation for U.S.-style society by projecting ideas like freedom and affluence via popular culture. These ideas were also deployed in South Korea and South Vietnam. Typically, young people patronized fast-food restaurants like McDonald's and Pizza Hut, purchased blue jeans and T-shirts, watched American television shows, and sought out recordings of the latest popular music.

The popularity of American culture led many countries to fear the loss of their own unique cultural characteristics and the weakening of their domestic industries. Brazil, Greece, Spain, South Korea, and others imposed screen quotas, limiting the hours theaters could show foreign movies. In 1993, France forced the nation's radio stations to allocate 40 percent of their airtime to exclusively French music.

Hollywood movies and American recording artists are still major players, but in the twenty-first century, some believe diversity has returned to the global stage. Japanese anime and manga have become global phenomena. South Korean K-pop bands like BTS, iKon, and Got7 have gained audiences in the United States, Europe, and across Asia. In 2021, the Korean-made serial thriller *Squid Game* became the most-watched Netflix show of all time. Korean television dramas are also very popular in Southeast Asian countries like the Philippines. Korean popular culture borrows American cultural styles but invigorates them with distinctly Korean elements. For example, K-pop, with its large groups and flashy choreographed dancing, was clearly influenced by hip-hop. K-pop itself is thus a potent reminder that globalization is often the product of cultural sharing rather than a one-directional flow of cultural norms.



Figure 7.2.3: Blackpink, girl K-Pop band accepting an award. (CC BY 4.0; @K_POP_Amber via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

7.3: Geopolitics and Modern Conflict

Conflict in the Middle East

As the Soviet Union disappeared as the preoccupation of western powers, the Middle East became a source of increased concern. In the wake of its eight-year war with Iran from 1980 to 1988, Iraq had accumulated a significant amount of foreign debt. At the same time, other Arab states had increased their oil production, forcing oil prices down and further hurting Iraq's economy. Iraq's leader, Saddam Hussein, approached these oil-producing states for assistance, particularly Saudi Arabia and neighboring Kuwait, which Iraq felt directly benefited from its war with Iran. When talks with these countries broke down, and Iraq found itself politically and economically isolated, Hussein ordered the invasion of oil-rich Kuwait in August 1990. Bush faced his first full-scale international crisis.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Describe threats to global peace and security since the end of the Cold War
- Identify some consequences of migration and refugee resettlement in Europe and the United States
- Identify recent and current threats to human rights around the world

In response to the invasion, Bush and his foreign policy team forged an international coalition of thirty-four countries, including many members of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and the Middle Eastern countries of Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Egypt, to oppose Iraq's invasion. Bush hoped that this coalition would herald the beginning of a "new world order" in which the nations of the world would work together to deter belligerence. A deadline was set for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait by January 15, or face serious consequences. Wary of not having sufficient domestic support for combat, Bush first deployed troops to the area to build up forces in the region and defend Saudi Arabia via Operation Desert Shield. On January 14, Bush succeeded in getting resolutions from Congress authorizing the use of military force against Iraq, and the U.S. then orchestrated an effective air campaign, followed by Operation Desert Storm, a one-hundred-hour land war involving over 500,000 U.S. troops and another 200,000 from twenty-seven other countries, which expelled Iraqi forces from Kuwait by the end of February.

Some controversy arose among Bush's advisors regarding whether to end the war without removing Saddam Hussein from power, but General Colin Powell, the head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, argued that to continue to attack a defeated army would be "un-American." Bush agreed and troops began moving out of the area in March 1991. Although Hussein was not removed from power, the war nevertheless suggested that the United States no longer suffered from "Vietnam Syndrome" and would deploy massive military resources if and when it thought necessary. In April 1991, United Nations (UN) Resolution 687 set the terms of the peace, with long-term implications. Its concluding paragraph authorizing the UN to take such steps as necessary to maintain the peace was later taken as the legal justification for the further use of force, as in 1996 and 1998, when Iraq was again bombed. It was also referenced in the lead-up to the second invasion of Iraq in 2003, when it appeared that Iraq was refusing to comply with other UN resolutions.

The U.S. and the Global "War on Terror"

Nuclear proliferation remained an issue after the Cold War. India, for example, had become a nuclear power in 1974. At the time, it claimed it was not pursuing nuclear weapons capability, but since then, it has embraced these weapons as an important part of its security platform. Given the history of hostility between India and Pakistan, international observers in the 1970s worried about the implications of a nuclear-armed India. Some of these fears were realized in 1998 when Pakistan tested its first nuclear weapons, a goal toward which it had been building since before India became a nuclear power. While India maintains a no-first-use doctrine for its nuclear weapons, Pakistan has not reciprocated. Today, the countries have approximately one hundred nuclear weapons each, as well as long-range ballistic missile delivery systems.

Only a few years after Pakistan tested its first nuclear weapon, the illusion of an enduring post-Cold War peace was further shaken when on September 11, 2001, nineteen militant Islamic hijackers took control of four large passenger airplanes and crashed two of them into New York City's World Trade Center, one into the Pentagon, and the fourth—after its path was deflected

by passengers—into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. It was soon determined that the terrorist attack, which killed nearly three thousand people from many nations, had been orchestrated by al-Qaeda, an Islamic terrorist organization then based in Afghanistan that was financed and led by a militant Saudi Arabian national named Osama bin Laden. According to bin Laden, the attack was carried out in response to U.S. support for Israel and its continued military presence in the Middle East, especially in Saudi Arabia home of the holiest cities in Islam, Mecca and Medina.

After assessing the damage and collecting global support, the United States launched an attack on Afghanistan with the stated purpose of finding those responsible. This offensive represented the beginning of the U.S. war on terror and resulted in the collapse of Afghanistan's Islamic fundamentalist Taliban government, many of whose officials fled to the southern parts of the country or into neighboring Pakistan. Most of al-Qaeda's leadership also escaped, however, including Osama bin Laden. Over the next several years, the U.S. military pursued a policy of attempting to eliminate al-Qaeda, rebuild civil society and infrastructure in Afghanistan, and prop up a democratically elected regime in the country. These efforts were made more difficult, however, by the decision of President George W. Bush to launch an invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The United States supported Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) but came into conflict with it during the Gulf War in 1990, when Iraq invaded its neighbor Kuwait. The United States, Great Britain, and thirty-three other nations came to Kuwait's defense by bombing Iraqi targets and then launching a ground invasion. A mere one hundred hours after the coalition's ground invasion began, Iraqi forces had retreated from Kuwait, and a cease-fire was in place. Immediately following, uprisings took place in Kurdish and Shi'ite regions of Iraq that sought to topple President Saddam Hussein's government. Hussein brutally crushed the attempted revolts, but the coalition forces withdrew from Iraq, leaving him in power.

In 2001, in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks, some U.S. foreign policy leaders began to argue that Hussein might acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), possibly including biological weapons. The Bush administration said they wanted to prevent this and hoped to channel the international goodwill showered on the country after the 2001 attacks toward the goal of removing the secular Iraqi leader who had nothing to do with the religious fundamentalists behind attacks. In an effort to make a case that Iraq was attempting to secure illegal weapons the Bush administration sent Secretary of State Colin Powell to the United Nations to present the argument that Iraq had connections to al-Qaeda and possessed WMDs that made it a threat to international security. At the time many in the US and the international community were skeptical of the weak and flawed evidence. The UN Security Council refused to authorize a US invasion of the country.



Figure 7.3.1: A photograph of the damage to the Pentagon caused by the 9/11 attacks. (CC0 1.0; TSGT CEDRIC H. RUDISILL, USAF via Wikimedia Commons). Detailed Description of Figure 7.3.1.

Nevertheless, the U.S. and a handful of allies invaded Iraq on March 19, 2003, just a few weeks after Powell's presentation. By 2005, after years of US occupation and searching, it was undeniable that Iraq did not possess WMDs. Nevertheless, the invasion caused the violent unraveling of Iraqi society, which the coalition forces then struggled for years to bring under control. There were countless civilian casualties; Brown University's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs estimates that between 184,382 and 207,156 civilians were killed. While the United States could point to some successes, such as the 2005 Iraq elections and the 2006 conviction of Saddam Hussein for crimes against humanity, the nation's reputation as a global force capable of projecting power to bring about positive change in the world had suffered greatly.

The consequences for the United States became more obvious in October 2006 when communist North Korea launched its first nuclear weapons test, an event the U.S. government had worked for years to prevent. The test was the culmination of decades of work inside the isolated country. North Korean leaders believed nuclear weapons would guarantee its survival in the post-Cold War world. But the United States and neighboring countries like South Korea and Japan worried that the North Korean regime might use the weapons against them. Given the problems in Iraq and diminished global standing of the United States, it was unclear whether North Korea could be deterred from attempting additional tests, or whether the United States could discourage other countries that defied US power like Iran from pursuing a nuclear weapons program.

In 2011, the withdrawal of U.S. combat troops from Iraq was completed, eight long years after the invasion. Hopes that peace in Iraq would last were dashed, however, with the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a fundamentalist and militant Islamic group also referred to as the Islamic State. Formed in 1999, ISIL had fought against the U.S.-led coalition that invaded Iraq in 2003. In 2014, it attacked Iraqi security forces and drove them from a number of cities, including Ramadi, Fallujah, and Mosul, and it killed thousands of members of the Yazidi minority group in Iraq's Sinjar district.

ISIL leaders proclaimed themselves the heads of a new caliphate, an Islamic state led by a ruler claiming to be a successor to Muhammad, with religious and political authority over all Muslims. This is a claim most of the world's Muslims reject. In response, a military coalition led by the United States returned to Iraq following a request by the Iraqi government. Meanwhile, ISIL's counterpart in Syria, known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, waged war against both the government of Syria and other nonfundamentalist groups that were also seeking to oust Syria's president Bashar al-Assad. The U.S.-led coalition that returned to Iraq to fight the Islamic State there intervened in Syria as well.

Refugee Crises

Instability in Iraq and Syria led to a flood of refugees making their way across the Mediterranean to Europe in 2015. Yet more were fleeing a civil war in Libya or genocidal violence in the Darfur region of Sudan, while many others sought to escape failing states and poverty driven in part by disruptions caused by globalization in numerous parts of the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. These refugees and economic migrants felt they would find a better and safer life in the developed countries of the West, particularly Germany, Sweden, Britain, France, and the United States, and many were willing to risk their lives to achieve this.

Upon arrival, these groups met various responses. While some argued that the refugees had survived trauma and deserved to be welcomed with open arms, others said they were fleeing circumstances outside the host country's responsibility and would bring too many cultural and religious changes. For example, many Europeans feared that refugees from Islamic countries would reject the values of the largely secular European nations in which they settled. Many others believe that Muslims embrace political extremism or support acts of terrorism. Responding to the developing migrant crisis, German chancellor Angela Merkel declared, "We can do this!" and promised Germany would welcome 800,000 refugees in 2015.

While some were heartened by Merkel's offer, others throughout Europe felt it was short-sighted. They noted that since Germany was in the European Union, bringing refugees there effectively amounted to bringing them into any other country in the EU. Within Germany itself, there was also resistance. Founded in 2014, the German group Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West (PEGIDA) began conducting weekly marches in cities like Dresden, declaring that opening the doors to the Islamic world would spell the end of Europe. While PEGIDA made a point not to categorically oppose refugees, members continue to openly oppose the presence of the Islamic religion and culture within Germany.



Figure 7.3.2: A PEGIDA demonstration in Frankfurt, Germany. (CC BY 2.0; Opposition 24 via [Wikimedia Commons](#)). [Detailed Description of Figure 7.3.2.](#)

PEGIDA is just one of several ultra nationalist movements that support an extreme form of nationalism and often seek to create ethnically homogeneous homelands. Others are Golden Dawn in Greece, the English Defence League in Britain, and the Identitarian Movement of Austria. Such groups advocate the establishment of ethnic-based citizenship, resist non-European immigration, and generally promote more conservative social policies. Europe is not the only continent to see a resurgence of xenophobic political activism in the last few decades. In Japan, Nippon Kaigi (“Japan Conference”) is an ultra nationalist organization founded in 1997 that advocates a staunchly nationalist education system, a strong monarchy, and positive interpretation of Japan’s imperial past. The Nationalist Front of Mexico was founded in 2006 and advocates a neofascist ideology and a retreat from globalization. In the United States, the American Freedom Party, American Identity Movement, Patriot Front, National Justice Party, and others promote similar ideas. These groups are especially concerned with preventing immigration to the United States from Latin America. They are generally in the neofascist mold and advocate a United States that is overwhelmingly White and European in culture.

Modern Global Developments

Latin America

Many of the migrants arriving at the southern border of the United States are fleeing economic and political disorder in their home countries. This pattern goes back many decades. For example, many thousands of Salvadoran migrants have entered the United States each year, especially during and after the El Salvador Civil War. That war began in 1979 with a military coup supported by the United States, which feared that radical leftist elements in El Salvador were destabilizing the country and leading it in a direction contrary to U.S. Cold War interests.

By supporting the coup with money, military training, and the sharing of intelligence reports, the United States hoped to return stability to El Salvador, but the opposite occurred. Many in El Salvador felt the military government was illegitimate and staged protests and resistance. The military responded with violence of its own, such as a deadly attack on demonstrators in 1980. There were also rightist paramilitary groups, often referred to as “death squads,” fighting against leftist guerrilla forces in the countryside and committing murders and massacres. As the country descended into chaos, many left and found refuge in the United States. Today these immigrants number about 2.5 million.

A similar pattern of civil war and instability in other parts of Central America has also produced human rights abuses and an increase in migration to the United States. The Guatemalan Civil War (1960–1996), for example, led to numerous human rights violations against Guatemalans. These included a reported campaign of violence and terrorism by the government against ethnic Mayans and peasants accused of supporting leftist guerrilla groups. Nicaragua has experienced destabilization since the 1960s as well. Leftist guerrilla organizations fought against the dictatorship of the Somoza family, which ruled until the late 1970s. Then, in 1979, one of the major leftist groups, the Sandinistas, took control. The Sandinistas were socialists, and within months

they had opened diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and later accepted its economic and military assistance. This action alarmed the United States and led it to support resistance to the Sandinista government, which contributed to an escalation of the violence and a number of human rights abuses on both sides.

While violence in Central America has declined in the last few decades, it persists elsewhere. Venezuela, effectively a one-party state since 2007, has been accused by the United States of a number of human rights abuses. These include murder, imprisonment, torture, and government support of armed groups that commit violence against protestors. Similar accusations have been made against the governments in Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Peru, and Chile. Chile's government committed numerous human rights abuses against its people during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973–1990). These included torture, execution, and sexual abuse of leftist political opponents. While Pinochet has since died, human rights organizations claim the abuses continue, particularly against Indigenous groups and those identifying as LGBTQ+.

Africa

Similar human rights abuses committed by authoritarian governments are also a persistent reality across much of Africa. Between April and July 1994, nearly 800,000 people were killed in Rwanda when an estimated 200,000 members of the Hutu majority sought to wipe out the minority Tutsi population and any Hutus who tried to protect them. Armed conflicts in countries like Liberia, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, and Somalia have also led to many human rights violations. In a number of countries, militant Islamic organizations have committed civilian massacres and targeted killings. These include attacks by Boko Haram, the Islamic State in West Africa, and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, which have been responsible for many hundreds of deaths over the last few years. In response, the governments in these countries have committed atrocities of their own. For example, in 2021, government forces in the Central African Republic attacked a mosque and killed fourteen people.

Governments across Africa have often used violence to break up anti-government protests. For example, in the small southern African country of Eswatini (formerly Swaziland), government forces broke up a pro-democracy protest in 2021, killing eighty people and injuring more than two hundred. Many more who protested the regime of the Eswatini king Mswati III were arrested. Similar actions against protestors in Sudan that year led to the deaths of fifty-three people. And other government abuses across the continent have resulted in long prison sentences and even death for protestors, whistleblowers, and journalists who have challenged government policies.

In Angola, rich in diamonds and oil, struggled with the resource curse. In 2018, oil made up more than 92 percent of its exports, and the oil industry accounted for about a third of its GDP. Since achieving independence from Portugal in 1975, the country has experienced internal wars. For much of this period, until 2017, Angola was ruled by José Eduardo dos Santos, who was routinely criticized internationally for election fraud, corruption, and authoritarianism. Much of his power was derived from the oil rents paid to him by oil companies operating in Angola, which he used to oppress his opposition, maintain his hold on power, and shower his family and close contacts with favors and money. The oil rents were substantial, but relatively little of this money actually trickled down to the country's largely impoverished people (Figure 15.35). Strife also weakened Angola's ability to feed itself. Famine conditions prevailed in the 1980s and 1990s, and many educated and skilled workers left for opportunities abroad. In 2019, the percentage of the population below the national poverty line was 41 percent, 30 percent of adults had not completed primary schooling, and 53 percent of the country had no access to electricity.

While Angola is an extreme case, its problems are generally representative of those in many countries across the Global South, including those unaffected by the resource curse. As of 2015, approximately 85 percent of the world's extreme poor (those living on less than \$1.90 per day) lived in Sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia, and half of them lived in just five countries: India, Bangladesh, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Ethiopia. Many lack access to good-quality medical care, infrastructure, educational resources, and communication systems. They face high rates of famine, disease, and death from political instability. They also experience food instability. According to the United Nations, approximately 800 million people faced hunger in 2020, many in the Global South. They are also more vulnerable to natural disasters like hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, and heat waves. Their countries are more likely to experience problems related to environmental and industrial pollution, as well as the many effects of climate change.

Asia

In Asia, Myanmar and China demonstrate that human rights violations can emerge where racial and religious prejudices against minorities are pronounced. The Rohingya people, a Muslim minority living in predominantly Buddhist Myanmar, have faced oppression for generations, including being officially excluded from citizenship in 1982. Because they are a small minority and

viewed with suspicion by the larger Buddhist population, they have long been vulnerable to attacks. In 2017, brutality against the Rohingya escalated dramatically and triggered a mass migration of more than 700,000 to neighboring Bangladesh. As of 2022, nearly a million Rohingya people were still living in large refugee camps there.

Another case of state-sponsored abuse against an ethnic minority is the oppression of the Uyghurs of China. The Uyghurs number about eleven million and are a mostly Muslim ethnic group of Turkic origin living in northwestern Xinjiang. The Chinese government has repressed them for decades, claiming that many hold extremist ideas about carving out their own Islamic state, which China views as a threat to its territorial integrity. Chinese policy has been to compel the Uyghurs to conform their religious beliefs more thoroughly to the state's nationalist message and to eliminate separatist movements. Since at least as early as 2017, China has rounded up several hundred thousand Uyghurs and placed them in what it calls vocational training centers. Human rights groups, however, have described these as reeducation camps intended to compel the Uyghurs to renounce Islam and become loyal Chinese citizens. Relatively little is known about the many camps because the state controls information and denies that abuse occurs within them.



Figure 7.3.3: Uyghur community members at a Sunday market in Xinjiang, illustrating daily life and local commerce. (CC BY 2.0; Todenhoff via [Wikimedia Commons](#)).

Women and girls often face the brunt of violence when instability reigns or when states sponsor oppression against minorities. Both Rohingya and Uyghur women have described sexual abuse perpetrated by the state or with its tacit approval. In 2014, the world condemned the Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram's attack on a girl's high school in Nigeria and its kidnapping of 276 mostly Christian female students, many of whom were forced into marriages with Boko Haram members or sold into sexual slavery. Those who escaped have described beatings, sexual assaults, and torture. While this event captured global attention, including from then US First Lady Michelle Obama, many similar kidnappings have occurred before and since with almost no international coverage at all.

The situation of women in Afghanistan is particularly dire. Since retaking control of the country in August 2021 following the U.S. military's departure, the Taliban has rolled back virtually all the once-protected civil rights of women and girls. Afghan women have been denied access to education, health care, and civil rights and the right to free expression, freedom of movement, and freedom of association. They are required to completely cover their bodies while outdoors and are routinely inspected by security officials to ensure they are properly clothed and in the company of a male relative. Because they are now restricted in the types of jobs they can hold, many Afghan women have found it difficult to earn enough money to support themselves or their families as they once did.

7.4: Alternative Text Description

Figure 7.3.1: Aerial view of the Pentagon

This image shows a large, rectangular building viewed from an elevated angle. The building spans the width of the image, with long horizontal sections and a flat roof divided into multiple segments. The central portion of the structure has suffered severe damage, with a large gap where floors and walls have collapsed inward.

In the foreground, an open area is filled with debris, construction materials, and equipment. Several cranes and lifting machines extend upward, with long arms reaching toward the damaged section of the building. Workers are dispersed across the ground, wearing protective clothing and clustered in small groups, indicating coordinated activity.

In the middle section of the image, the building's façade is partially intact on both the left and right sides. Rows of evenly spaced windows remain visible, contrasting with the central collapsed area where structural elements have fallen inward and downward. Broken beams, concrete fragments, and twisted materials fill the gap.

On the right side, a large flag hangs vertically from the side of the building, positioned near the damaged area. Emergency vehicles and equipment are stationed nearby.

In the background, additional sections of the building extend further back, appearing less damaged but showing signs of wear and disruption near the collapsed zone.

Spatial relationships and function: The central collapse divides the building into two intact sides, emphasizing the extent of destruction. The positioning of cranes, vehicles, and workers around the damaged area indicates an organized response effort focused on clearing debris and recovering the site. The image conveys the scale of structural damage and the coordinated activity required in response to a major destructive event.

Figure 7.3.2: Public Demonstration with Political Banners

This image shows a group of individuals standing outdoors in front of a building, holding large banners stretched horizontally across the foreground. The group is arranged in a line, facing forward, and standing close together.

In the foreground, two large banners dominate the scene. The banner on the left is white with bold text that reads “PEGIDA-DEUTSCHLAND” across the top and “GEWALTFREI & FRIEDLICH” below. The banner includes a symbol of a walking figure discarding an item into a bin. The banner on the right is red and black, with large yellow and white text that reads “LÜGENPRESSE BLEIBT LÜGENPRESSE,” along with smaller text above it.

Several individuals hold the banners at both ends and along the middle, gripping the top edges. Some individuals wear casual clothing, including jackets and hooded sweatshirts, and are spaced evenly across the width of the banners.

Behind the group, a van is parked with its doors open, and a large flag with horizontal stripes is draped across part of the vehicle. Additional flags are visible behind the group, with vertical color bands. The building in the background has a textured stone or plaster façade with windows and architectural details.

On the right edge of the image, a smaller banner or sign is partially visible near an open doorway. In the lower foreground, a small traffic cone sits on the ground, indicating the event takes place in a public or controlled outdoor space.

Spatial relationships and function: The banners form a visual barrier across the front of the group, clearly presenting written messages as the central focus. The positioning of individuals behind the banners emphasizes collective action. The flags and signage reinforce that this is a coordinated public demonstration. The image communicates how groups use text, symbols, and shared positioning in public spaces to convey messages and express viewpoints during demonstrations.

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7.5: Chapter Themes to Discuss

This page offers different themes that appear throughout the sections in this chapter. The themes are meant to provide a framework in which discussion questions can be developed to inspire further exploration of the topics covered.

1. The factors that led to the end of the Soviet Union.
2. The politics and economic developments in the post-Cold War world.
3. The emerging technologies of the 1980s and 1990s that had a profound impact on the modern geopolitical landscape.
4. The tensions that continue to create division in the modern world.

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7.6: Teacher Resources

Supplemental Materials to Enhance the Chapter

These materials are provided to help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction. Some resources are openly licensed, while others may require institutional access or individual review before use in class.

Web Resources

These websites may help instructors extend and enrich chapter instruction.

- [World History Encyclopedia](#) – Provides overviews of important people, places, and events throughout history. This resource can be useful for finding concise, expert-informed background information.
- [Fordham University Internet History Sourcebooks Project](#) – Provides translated, transcribed, and digitized primary sources. This resource can support source-based instruction, though instructors should review links carefully because some materials may be incomplete or less suitable for classroom use.

Articles

These articles provide additional scholarly context for this chapter. Access may depend on your institution's JSTOR subscription.

- Ackerman, Elliot. "Winning Ugly: What the War on Terror Cost America." *Foreign Affairs* 100, no. 5 (2021): 66–74, 1–26. [Access article in JSTOR](#)

8: CONCLUSION

The Ongoing Work of Making History

Making (More) History: World History, 1750–Present has explored the profound changes over a roughly 250-year period that have shaped the world we live in today. The long-term processes that have created our modern world can only be fully scrutinized by analyzing what has happened since 1750, and more importantly, why. Despite the immense changes that have occurred in this period, the world today, much like it was in 1750, is still increasingly interconnected, and shaped by both cooperation and conflict.

This narrative reflects the immense challenge of making even more history. Not all voices and experiences are equally preserved, and some perspectives may be underrepresented or omitted. The idea of “history denying” reminds us to critically consider whose stories are told and whose are missing.

The technologies that emerged since 1750 have also profoundly altered the relationships between regions and peoples — including the transformative impact of global interactions that reshaped economic systems, belief systems, and power structures. These changes directly and indirectly shaped our world today.

As you assess our world as it exists today, consider how the events since 1750 set the stage for the present — and how the study of history is an ongoing process of interpretation and inclusion.

[8.1: The World Since 1750](#)

[8.2: Bibliography](#)

8.1: The World Since 1750

What is the value of history?

Whose stories are told when we construct the historical record? Who is telling them; how are they told, and why are they deemed important enough to be told (and by whom)? Historians are constantly debating these questions. No matter the position a respective scholar has on these questions, in the end, peoples and events end up in history textbooks – and the stories that appear there imply that they are important. The histories that have shaped our world, as local or global as they may be, have importance to someone. Yet, the events that appeared in this textbook have regional, national, and global significance, even if they do not address every event that had an impact on the history of a particular region and its peoples.

Most scholars would agree that there is limited time and space to cover every possible event that has happened in the past, and that requires authors of textbooks to pick and choose what they include. This does not always imply that the events and peoples left out is intentionally done to "silence" those perspectives. In her study on colonialism and gender, scholar Irene Silverblatt explains that creating historical knowledge also involves – either inadvertently or deliberately – "history denying." Silverblatt argues that versions of the past (history) are always politicized – whether we want to acknowledge that fact or not. She rightly asserts that multiple versions of a past event exist. Certain versions function to reinforce and uphold prevailing beliefs that benefit the individuals overseeing institutions of power. Other versions directly challenge the traditional ideas and the existing power structures. Therefore, what is and is not including in the retelling of the past reveals the relationship that history has with the building and maintenance of power in the present.

It is important to recognize that those who choose to tell only one version of a past event could have ulterior motives in mind. They might be seeking to create a politicized narrative about history that does not reflect a thorough and honest understanding of the past in order to advance politically motivated self-interests in the present. By controlling history, people can shape power in the present. This is why studying history is so important. The more informed people are on the varied perspectives of the people affected by past events, the more empowered they can be to challenge power structures in the present. What lies ahead? What will the history of the future reveal about the human experience? Only time will tell...

The Continued East-West Divide

One of the overarching themes of the Cold War was the geopolitical divide imposed on the world by the Soviet Union and United States. People living through the decades of the Cold War, and scholars today, use(d) the terms "East" and "West" to describe the differences between the two superpowers. They had geographic significance, and political meaning as well. The Soviet Union, in eastern Europe, and by extension, communism came to represent "the east." In contrast, capitalism and the United States, in the western hemisphere – and allied with nations in western Europe – represented "the west."

This was not the only time in history that these terms had more than geographic importance. Not long after that the Roman Empire fell, a divide between the eastern and western regions of the empire emerged in which Constantinople continued to serve as the capital of Rome. Romans living in the East, in Constantinople, conceived of themselves as the true Romans, and separated themselves from the West geographically. In doing so, they also separated themselves culturally, and intellectually.

The initial east-west divide on the European continent shifted once Islam spread throughout the Middle East, Africa, and into the Iberian Peninsula. The Crusades presented another intellectual and cultural shift in the meaning of "east" and "west." Once Europeans embraced a common identity under Christianity, they reconnected with Rome and the legacy of the Roman Catholic Church. Within the crusading mindset, European Christendom stood in opposition to Islam, which was seen as a "threat" from the east that contributed to the construction of Europe as "the West" and the Middle East as "the East."

The Crusades reoriented the deeper political meanings behind the terms "east" and "west," and the labels underwent another transformative period in 1492 when Europeans encountered the peoples living in North, Central, and South America – the western hemisphere. The global divide between major continents presented a major intellectual shift in the political, cultural, and geographic meanings of "east" and "west." The eastern hemisphere was called the "Old World" by Europeans who centered themselves in the historical retelling of the encounters they made that they subsequently called "discoveries." Every region and person living throughout the western hemisphere were part of the "New World." These terms carried political meaning, and shaped how many people understood this historic development for centuries.

Once European powers began colonizing the Americas, they extended the political and cultural meanings of “the West” onto the land and peoples they sought to conquer and control. Therefore, European colonists conceived of themselves as living in a “new world” but retaining the ideas they believed made them unique and superior to the Indigenous Peoples they encountered and were suddenly living among.

Throughout the centuries, White, Euro-Americans and their descendants that eventually populated the United States of America continued to remake their history and relationship with Europe. White Americans continued to embrace (and celebrate) their European ancestry while simultaneously asserting their superior – and “exceptional” – place within world history.

New ideas emerged along with industrialization that altered the construction of economic theories in which capitalism evolved within the United States. Critiques of capitalism appeared and through the writings of Karl Marx, a major opposition to it, communism, appealed to many who were oppressed through capitalism's influence on politics and power. When the Cold War rose from the ashes of the Second World War, it intensified the debate over these two conflicting systems and imbued the geography with political meaning that redefined “east” and “west.”

In many ways, our world today is still interested in the discourse surrounding the historical construction of “east” and “west.” We can see the evidence of this ongoing debate everywhere. From social media trends asking people how often they think about the Roman Empire, to courses taught under the title “Western Civilization,” to the way that global leaders still describe a political divide across the world. However, if history has taught anything, it's that the conversation is not over.

Debates over the importance of history – and by extension, how we define “east” and “west” – will continue into the future. Their conclusion is still being written, but the text for this particular book must come to an end. This is where this textbook leaves you as you navigate into a world where certain actors will seek to exploit ignorance to their advantage. Hopefully you will take the knowledge and wisdom from the contents of this textbook to be an informed global citizen who will work to build a better world for all.

8.2: Bibliography

Sources

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