

# Western Civilization: A Concise History - Volume 3

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Version 3.0

Last Updated: May, 2024

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# The Idea of Western Civilization

## Introduction

What is “Western Civilization”? Furthermore, who or what is part of it? Like all ideas, the concept of Western Civilization itself has a history, one that coalesced in college textbooks and curriculums for the first time in the United States in the 1920s. In many ways, the very idea of Western Civilization is a “loaded” one, opposing one form or branch of civilization from others as if they were distinct, even unrelated. Thus, before examining the events of Western Civilization’s history, it is important to unpack the history of the concept itself.

## Where is the West?

The obvious question is “west of what”? Likewise, where is “the east”? Terms used in present-day geopolitics regularly make reference to an east and west, as in “Far East,” and “Middle East,” as well as in “Western” ideas or attitudes. The obvious answer is that “the West” has something to do with Europe. If the area including Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Israel - Palestine, and Egypt is somewhere called the “Middle” or “Near” East, doesn't that imply that it is just to the east of something else?

In fact, we get the original term from ancient Greece. Greece is the center-point: east of the Balkan Peninsula was east, west of the Balkans was west, and the Greeks were at the center of their self-understood world. Likewise, the sea that both separated and united the Greeks and their neighbors, including the Egyptians and the Persians, is still called the Mediterranean, which means “sea in the middle of the earth” (albeit in Latin, not Greek - we get the word from a later “Western” civilization, the Romans). The ancient civilizations clustered around the Mediterranean treated it as the center of the world itself, their major trade route to one another and a major source of their food as well.

To the Greeks, there were two kinds of people: Greeks and barbarians (the Greek word is *barbaros*). Supposedly, the word barbarian came from Greeks mocking the sound of non-Greek languages: “bar-bar-bar-bar.” The Greeks traded with all of their neighbors and knew perfectly well that the Persians and the Egyptians and the Phoenicians, among others, were not their inferiors in learning, art, or political organization, but the fact remains that they



were not Greek, either. Thus, one of the core themes of Western Civilization is that right from its inception, of the east being east of Greece and the west being west of Greece, and of the world being divided between Greeks and barbarians, there was an idea of who is central and superior, and who is out on the edges and inferior (or at least not part of the best version of civilization).

In a sense, then, the Greeks invented the idea of west and east, but they did not extend the idea to anyone but themselves, certainly including the “barbarians” who inhabited the rest of Europe. In other words, the Greeks did not have a concept of “Western Civilization,” just Greek vs. barbarian. Likewise, the Greeks did not invent “civilization” itself; they inherited things like agriculture and writing from their neighbors. Neither was there ever a united Greek empire: there was a great Greek civilization when Alexander the Great conquered what he thought was most of the world, stretching from Greece itself through Egypt, the Middle East, as far as western India, but it collapsed into feuding kingdoms after he died. Thus, while later cultures came to look to the Greeks as their intellectual and cultural ancestors, the Greeks themselves did not set out to found “Western Civilization” itself.

## Mesopotamia and Civilization

“The West” as a concept is rooted in the geography of Greece, but “civilization” is not. The word is linked to the Latin word for city, *civitas*, and it suggests a way of life centering on the products of an urbanized culture. Likewise, as noted above with the Greeks, civilization was usually seen as the opposite of barbarism, and historically it was nomadic, non-urbanized peoples who were most likely to be labeled as “barbarians.” For the sake of historical analysis, however, we can set aside the pejorative distinction between civilization and barbarism and instead consider civilization as a set of essential technological advances and examine how those technologies altered human life on an enormous scale. That process began in the Middle East thousands of years before the first cities of ancient Greece existed.

The most ancient human civilizations arose in the Fertile Crescent, an area stretching from present-day Israel - Palestine through southern Turkey and into Iraq. Closely related, and lying within the Fertile Crescent, is the region of Mesopotamia, which is the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in present-day Iraq. In these areas, people invented the most crucial technology necessary for the development of civilization: agriculture. The Mesopotamians also invented other things that are central to civilization, including towns and cities, the earliest writing systems, mathematics, engineering, and both organized religion and complex political systems. Similar advances happened in key regions across the globe,

including China, India, and Mesoamerica, but it happened first in Mesopotamia, and it was from Mesopotamia that civilization spread to the rest of western Eurasia.

## Greece and Rome

Even if we do not start with the Greeks, we do need to acknowledge their importance. Alexander the Great was one of the most famous and important military leaders in history, a man who started conquering “the world” when he was eighteen years old. When he died his empire fell apart, in part because he did not say which of his generals was to take over after his death. Nevertheless, the empires he left behind were united in important ways, using Greek as one of their languages, employing Greek architecture in their buildings, putting on plays in the Greek style, and of course, trading with one another. This period in history is called the Hellenistic Age. The people who were part of that age were European, Middle Eastern, and North African, people who worshiped both Greek gods and the gods of their own regions, spoke all kinds of different languages, and lived as part of a hybrid culture. Hellenistic civilization demonstrates the fact that Western Civilization has always been a blend of different peoples, not a single encompassing group or language or religion.

Perhaps the most important empire in the ancient history of Western Civilization was ancient Rome. Over the course of roughly five centuries, the Romans expanded from the city of Rome in the middle of the Italian peninsula to rule an empire that stretched from Britain to Spain and from North Africa to Persia (present-day Iran). Through both incredible engineering, the hard work of Roman citizens and Roman subjects, and the massive use of slave labor, they built remarkable buildings and created infrastructure like roads and aqueducts that survive to the present day.

The Romans are the ones who give us the idea of Western Civilization being something *ongoing* – something that had started in the past and continued into the future. In the case of the Romans, they (sometimes grudgingly) acknowledged Greece as a cultural model; Roman architecture used Greek shapes and forms, the Roman gods were really just the Greek gods given new names (Zeus became Jupiter, Hades became Pluto, etc.), and educated Romans spoke and read Greek so that they could read the works of the great Greek poets, playwrights, and philosophers. Thus, the Romans deliberately adopted an older set of ideas and considered themselves part of an ongoing civilization that blended Greek and Roman values. Like the Greeks before them, they also divided civilization itself in a stark binary: there was

Greco-Roman culture on the one hand and barbarism on the other, although they made a reluctant exception for Persia at times.

The Romans were largely successful at assimilating the people they conquered. They united their provinces with the Latin language, which is the ancestor of all of the major languages spoken in Southern Europe today (French, Italian, Spanish, Romanian, etc.), Roman Law, which is the ancestor of most forms of law still in use today in Europe, and the Roman form of government. Along with those factors, the Romans brought Greek and Roman science, learning, and literature to the reaches of their empire. In many ways, the Romans believed that they were bringing civilization itself everywhere they went, and because they made the connection between Greek civilization and their own, they played a significant role in inventing the idea of Western Civilization as something that was ongoing.

That noted, the Romans did not use the term “Western Civilization” and as their empire expanded, even the connection between Roman identity and Italy itself weakened. During the period that the empire was at its height the bulk of the population and wealth was in the east, concentrated in Egypt, Anatolia (the region corresponding to the present-day nation of Turkey) and the Middle East. This shift to the east culminated in the move of the capital of the empire from the city of Rome to the Greek town of Byzantium, renamed Constantinople by the emperor who ordered the move: Constantine. Thus, while the Greco-Roman legacy was certainly a major factor in the development of the *idea* of Western Civilization much later, “Roman” was certainly not the same thing as “western” at the time.

## The Middle Ages and Christianity

Another stage in the development of the idea of Western Civilization came about after Rome ceased to exist as a united empire, during the era known as the Middle Ages. The Middle Ages were the period between the fall of Rome, which happened around 476 CE, and the Renaissance, which started around 1300 CE. During the Middle Ages, another concept of what lay at the heart of Western Civilization arose, especially among Europeans. It was not just the connection to Roman and Greek accomplishments, but instead, to religion. The Roman Empire had started to become Christian in the early fourth century CE when the emperor, Constantine, converted to Christianity. Many Europeans in the Middle Ages came to believe that, despite the fact that they spoke different languages and had different rulers, they were united as part of “Christendom”: the kingdom of Christ and of Christians.

Christianity obviously played a hugely important role in the history of Western Civilization. It inspired amazing art and music. It was at the heart of scholarship and learning for centuries. It also justified the aggressive expansion of European kingdoms. Europeans truly believed that members of other religions were infidels (meaning "those who are unfaithful," those who worshiped the correct God, but in the wrong way, including Jews and Muslims, but also Christians who deviated from official orthodoxy) or pagans (those who worshiped false gods) who should either convert or be exterminated. For instance, despite the fact that Muslims and Jews worshiped the same God and shared much of the same sacred literature, medieval Europeans had absolutely no qualms about invading Muslim lands and committing atrocities in the name of their religion. Likewise, medieval antisemitism (prejudice and hatred directed against Jews) eventually drove many Jews from Europe itself to take shelter in the kingdoms and empires of the Middle East and North Africa. Historically, it was much safer and more comfortable for Jews to live in places like the Muslim-ruled Ottoman Empire than in most of Christian Europe.

A major irony of the idea that Western Civilization is somehow inherently Christian is that Islam is unquestionably just as "Western." Islam's point of origin, the Arabian Peninsula, is geographically very close to that of both Judaism and Christianity. Its holy writings are also closely aligned to Jewish and Christian values and thought. The connections were not just religious in nature, however: Islamic kingdoms and empires were part of the networks of trade, scholarship, and exchange that linked together the entire greater Mediterranean region. Thus, despite the fervor of European crusaders, it would be profoundly misleading to separate Islamic states and cultures from the rest of Western Civilization.

## The Renaissance and European Expansion

Perhaps the most crucial development in the idea of Western Civilization in the pre-modern period was the Renaissance. The idea of the "middle ages" was invented by thinkers during the Renaissance, which started around 1300 CE. The great thinkers and artists of the Renaissance claimed to be moving away from the ignorance and darkness of the Middle Ages – which they also described as the "dark ages" – and returning to the greatness of the Romans and Greeks. People like Leonardo Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Christine de Pizan, and Petrarch proudly connected their work to the work of the Romans and Greeks, claiming that there was an unbroken chain of ideas, virtues, and accomplishments stretching all the way back thousands of years to people like Alexander the Great, Plato, and Socrates.

During the Renaissance, educated people in Europe roughly two thousand years after the life of the Greek philosopher Plato based their own philosophies and outlooks on Plato's philosophy, as well as that of other Greek thinkers. The beauty of Renaissance art is directly connected to its inspiration in Roman and Greek art. The scientific discoveries of the Renaissance were inspired by the same spirit of inquiry that Greek scientists and Roman engineers had cultivated. Perhaps most importantly, Renaissance thinkers proudly linked together their own era to that of the Greeks and Romans, thus strengthening the concept of Western Civilization as an ongoing enterprise.

In the process of reviving the ideas of the Greeks and Romans, Renaissance thinkers created a new program of education: "humanistic" education. Celebrating the inherent goodness and potentialities of humankind, humanistic education saw in the study of classical literature a source of inspiration for not just knowledge, but also morality and virtue. Combining the practical study of languages, history, mathematics, and rhetoric (among other subjects) with the cultivation of an ethical code the humanistics traced back to the Greeks, humanistic education ultimately created a curriculum meant to create well-rounded, virtuous individuals. That program of education remained intact into the twentieth century, with the study of the classics remaining a hallmark of elite education until it began to be displaced by the more specialized disciplinary studies of the modern university system that was born near the end of the nineteenth century.

It was not Renaissance ideas, however, that had the greatest impact on the globe at the time. Instead, it was European soldiers, colonists, and most consequentially, diseases. The first people from the Eastern Hemisphere since prehistory to travel to the Western Hemisphere (and remain - an earlier Viking colony did not survive) were European explorers who, entirely by accident, "discovered" the Americas at the end of the fifteenth century CE. It bears emphasis that the "discovery" of the Americas is a misnomer: hundreds of millions of people already lived there, as their ancestors had for thousands of years, but geography had left them ill-prepared for the arrival of the newcomers. With the European colonists came an onslaught of epidemics to which the Native peoples of the Americas had no resistance, and within a few generations the immense majority - perhaps as many as 90% - of Indigenous Americans perished as a result. This catastrophic event, the greatest demographic collapse in world history, is remembered as "the Great Dying." The subsequent conquest of the Americas by Europeans and their descendents was thus made vastly easier. Europeans suddenly had access to an astonishing wealth of land and natural resources, wealth that they extracted in large part by enslaving millions of Indigenous Americans and, soon, Africans.

Thanks largely to the European conquest of the Americas and the exploitation of American resources and enslaved people, Europe went from a region of little economic and military power and importance to one of the most formidable in the following centuries. Following the Spanish and Portuguese conquest of Central and South America, the other major European states embarked on their own imperialistic ventures in the following centuries. “Trade empires” emerged over the course of the seventeenth century, first and foremost those of the Dutch and English, which established the precedent that profit and territorial control were mutually reinforcing priorities for European states. Driven by that conjoined motive, European states established huge, and growing, global empires. By 1800, roughly 35% of the surface of the world was controlled by Europeans or their descendants.

## The Modern Era

Most of the world, however, was off limits to large-scale European expansion. Not only were there prosperous and sophisticated kingdoms in many regions of Africa, but (in an ironic reversal of the impact of European diseases on Americans) African diseases ensured that would-be European explorers and conquerors were initially unable to penetrate beyond the coasts of most of sub-Saharan Africa entirely. Meanwhile, the enormous and sophisticated empires and kingdoms of China, Japan, Southeast Asia, and South Asia (i.e. India) largely regarded Europeans as incidental trading partners of relatively little importance. The Middle East was dominated by two powerful and “western” empires of its own: Persia and the Ottoman Empire.

The explosion of European power, one that coincided with the fruition of the idea that Western Civilization was both distinct from and *better* than other branches of civilization, came as a result of a development in technology: the Industrial Revolution. Starting in Great Britain in the middle of the eighteenth century, Europeans learned how to exploit fossil fuels in the form of coal to harness hitherto unimaginable amounts of energy. That energy underwrote a vast and dramatic expansion of European technology, wealth, and military power, this time built on the backs not of outright slaves, but of workers paid subsistence wages.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution underwrote and enabled the transformation of Europe from regional powerhouse to global hegemon. By the early twentieth century, Europe and the American nations founded by the descendants of Europeans controlled roughly 85% of the globe. Europeans either forced foreign states to concede to their economic demands and political influence, as in China and the Ottoman

Empire, or simply conquered and controlled regions directly, as in South Asia and Africa. None of this would have been possible without the technological and energetic revolution wrought by industrialism.

To Europeans and North Americans, however, the reason that they had come to enjoy such wealth and power was not because of a (temporary) monopoly of industrial technology. Instead, it was the inevitable result of their inherent biological and cultural superiority. The idea that the human species was divided into biologically distinct races was not entirely invented in the nineteenth century, but it became the predominant outlook and acquired all the trappings of a “science” over the course of the 1800s. By the year 1900, almost any person of European descent would have claimed to be part of a distinct, superior “race” whose global dominance was simply part of their collective birthright. Likewise, for the first time, the idea of “the West” started emerging among certain philosophers, although at the time the concept excluded all of Eastern Europe, not just non-European regions and continents.

The conceit that the West represented the leading edge of human development arrived at its zenith in the first half of the twentieth century. The European powers themselves fell upon one another in the First World War in the name of expanding, or at least preserving, their share of global dominance. Soon after, the new (related) ideologies of fascism and Nazism put racial superiority at the very center of their worldviews. The Second World War was the direct result of those ideologies, when racial warfare was unleashed for the first time not just on members of races Europeans had already classified as “inferior,” but on European ethnicities that fascists and Nazis now considered inferior races in their own right, most obviously the Jews. The bloodbath that followed resulted in approximately 60 million deaths, including the 6 million Jewish victims of the Holocaust and at least 25 million citizens of the Soviet Union, another “racial” enemy from the perspective of the Nazis.

## Western Civilization Is Reinvented

It was against the backdrop of this descent into what Europeans and Americans frequently called “barbarism” - the old antithesis of the “true” civilization that started with the Greeks - that the history of Western Civilization first came into being as a textbook topic and, soon, a mainstay of college curriculums. Prominent scholars in the United States, especially historians, came to believe that the best way to defend the elements of civilization with which they most strongly identified, including certain concepts of rationality and political equality, was to describe all of human existence as an ascent from primitive savagery into enlightenment, an

ascent that may not have strictly speaking started in Europe, but which they felt enjoyed its greatest success there. The early proponents of the “Western Civ” concept spoke and wrote explicitly of European civilization as an unbroken ladder of ideas, technologies, and cultural achievements that led to the present. Along the way, of course, they included the United States as both a product of those European achievements and, in the twentieth century, as one of the staunchest defenders of that legacy.

That first generation of historians of Western Civilization succeeded in crafting what was to be the core of history curriculums for most of the twentieth century in American colleges and universities, not to mention high schools. The narrative in the introduction in this book follows a traditional Western Civilization curriculum’s basic contours, without all of the qualifying remarks: it starts with Greece, goes through Rome, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, then on to the growth in European power leading up to the recent past. The traditional story, however, usually made a distinction between Western Civilization as the site of progress, and the rest of the world (usually referred to as the “Orient,” simply meaning “east,” all the way up until textbooks started changing their terms in the 1980s) which were normally characterized as lagging behind. Outside of the West, went the narrative, there was despotism, stagnation, and corruption, so it was almost inevitable that the West would eventually achieve global dominance.

This was, in hindsight, a somewhat surprising conclusion given when the narrative was invented. The West’s self-understanding as the most “civilized” culture had imploded with the world wars, but the inventors of Western Civilization as a concept were determined to not only rescue its legacy from that implosion, but to celebrate it as the *only* major historical legacy of relevance to the present. In doing so, they reinforced many of the intellectual dividing lines created centuries earlier: there was true civilization opposed by barbarians, there was an ongoing and unbroken legacy of achievement and progress, and most importantly, only people who were born in or descended from people born in Europe had played a significant historical role. The entire history of most of humankind was not just irrelevant to the narrative of European or American history, it was irrelevant to the history of the modern world for *everyone*. In other words, Africans and Asians, to say nothing of the people of the Pacific or Indigenous Americans, could have little of relevance to learn from their own history that was not somehow “obsolete” in the modern era. And yet, this astonishing conclusion was born from a culture that unleashed the most horrific destruction (*self*-destruction) ever witnessed by the human species.



## The West: The Problems of the Concept

Today, the terms “The West” and “Western” remain prevalent in journalism, politics, and casual language alike. Rarely are they considered in much depth, however. To pick one particularly glaring example, Russia under the regime of its dictatorial president Vladimir Putin is usually described in terms of its opposition to the West, which is understood to mean the United States and Western Europe. Those countries correspond fairly neatly to the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which was originally created to limit the expansion of the Soviet Union during the Cold War that followed World War II. Is Russia, however, “Eastern”? As of the 2020s, it is in close political alliance with China, as well as other American political adversaries like Iran, but Russian cultural history is unquestionably linked more closely to Europe than East Asia or the Middle East, and most contemporary Russians consider themselves Europeans.

When we consider the fact that the very term “the West” was not used in earnest until the later part of the nineteenth century, and then it generally only included European countries west of Poland, and when we reflect on the historical connections between nominally Western and (middle) Eastern developments in the history of ideas, commerce, politics, and religion, it is clear that the very concept of the West is empirically (i.e. factually) questionable, even if most people today have at least a vague sense of what it is supposed to mean. None of this is to suggest that the idea is useless or should necessarily be abandoned, but it *is* to suggest that the concept should be subject to scrutiny even if we conclude that it remains useful for historical or political analysis.

The other obvious problem with the idea of the West is its appropriation by the contemporary far-right, which openly celebrates a neo-fascist form of politics tied to western chauvinism. The risk of studying the history of western civilization without applying a critical and thoughtful lens to the idea is that it may implicitly endorse the outdated and inaccurate concepts of western exceptionalism and triumphalism that came of age in the late 1800s and which continue to inspire racist and anti-democratic politics in the present. To be clear, the immense majority of people who use the idea of the West in academia, journalism, politics, or even casual conversation do not accept cultural chauvinism or racism, but it is impossible to disentangle the concept from its abuses over the last two centuries and should, therefore, be “unpacked” in a deliberate, thoughtful, and focused manner whenever possible.

## This Textbook

This textbook has been revised significantly on two occasions to date. The original version of the textbook was released as an Open Educational Resource in March 2019. It was revised and released as “Version 2.0” in September of 2021. The current “Version 3.0” was released in May of 2024. Over time, in addition to routine factual corrections, the revisions have focused on three major areas: expanding coverage of gender roles and women’s history, including the history of the Middle East as an integral part of the narrative, and incorporating a world-historical perspective, emphasizing connections and parallels between “western” history and the histories of other regions.

The core narrative of the textbook is a political history of the greater Mediterranean region in the ancient period in Volume 1, Europe and European empires in the medieval and early modern periods in Volume 2, and both European and world history in the modern period in Volume 3. Elements of intellectual, cultural, social, and religious history are present throughout, but the main focus of the text is politics over time.

Please note that the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License under which the textbook is released allows anyone the right to freely use, modify, and redistribute it so long as it is not used for commercial purposes. As a courtesy, I request that my name be included as the original author. In addition, while I welcome factual corrections and suggestions via email, I am unable to provide research assistance for students outside of my own institution and I am also unable to provide custom versions of the textbook for other instructors.

## Acknowledgments

My thanks to my colleagues at Portland Community College who have offered their comments and edits on past versions, especially Sylvia Gray, Robert Flynn, and Terri Barnes. Wendy Fall, at the time a PhD Candidate in literature at Marquette University, graciously edited the entire first volume in 2020 - my sincere thanks to Wendy for her efforts. Revisions for Version 2.0 of the textbook were supported by a grant from Open Oregon, a state-run consortium that supports Open Educational Resources. Revisions for Version 3.0 were supported by a grant from PCC’s OER Steering Committee.

Christopher Brooks, PhD, Portland, Oregon, June 2024



# Chapter 1: Napoleon

In 1789, the French Revolution began. What had been one of the most powerful and conservative monarchies in Europe was transformed in just a few short years into a radical republic, and France also found itself at war with several of the other most powerful countries of Europe (the French Revolution is described in detail in the previous volume of this textbook). Already by the mid-1790s, the revolutionary government was unstable and many in France worried that their country would be overwhelmed by its foreign enemies. Likewise, the taste for radical reform remained strong in some circles, particularly among workers in Paris, but both open demands for the restoration of a monarchy and fear and resentment at the excesses of revolutionary radicalism were widespread. It was into this context that Napoleon Bonaparte emerged first as a key revolutionary general, and then a powerful and popular dictator.

Considering that he would go on to become one of the most significant French rulers of all time, there is considerable irony in the fact that Napoleon Bonaparte was not born in France itself, but on the island of Corsica in the Mediterranean. A generation earlier, Corsica had been won by France as a prize in one of its many wars, and Napoleon was thus born a French citizen. His family was not rich, but did have a legitimate noble title that was recognized by the French state, meaning Napoleon was eligible to join the ranks of noble-held monopolies like the officer corps of the French army. Thus, as a young man, his parents sent him to France to train as an artillery officer. There, he endured harassment and hazing from the sons of "real" French nobles, who belittled his Corsican accent and treated him as a foreign interloper. Already pugnacious and incredibly stubborn, the hazing contributed to his determination to someday arrive at a position of unchallenged authority. Thanks to his relentless drive, considerable intellectual gifts, and more than a little luck, he would eventually achieve just that.

Napoleon was a great contrast. On the one hand, he was a man of the French Revolution. He had achieved fame only because of the opportunities the revolutionary armies provided; as a member of a minor Corsican noble family, he would never have risen to prominence in the pre-revolutionary era. Likewise, with his armies he "exported" the revolution to the rest of Europe, undermining the power of the traditional nobility and instituting a law code based on the principle of legal equality (for men). Decades later, as a prisoner in a miserable British island-prison in the South Atlantic, Napoleon would claim in his memoirs that everything he had done was in the name of France and the Revolution.

On the other hand, Napoleon was a megalomaniac who indulged his every political whim and single-mindedly pursued personal power. He appointed his family members to run

newly-invented puppet states in Europe after he had conquered them. He ignored the beliefs and sentiments of the people he conquered and, arguably, of the French themselves, who remained loyal because of his victories and the stability and order he had returned to France after the tumult of the 1790s. He micro-managed the enormous empire he had created with his armies and trusted no one besides his older brother and the handful of generals who had proved themselves over years of campaigning for him. Thus, while he may have truly believed in the revolutionary principles of reason and efficiency, and cared little for outdated traditions, there was not a trace of the revolution's democratic impulse present in his personality or in the imperial state that he created.

## The Rise of Napoleon's Empire

Napoleon had entered the army after training as an artillery officer before the revolution. He rose to prominence against the backdrop of crisis and war that affected the French Republic in the 1790s. As of 1795, political power had shifted again in the revolutionary government, this time to a five-man committee called the Directorate. The war against the foreign coalition, which had now grown to include Russia and the Ottoman Empire, ground on endlessly even as the economic situation in France itself kept getting worse.

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.



*Napoleon on his imperial throne. He was not one for subtlety.*

Even as he was cementing his hold on political power, Napoleon was leading the French armies to victory against the foreign coalition. He continued the existing focus on total war that had begun with the *levée en masse*, but he enhanced it further by paying for the wars (and new troops) with loot from his successful conquests. He ended up controlling a million soldiers by 1812, the largest armed force ever seen in Europe. From 1799 to 1802, he defeated Austrian and British forces and secured a peace treaty from both powers, one that lasted long enough for him to organize a new grand strategy to conquer not only all of continental Europe, but (he hoped), Britain as well. That treaty held until late 1805, when a new coalition of Britain, Austria, and Russia formed to oppose him.

His one major defeat during this early period was when he lost the ability to threaten Britain itself: in October of 1805, at the Battle of Trafalgar, a British fleet destroyed a larger French and allied Spanish one. The British victory was so decisive that Napoleon was forced to abandon his hope of invading Britain and had to try to indirectly weaken it instead. Even the fact that the planned invasion never came to pass did not slow his momentum, however, since

the enormous army of seasoned troops he assembled for it was available to carry out conquests of states closer to home in Central Europe.

Thus, despite the setback at Trafalgar, the years of 1805 and 1806 saw stunning victories for Napoleon. In a series of major battles in 1805, Napoleon defeated first Austria and then Russia. The Austrians were forced to sign a treaty and Vienna itself was occupied by French forces for a short while, while the Russian Tsar Alexander I worked on raising a new army. The last major continental power, Prussia, went to war in 1806, but its army was no match for Napoleon, who defeated the Prussians at the Battle of Jena and then occupied Berlin. Fully 96% of the over 170,000 soldiers in the Prussian army were lost, the vast majority (about 140,000) taken prisoner by the French. In 1806, following his victories over the Austrians and Prussians, Napoleon formally dissolved the (almost exactly 1,000-years-old) Holy Roman Empire, replacing much of its territory with a newly-invented puppet state he called the Confederation of the Rhine.

After another (less successful) battle with the Russians, Napoleon negotiated an alliance with Tsar Alexander in 1807. He now controlled Europe from France to Poland, though the powerful British navy continued to dominate the seas. His empire stretched from Belgium and Holland in the north to Rome in the south, covering nearly half a million square miles and boasting a population of 44 million. In some places Napoleon simply expanded French borders and ruled directly, while in others he set up puppet states that ultimately answered to him (he generally appointed his family members as the puppet rulers). Despite setbacks discussed below, Napoleon's forces continued to dominate continental Europe through 1813; attempts by the Prussians and, to a lesser extent, Austrians to regain the initiative always failed thanks to French military dominance.



*Napoleon's empire at its height. The regions in dark green were governed directly by Napoleon's imperial government, while the regions in light green were puppet states that answered to France.*

## Military Strategy

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.

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.

## Civil Life

Napoleon was not just a brilliant general, he was also a serious politician with a keen mind for how the government had to be reformed for greater efficiency. He addressed the chronic problem of inflation by improving tax collection and public auditing, creating the Bank of France in 1800, and substituting silver and gold for the almost worthless paper notes. He

introduced a new Civil Code of 1804 (as usual, named after himself as the Code Napoleon), which preserved the legal egalitarian principles of 1789.

Despite the rapacity of the initial invasions, French domination brought certain beneficial reforms to the puppet states created by France, all of them products of the French Revolution's innovations a decade earlier: single customs areas, unified systems of weights and measures, written constitutions, equality before the law, the abolition of archaic noble privileges, secularization of church property, the abolition of serfdom, and religious toleration. At least for the early years of the Napoleonic empire, many conquered peoples - most obviously commoners - experienced French conquest as (at least in part) a liberation.

In education, his most noteworthy invention was the *lycée*, a secondary school for the training of an elite of leaders and administrators, with a secular curriculum and scholarships for the sons of officers and civil servants and the most gifted pupils of ordinary secondary schools. A Concordat (agreement) with the Pope in 1801 restored the position of the Catholic Church in France, though it did not return Church property, nor did it abandon the principle of toleration for religious minorities. The key revolutionary principle that Napoleon imposed was *efficiency* - he wanted a well-managed, efficient empire because he recognized that efficiency translated to power. Even his own support for religious freedom was born out of that impulse: he did not care what religion his subjects professed so long as they worked diligently for the good of the state.

Napoleon was no freedom-lover, however. He imposed strict censorship of the press and had little time for democracy. He also took after the leading politicians in the revolutionary period by explicitly excluding women from the political community - his 1804 law code made women the legal subjects of their fathers and then their husbands, stating that a husband owed his wife protection and a wife owed her husband obedience. In other words, under the Code Napoleon, women had the same legal status as children. From all of his subjects, men and women alike, Napoleon expected the same thing demanded of women in family life: obedience.

## The Fall of Napoleon's Empire

Unable to invade Britain after 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 booted 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.



*Francisco Goya's "The Third of May," commemorating the massacre of Spanish villagers by French troops.*

The problem for the French forces was that they had consistently defeated enemies who opposed them in large open battles, but that kind of battle was 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 Josephine (who had not produced a male heir) and married the 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.

## Russia, Elba, and Waterloo

Meanwhile, the one continental European power that was completely outside of his control was Russia. Despite the obvious problem of staging a full-scale invasion - Russia was far from France, it was absolutely enormous, and it remained militarily powerful - Napoleon concluded that it had come time to expand his empire's borders even further. In this, he not only saw Russia as the last remaining major power on the continent that opposed him, but he hoped to regain lost inertia and popularity. His ultimate goal was to conquer not just Russia, but the European part (i.e. Greece and the Balkans) of the Ottoman Empire. He hoped to eventually control Constantinople and the Black Sea, thereby re-creating most of the ancient Roman Empire, this time under French rule. To do so, he gathered an enormous army, 600,000 strong, and in the summer of 1812 it marched for Russia.

Napoleon faced problems even before the army left, however. Most of his best troops were fighting in Spain, and more than half of the "Grand Army" created to invade Russia was recruited from non-French territories, mostly in Italy and Germany. Likewise, many of the

recruits were just that: new recruits with insufficient training and no military background. He chased the Russian army east, fighting two actual battles (the second of which, the Battle of Borodino in August of 1812, was extremely bloody), but never pinning the Russians down or receiving the anticipated negotiations from the Tsar for surrender. When the French arrived in Moscow in September, they found it abandoned and largely burned by the retreating Russians, who refused to engage in the "final battle" Napoleon always sought. As the first snowflakes started falling, the French held out for another month, but by October Napoleon was forced to concede that he had to turn back as supplies began running low.

The French retreat was a horrendous debacle. The Russians attacked weak points in the French line and ambushed them at river crossings, disease swept through the ranks of the malnourished French troops, and the weather got steadily worse. Tens of thousands starved outright, desertion was ubiquitous, and of the 600,000 who had set out for Russia, only 40,000 returned to France. In contrast to regular battles, in which most lost soldiers could be accounted for as either captured by the enemy or wounded, but not dead, at least 400,000 men lost their lives in the Russian campaign. In the aftermath of this colossal defeat, the anti-French coalition of Austria, Prussia, Britain, and Russia reformed.



*Napoleon's retreat.*

Amazingly, Napoleon succeeded in raising still more armies, and France fought on for two more years. Increasingly, however, the French were losing, the coalition armies now trained and equipped along French lines and anticipating French strategy. In April of 1814, as coalition forces closed in, Napoleon finally abdicated. He even attempted suicide, drinking the poison he had carried for years in case of capture, but the poison was mostly inert from its age and it merely sickened him (after his recovery, his self-confidence quickly returned). Fearing that his execution would make him a martyr to the French, the coalition's leadership opted to exile him instead, and he was sent to a manor on the small Mediterranean island of Elba, near his native Corsica.

He stayed less than a year. In March of 1815, bored and restless, Napoleon escaped and returned to France. The anti-Napoleonic coalition had restored the Bourbons to the throne in the person of the unpopular Louis XVIII, younger brother of the executed Louis XVI, and when a French force sent to capture Napoleon instead defected to him, the coalition realized that they had not really won. Napoleon managed to scrape together one more army, but was finally defeated by a coalition force of British and Prussian soldiers in June of 1815 at the Battle of Waterloo. Napoleon was imprisoned on the cold, miserable island of Saint Helena in the South Atlantic, where he finally died in 1821 after composing his memoirs.

## The Aftermath

What were the effects of Napoleon's reign? First, despite the manifest abuses of occupied territories, the Napoleonic army still brought with it significant reform. It brought a taste for a more egalitarian social system with it, a law code based on rationality instead of tradition, and a major weakening of the nobility. It also directly inspired a growing sense of nationalism, especially since the Napoleonic Empire was so clearly *French* despite its pretensions to universalism. Napoleon's tendency to loot occupied territories to enrich the French led many of his subjects to recognize the hypocrisy of his "egalitarian" empire, and in the absence of their old kings they began to think of themselves as Germans and Italians and Spaniards rather than just subjects to a king.

The myth of Napoleon was significant as well – he became the great romantic hero, despite his own decidedly unromantic personality, thought of as a modern Julius Caesar or Alexander the Great (just as he had hoped). He gave France its greatest hour of dominance in European history, and for more than fifty years the rest of Europe lived in fear of another French invasion. This was the context that the kingdoms that had allied against him were left with in 1815. At a series of meetings known as the Congress of Vienna, Britain, Russia, Prussia, and

Austria gathered together in the Austrian capital of Vienna to try to rebuild the European order. What they could not do, however, was undo everything that Napoleon's legacy completely, and so European (and soon, world) history's course was changed by a single unique man from Corsica.

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# Chapter 2: The Industrial Revolution

## Big Changes

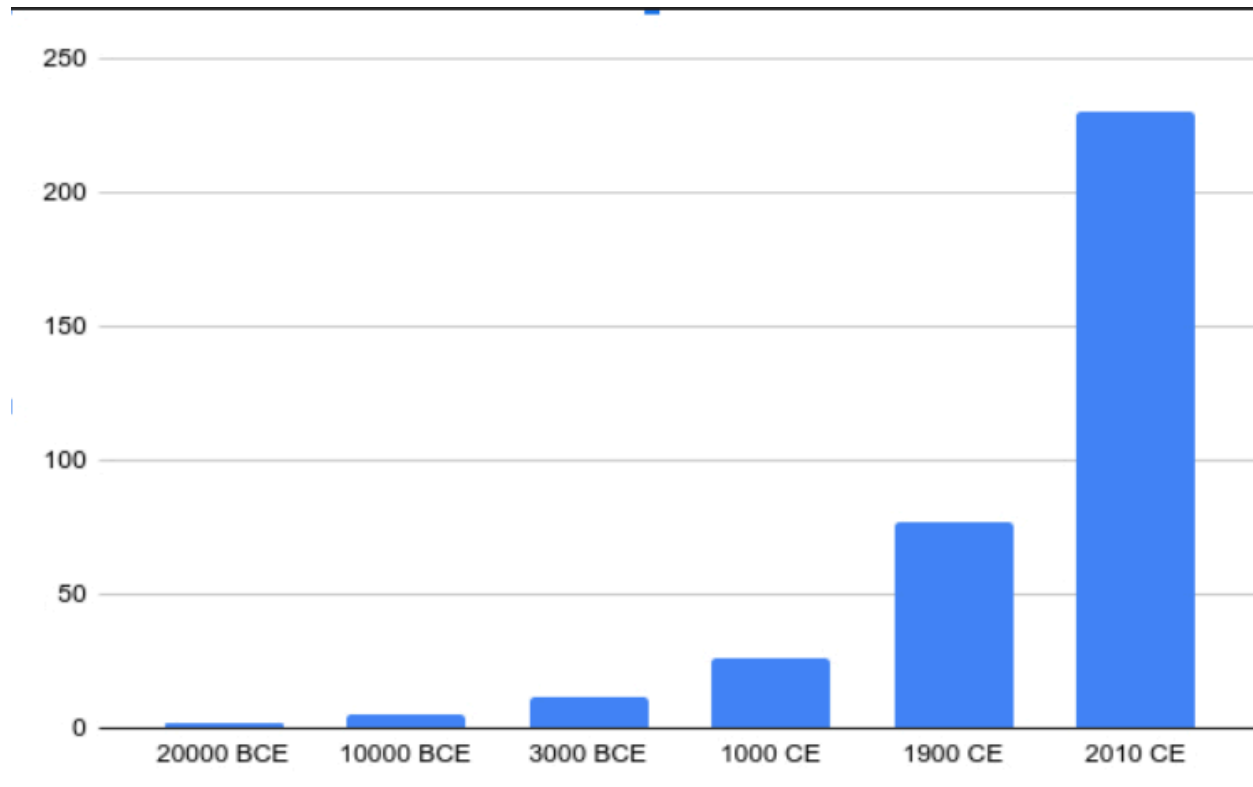
One of the most vexing questions for historians is how to identify the causes of nineteenth-century European dominance: how does one explain the simple fact that Europe controlled a staggering amount of territory all around the globe by 1900? The old Eurocentric viewpoint was that there was something unique about European culture that gave it a competitive edge in the world. The even older version, popular among Europeans themselves in the late nineteenth century, was openly racist and chauvinistic: it claimed that European civilization was the bearer of critical thought itself, of technological know-how, of piercing insight and practical sense. All other civilizations were, in this model, regarded as either hopelessly backward or stuck in a previous stage of cultural or even biological evolution.

That explanation was, obviously, not just self-serving but inaccurate. Nineteenth-century Europeans rarely lived up to their own inflated view of themselves, and more to the point, their dominance was extremely short-lived. Europe had a technological lead on most other world regions for less than a century. The Industrial Revolution began in England in about 1750, took almost a century to spread to other parts of western Europe (a process that began in earnest around 1830), and reached maturity by the 1850s and 1860s. In turn, European industrial power was overwhelming in comparison to the rest of the world, except the United States starting in the last decades of the nineteenth century, from about 1860 - 1914. After that, Europe's competitive edge began a steady decline, one that coincided with the collapse of its global empires after World War II.

A more satisfying explanation for the explosion of European power than one that claims that Europeans had some kind of inherent cultural advantage has to do with energy. For about a century, Europe and, eventually, the United States, had almost exclusive access to what amounted to unlimited energy in the form of fossil fuels. The iconic battles toward the end of the century between rifle-wielding European soldiers and the people they conquered in Africa and parts of Asia were not just about the rifles; they were about the factories that made those rifles, the calories that fed the soldiers, the steamships that transported them there, the telegraph lines that conveyed orders for thousands of miles away, the medicines that kept them healthy, and so



on, all of which represented an epochal shift from the economic and technological reality of the people trying to resist European imperialism. All of those inventions could be produced in gigantic quantities thanks to the use of coal and, later, oil power.



*Energy consumption over time. Units are in kilocalories per capita, including not just food but calories used indirectly for transportation, heating, etc. Note the massive spike between 1000 CE and 1900 CE, as well as the even larger one from 1900 to the recent past. Source: adapted from David Christian, Maps of Time (Berkeley, 2004).*

While many historians have taken issue with the term “revolution” in describing what was much more of a slow *evolution* at the time, there is no question that the changes industrial technology brought about really were revolutionary. Few things have mattered as much as the Industrial Revolution, because it fundamentally transformed almost everything about how human beings live, perhaps most strikingly including humankind’s relationship with nature. Whole landscapes can be transformed, cities constructed, species exterminated, and the entire natural ecosystem fundamentally *changed* in a relatively short amount of time.

Likewise, “the” Industrial Revolution was really a linking together of distinct “revolutions” – technology started it, but the *effects* of those technological changes were economic and social. All of society was eventually transformed, leading to the phrase “industrial society,” one

in which everything is in large part based on the availability of a huge amount of cheap energy and an equally huge number of mass-produced commodities (including people, insofar as workers can be replaced). To sum up, the Industrial Revolution was as momentous in human history as was the agricultural revolution that began civilization back in about 10,000 BCE. Even if it was a revolution that took over a century to come to fruition, from a long-term world-historical perspective, it still qualifies as revolutionary.

## Geography of the Industrial Revolution

The Industrial Revolution occurred first in Great Britain, and that simple fact goes a long way toward explaining why Britain became the single most powerful European country of the nineteenth century. Britain was well positioned to serve as the cradle of industrialism. One of the background causes of the Industrial Revolution was the combination of rapidly increasing populations and more efficient agriculture providing more calories to feed that population. Even fairly rudimentary improvements in sanitation in the first half of the eighteenth century resulted in lower infant mortality rates and lower disease rates in general. The Little Ice Age of the early modern period ended in the eighteenth century as well, increasing crop yields. Despite the fact that more commercially-oriented agriculture, something that was well underway in Britain by the middle of the eighteenth century, was often experienced as a disaster by peasants and farmers, the fact is that it did increase the total caloric output of crops at the same time. In short, agriculture definitively left the subsistence model behind and became a commercial enterprise in Britain by 1800. Thus, there was a “surplus population” (to quote Ebenezer Scrooge of *A Christmas Carol*, speaking of the urban poor) of farmers who were available to work in the first generations of factories.



*English workers arriving for their shift in 1900. Note the young boy on the right, employed by the factory in lieu of being in school.*

In addition, Britain has abundant coal deposits concentrated in northern England. In a very lucky coincidence for British industry, northern England in the eighteenth century was the heart of the existing British textile industry, which became the key commercial force in the early period of industrialization. The northern English coal deposits are part of an underground band of coal that reaches across to Belgium, eastern France, and western Germany. This stretch of land would become the industrial heartland of Europe - one can draw a line down a map of western Europe from England stretching across the English Channel toward the Alps and trace most of the industrial centers of Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century.

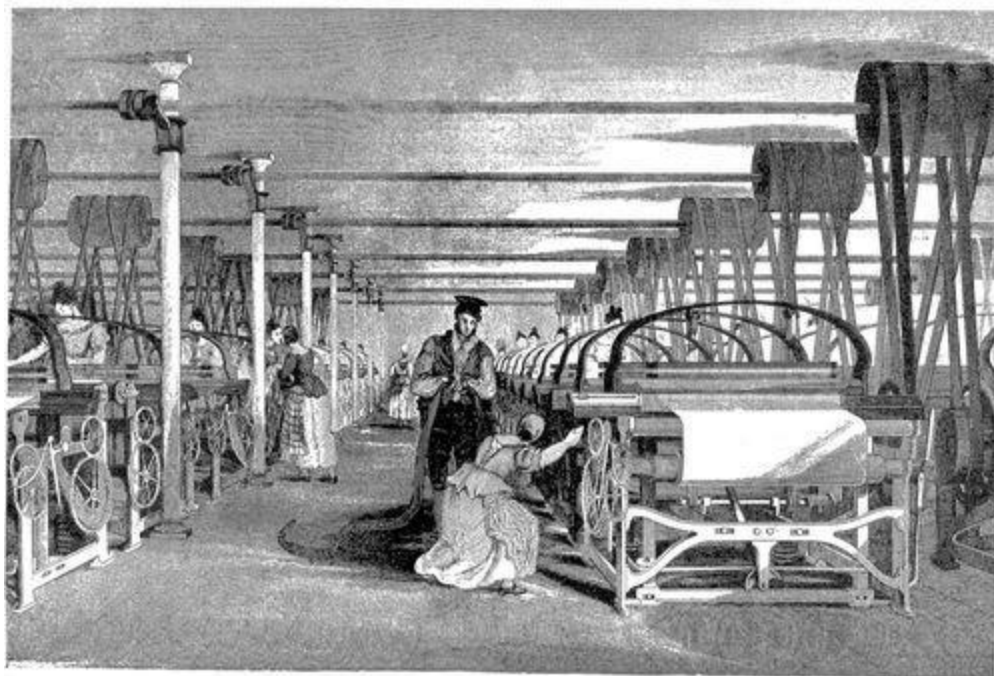
Britain had coal, and the English and Scottish had long known that you could burn it and produce heat. For many centuries, however, it was an unpopular fuel source. Coal produces a noxious, toxic smoke, along with heaps of black ash. It has to be mined, and coal mines in northwestern Europe tended to rapidly fill with water as they dipped below the water table, requiring cumbersome pumping systems. In turn, conditions in those mines were extremely dangerous and difficult. Thus, coal was only used in small amounts in England until well into the Renaissance period.

What changed was, simply, Britain ran out of forests. Thanks to the need for firewood and charcoal for heat, as well as timber for building (especially shipbuilding; Britain's navy consumed a vast quantity of wood in construction and repairs), Britain was forced to import huge quantities of wood from abroad by the end of the seventeenth century. As firewood became prohibitively expensive, British people increasingly turned to coal. Already by the

seventeenth century, former prejudices against coal as dirty and distasteful had given way to the necessity of its use as a fuel source for heat. As the Industrial Revolution began in the latter half of the eighteenth century, thanks to a series of key inventions, the vast energy capacity of coal was unleashed for the first time. By 1815, annual British coal production yielded energy equivalent to what could be garnered from burning a hypothetical forest equal in area to all of England, Scotland, and Wales.

There were a series of technological breakthroughs that powered the expansion of the Industrial Revolution, all of them originating in Britain. Most importantly, a Scottish engineer named James Watt developed an efficient steam engine in 1763, which was subsequently manufactured in 1775 (Watt was not the inventor of the concept, but his design was vastly more effective than earlier versions). Steam engines were originally used to pump water out of mines, but soon it was discovered that they could be used to substitute for water-power itself at mills, with Watt developing a rotary (spinning) mechanism tied to the engine. In turn, this enabled the conversion of thermal energy unleashed by burning a fossil fuel like coal into kinetic energy (the energy of movement). With a steam engine, coal did not just provide heat, it provided *power*. Watt, in turn, personally invented the term “horsepower” in order to explain to potential customers what his machine could do. Almost anything that moved could now be tied to coal power instead of muscle power, and thus began the vast and dramatic shift toward the modern world’s dependence on fossil fuels.

The first and most important industry to benefit from coal power besides mining itself was the northern English textile industry, which harnessed steam power to drive new machines that processed the cotton and transformed it into finished cloth. Building on various other machine breakthroughs, an inventor named Edmund Cartwright developed the power loom in 1787, the first large-scale textile machine that could process an enormous amount of cotton fiber. By the end of the 1800s, a single “mule” (a spinning invention linked to steam power in 1803) could produce thread 200 to 300 times as fast as could be done by hand. By 1850 Britain was producing 200 times as much cotton cloth than it had in 1780.



*Power looms in 1835. Female labor was preferred by factory-owners because women could be paid less than men for doing the same work.*

In turn, textiles were the basis of the Industrial Revolution for straightforward practical reasons: raw material was available from the American south thanks to slave labor, and there was an *endless* market for textiles all across Europe. British cloth processed by the new machines was of very high quality and, because of the vast quantity that British mills could produce, it was far cheaper than textiles produced by hand. Thus, British cloth rapidly cornered the market everywhere in Europe, generating tremendous profits for British industrialists. The impact on Britain's economy was enormous, as was its textile industry's growing dominance over its European rivals. France initially tried to keep British fabric out of its own markets, but in 1786 the two kingdoms negotiated the Eden Treaty, which allowed the importation of British manufactured goods. The result was a tidal wave of British cloth in French markets, which forced French manufacturers to implement industrial technology in their own workshops.

In its first century, the areas in Europe that benefited the most from the Industrial Revolution were the ones closest to coal. Besides access to coal, the other major factors driving industrial expansion in Britain were political and cultural. The reason that Britain was far and away the leading industrial power is that its parliament was full of believers in the principles of free trade, which meant that commercial enterprises were not hampered by archaic restrictions or cultural prejudices. Britain was also the richest society in Europe in terms of

available capital: money was available through reliable, trustworthy banking institutions. Thus, investors could build up a factory after securing loans with fair interest rates and they knew that they had a legal system that favored their enterprise. Finally, taxes were not arbitrary or extremely high (as they were in most parts of Spain and Italy, for example).

The other major reason that Britain enjoyed such an early and long-lasting lead in industrialization is that British elites, especially the powerful gentry class of landowners, were not hostile to commercial enterprise. In many kingdoms on the continent, members of the nobility were banned from actively practicing commerce until the period of the French Revolution. Even after the Napoleonic wars, when noble titles could no longer be lost by engaging in commerce, banking, or factory ownership, there remained deep skepticism and arrogance among continental nobles about the new industries. In short, nobles often looked down on those who made their wealth not from land, but from factories. This attitude helped to slow the advent of industrialism for decades.

The only continental region to industrialize in earnest before the 1840s was the southern swath of the Netherlands, which became the newly-created nation of Belgium in 1830 after a revolution. That region, immediately a close ally of Great Britain, had usable waterways, coal deposits, and a skilled artisanal workforce. By the 1830s the newly-minted country was rapidly industrializing. Belgium's neighbor to the southwest, France, was comparatively slow to follow despite its large population and considerable overall wealth, however. The traditional elites who dominated the restored monarchy were deeply skeptical of British-style commercial and industrial innovations. Despite Napoleon's having established the first national bank in 1800, the banking system as a whole was rudimentary and capital was restricted. In turn, the transportation of goods across France itself was prohibitively expensive due to the lack of navigable waterways and the existence of numerous tolls.

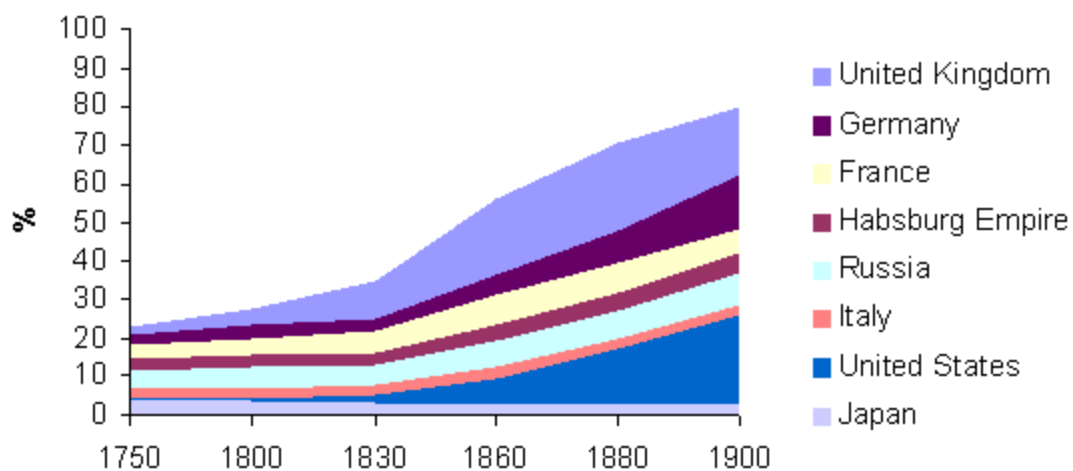
There were also important cultural factors that impeded industrial expansion in France. Whereas Britain's large population of landless rural laborers and poor peasants had little option but to seek factory work, most French peasants were independent farmers who had no interest in going to cities to work in miserable conditions. Second, French industry had always concentrated on high-quality luxury goods, and French artisans fiercely resisted the spread of lower-quality and lower-skilled work and goods. Industrialization was thus limited to the northeastern part of the country, which had coal deposits, until the second half of the century.

In the German lands, it was not until the establishment of the Zollverein, a customs union, in 1834 that trade could flow freely enough to encourage industrial growth in earnest. Following its creation, railroads spread across the various kingdoms of northern Germany.

Western Germany had extensive coal deposits, and by 1850 German industry was growing rapidly, especially in the Ruhr valley near the border with France.

Meanwhile, outside of Western Europe, there was practically no large-scale industry. It took until the late nineteenth century for the Industrial Revolution to "arrive" in places like northern Italy and the cities of western Russia, with some countries like Spain missing out entirely until the twentieth century.

**Relative Share of World Manufacturing Output,  
1750-1900**



*While the UK enjoyed the early lead in industrial manufacturing, its share of global output had dropped by 1900. The United States became the major industrial power of the world in the first two decades of the twentieth century.*

## Transportation and Communication

The Industrial Revolution began with mining and textiles, but its effects were probably most dramatic in transportation. The first experimental railroad was put in use in 1820, and the first passenger railroad followed in 1830, traveling between the industrial cities of Manchester and Liverpool in northern England. By the middle of the century some trains could go 50 MPH, far faster than any human had ever gone before (except when falling from a great height). About 6,500 miles of rail was built in Britain between 1830 and 1850, just 20 years, and railroad expansion soon followed suit on the continent. The construction of railroads became a massive

industry unto itself, fueling both profitable investment and the occasional disastrous financial collapse.

Above and beyond their economic impact, railroads had a myriad of social and cultural effects. The British developed the system of time zones, based on Greenwich (part of London) Mean Time as the “default,” because the railroads had to be coordinated to time departures and arrivals. This was the first time when a whole country, and soon a whole continent, had to have a precise shared sense of timing.

Likewise, the telegraph was invented in 1830 and used initially to warn train stations when multiple trains were on the track. Telegraphs allowed almost instant communication over huge distances - they sent a series of electrical impulses over a wire as “long” and “short” signals. The inventor of the telegraph, Samuel Morse, invented a code based off of those signals that could be translated into letters and, as a result, be used to send messages. Morse Code thus enabled the first modern mass communications device. This was the first time when a message could travel faster than a messenger on horseback, vastly increasing the speed by which information could be shared and disseminated.

Simultaneously, steamships were transforming long-distance commerce. The first sailed in 1816, going about twice as fast as the fastest sailing ship could. This had obvious repercussions for trade, because it became cheaper to transport basic goods via steamship than it was to use locally-produced ones; this had huge impacts on agriculture and forestry, among other industries. Soon, it became economically viable to ship grain from the United States or Russia across oceans to reach European markets. The first transatlantic crossing was a race between two steamships going from England to New York in 1838; soon, sailing vessels became what they are today: archaic novelties.

Two other advances in transportation are often overlooked when considering industrialization: paved roads and canals. A Scottish engineer invented a way to cheaply pave roads in the 1830s, and in the 1850s an overland, pan-European postal service was established that relied on “post roads” with stations for changing horses. Thus, well before the invention of cars, road networks were being built in parallel to railroads. Likewise, even though canals had been around since ancient times, there was a major canal-building boom in the second half of the eighteenth century and first half of the nineteenth century. Canals linked Manchester to coal fields, the Erie Canal was built in the US to link the Great Lakes to the eastern seaboard, and even Russia built a canal between Moscow and St. Petersburg.



The net effect of these innovations was that travel was vastly cheaper, simpler, and faster than it *had ever been in human history*. In essence, every place on earth was closer together than ever before.

## Social Effects

The most noteworthy transformation that occurred in quotidian life due to the Industrial Revolution was urbanization, which absolutely exploded in the nineteenth century. Manchester, in northern England, is the quintessential example of an industrial city. It was close to major coal deposits, it had a large textile industry, it was linked to the sea via canal as of 1761, and it had an army of artisans and laborers because of its historic role as a site of wool production. In 1750 it had a population of 20,000, by 1775 it was 40,000, by 1831 it was 250,000, and by 1850 it was 400,000 - a 200% increase in a century.



*View of Manchester in 1840. While the painting is in the Romantic style, with the nature scene in the foreground, the masses of factory smokestacks are visible in the distance.*

The living conditions, however, were abysmal. Whole families were crammed into one-room cellars, hovels, and cheap apartments. Pollution produced by the new factories streamed unfiltered into the air and water. Soot and filth covered every surface - early evolutionary biologists noted that certain moths that had a mutation that made them soot-brown survived and multiplied while their normal lightly-colored cousins died off. To deal with the

pollution, factory owners simply started building taller smokestacks, which spread the pollution farther. Waste from mining (which was often toxic) was simply left in “slag heaps,” through which rainwater ran and from which toxic runoff reached water supplies. A coal miner who entered the mines as a teenager would almost certainly be dead by “middle age,” (40 at the oldest) since his or her lungs were ridden with toxic coal dust.

Landlords in the cities took advantage of the influx of laborers and their families by building cheap tenements in which several families often lived in a single room. There was no running water and sanitation was utterly inadequate. Food was expensive, in part because of an 1815 act in the British Parliament called the Corn Laws that banned the importation of grain and kept prices up (the wealthy, land-owning gentry class had pushed the law through parliament). Given the incredible squalor, epidemics were frequent. In turn, wages were paid at a near-subsistence level until after (roughly) 1850. Whenever there was a market downturn, sometimes lasting for years (e.g. 1839 – 1842), workers were summarily fired to cut costs, and some starved as a result.

The English poet William Blake famously referred to the factories as “satanic mills.” Likewise, the English novelist Charles Dickens used the grim reality of cities like Manchester as inspiration and setting for his novels like *Hard Times* and *Oliver Twist*. Since real wages did not increase among working people until fairly late in the century, the actual living conditions of the majority of the population generally *worsened* in industrial regions until the second half of the century. In Britain, laws were passed to protect horses before they were passed to protect children working in mines and factories.

The major cause of this misery was simple: the ruthless pursuit of profit by factory owners and manufacturers. The aim of the early factory owners and managers was to simplify the stages of the manufacturing process so that they could be executed by cheap, unskilled labor. Many skilled workers or artisans experienced the factory system as a disaster, bringing in its wake subjection to harsh work discipline, the degradation of craft skills, long hours, cheap wages, and the abuse of young women and children (who worked under the same conditions as did adult men).

While they had little reason to consider it, the industrial workers of northern England lived in a state of misery that was tied to another that was even worse across the Atlantic: the slave-based cotton economy of the American south which provided the raw material. Despite the British ban on the transatlantic slave trade in 1807, the existing population of African-American slaves was sustained by natural reproduction and remained locked in a position of complete legal subservience, enforced with brutal violence. In a startling parallel, the

efficiency of cotton production increased to keep pace with textile manufacturing in Britain despite the absence of major new technologies besides the invention of the cotton gin in 1794. That increase was due to the application of ever-increasing degrees of brutality, as slaves were forced to pick and process cotton at unprecedented speed, spurred on by raw violence at the hands of overseers.

Back in Europe, one unforeseen effect of the Industrial Revolution, tied to the misery of working conditions, was the creation of social classes. Until the modern era “class” was usually something one was born into; it was a legally-recognized and enforced “estate.” With industrialization, the enormous numbers of dirt-poor industrial workers began to recognize that their social identity was defined by their poverty and their working conditions, just as rich industrialists and tenement-owning slumlords recognized that they were united by their wealth and their common interest in controlling the workers. The non-noble rich and middle class came to distinguish themselves both from the working class and the old nobility by taking pride in their morality, sobriety, work ethic, and cleanliness. They often regarded the workers as little better than animals, but some also regarded the old nobles as corrupt, immoral, and increasingly archaic.

The middle classes that arose out of industrialization were the ranks of engineers, foremen, accountants, and bureaucrats that were in great demand for building, overseeing, and running new industrial and commercial operations. Some were genuine “self-made men” who worked their way up, but most came from families with at least some wealth to begin with. The most vulnerable group were the so-called “petty bourgeoisie,” shop-owners and old-style artisans, whose economic life was precarious and who lived in constant fear of losing everything and being forced to join the working class.

From this context, socialism, the political belief that government should be deeply invested in the welfare of the common people, emerged. Well before mass socialist parties existed, there were struggles and even massacres over working conditions; one notorious event was the Peterloo Massacre of 1819 in which hundreds of protesting workers in Manchester were gunned down by middle-class volunteer cavalry. Another famous group, the Luddites, destroyed factory equipment in a vain attempt to turn back the clock on industrialization and go back to hand-work by artisans.

Appalled more by the sexual impropriety of young girls and women being around male workers in mines and factories than by the working conditions per se, the British parliament did pass some laws mandating legal protections. The Factory Act of 1833 limited child labor in cotton mills, the Miners Act of 1842 banned the employment of girls and women (and boys

under 10) underground, and in 1847 a Ten Hour Law limited the workday for women and children. These were exceptional laws; further legal protections for workers took decades and constant struggle by the emerging socialist groups and parties to achieve.



*Image of a girl hauling a “tub” of coal up a narrow mine shaft. The image originates with the British parliament’s investigation of working conditions in mines.*

## Gender

The Industrial Revolution had very different effects on gender roles depending on social class. Women in the working class, as noted above, labored alongside or even in lieu of men in factories, in mines, and in mills, almost always doing the same or similar work for lower wages (laws banning wage differentials based solely on sex were not put in place until the late nineteenth century at the earliest, and they were rarely enforced even then). Women industrial workers were still expected to carry out domestic labor as well, tending to children, cooking, and cleaning, a nearly impossible combination of demands that made life for women in the industrial cities even harder than it was for men.

The hardest workers of all, however, were probably the legions of domestic servants that toiled in the houses of others. A “maid of all works” in a middle-class household could expect to rise before dawn to light the home’s hearth and cookfire, cook and clean throughout the day, run errands if necessary, and finally collapse after up to seventeen hours of nearly nonstop work. Domestic service was the single largest employment sector in nineteenth-century Britain, yet economic thinkers (even communists like the great theorist Karl Marx) routinely ignored servants - they were both taken for granted and effectively invisible, replaceable when injured or sick, and paid so little that they were only a minor item in a household budget. As late as 1940, more than half of European women who earned an income were domestic servants of one kind or another.

These “maids” were necessary because of the growth of the middle classes and a concomitant shift in gender roles. A badge of honor for the middle classes was that the woman of the house did not have to work for wages, nor was she to perform hard work around the house if possible. Thus, a servant was believed to be essential. “Idleness” was still thought of as dangerous and sinful, however, so middle-class women were increasingly involved with raising their own children, maintaining the social relationships that demonstrated membership in the polite classes, and involving themselves in charity. A cult of “sentimentality” grew throughout the nineteenth century associated with family life, with middle-class women leading the way in placing greater emphasis on loving bonds between family members. That cultural shift was a byproduct of two factors brought about by industrialism: the wealth that allowed middle-class women to “outsource” the drudgery of domestic duties to a servant, and medical and sanitary advances that saw more children survive infancy.

Men, meanwhile, often struggled to maintain their own sense of masculine worth in the face of the changes brought about by industrial society. For the working classes, it was almost impossible for a family to survive on one man’s wages, so while men stubbornly insisted on their leadership of the family unit, they were codependent on their wives (and, all too often, their children) to work as well. Most artisanal skills were slowly but surely rendered obsolete, and as noted above it took until the second half of the nineteenth century for socialist movements to grow large and strong enough to effect meaningful improvements in the daily lives of most working people. Thus, all too often working class men turned to alcohol as their consolation; it is no coincidence the the first-wave feminist movement (described in a subsequent chapter) was closely tied to the temperance movement that sought legal bans on alcohol. Simply put, too many women saw their male family members plummet into alcoholism, leading to even greater financial struggles and horrific scenes of domestic violence.

## Cultural Effects

The Industrial Revolution was responsible for enormous changes in how people lived their everyday lives, not just how they made a living or how the things they used were made. Many of those changes were due to the spread of the transportation and communication technologies noted above. The speed of railway travel made everything “closer” together, and in doing so it started a long, slow process of tying together distant regions. People could travel to the capital cities of their kingdom or, later, their “nations,” and the intense localism of the past started to fade. For the first time, members of the middle classes could travel just for fun -

middle-class vacations were an innovation made possible by the railroad, and the first beneficiaries were the English middle class, who "went on holiday" to the seashore whenever they could.

Simultaneously, new, more advanced printing presses and cheaper paper made newspapers and magazines available to a mass reading public. That encouraged the spread of not just information and news, but of shared written languages. People had to be able to read the "default" language of their nation, which encouraged the rise of certain specific vernaculars at the expense of the numerous dialects of the past. For example, "French" was originally just the language spoken in the area around the city of Paris, just as "Spanish" was just the dialect spoken around Madrid. Rulers had long fought, unsuccessfully, to impose their language as the daily vernacular in the regions over which they ruled, but most people continued to speak regional dialects that often had little in common with the language of their monarch. With the centers of newspaper production often being in or near capital cities, usually written in the official language of state, more and more people at least acquired a decent working knowledge of those languages over time.

Those capital cities grew enormously, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century. Industry, finance, government itself, and railroads all converged on capitals. Former suburbs were simply swallowed up as the cities grew, and there was often a sense among cultural elites that the only places that *mattered* were the capitals: London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, St. Petersburg, etc. One peculiar phenomenon arising from the importance of capital cities was that political revolutions often began as revolutions of a single city - if a crowd could take over the streets of Paris, for example, they might well send the king running for the proverbial hills and declare themselves to be a new government (which happened in 1830 and 1848). In some cases, the rest of the nation would read about the revolution in their newspapers or via telegraph after the revolution had already succeeded.

While all of the cultural effects of the Industrial Revolution are too numerous to detail here, one other effect should be noted: the availability of food. With cheap and fast railway and steamship transport, not only could food travel hundreds or even thousands of miles from where it was grown or farmed or caught to where it was consumed, but the daily diet itself underwent profound changes. Tea grown in India became cheap enough for even working people to drink it daily; the same was true of South American coffee on the continent. Fruit appeared in markets halfway across the world from where it was grown, and the long term effect was a more varied (although not always more nutritious) diet. Whole countries sometimes became economic

appendages of a European empire, producing a single product: for a time, New Zealand (which became a British colony in 1840) was essentially the British Empire's sheep ranch.

The great symbol of changes in the history of food brought on by the Industrial Revolution is that quintessential English invention: fish and chips. Caught in the Atlantic or Pacific, packed on steamships, and transported to Britain, the more desirable parts of fish were sold at prices that were affordable for the middle and upper classes. The other bits - tails, fins and all - were fried up with chunks of potato, heavily salted, and wrapped in the now-cheap newspaper. The result was Europe's first greasy, cheap, and wildly popular fast food.

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# Chapter 3: Political Ideologies and Movements

## After the Revolution

The French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars profoundly shook Europe. The French Revolution was seen by the European great powers as both threatening and, as it progressed and radicalized, morally repulsive, but at least it had largely stayed confined to France. From the perspective of elites, Napoleon's conquests were even worse because everywhere the French armies went the traditional order of society was overturned. France may have been the greatest economic beneficiary, but Napoleon's Italian, German, and Polish subjects (among others) also had their first taste of a society in which one's status was not defined by birth. The kings and nobles of Europe had good cause to fear that the way of life they presided over, a social order that had lasted for roughly 1,000 years, was disintegrating in the course of a generation.

Thus, after Napoleon's defeat, there had to be a reckoning. Only the most stubborn monarch or noble thought it possible to completely undo the Revolution and its effects, but there was a shared desire among the traditional elites to re-establish stability and order based on the political system that had worked in the past. They knew that there would have to be *some* concessions to a generation of people who had lived with equality under the law, but they worked to reinforce traditional political structures while only granting limited compromises.

## Conservatism

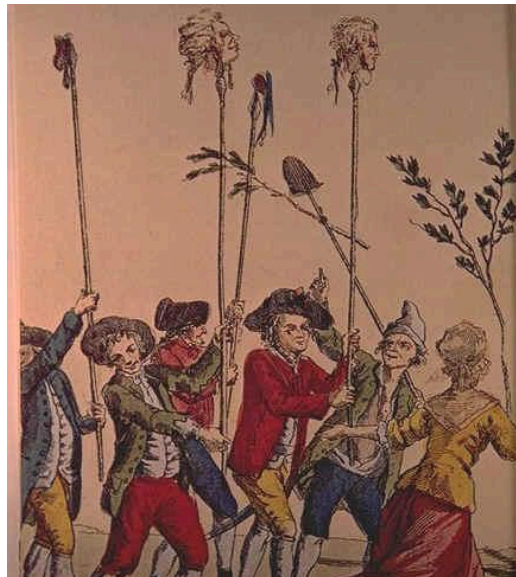
That being noted, how did elites understand their own role in society? How did they justify the power of kings and nobles over the majority of the population? This was not just about wealth, after all, since there were many non-noble merchants who were as rich, or richer, than many nobles. Nor was it viable for most nobles to claim that their rights were logically derived from their mastery of warfare, since only a small percentage of noblemen served in royal armies (and those that did were not necessarily very good officers!). Instead, European elites at the time explained their own social role in terms of peace, tradition, and stability. Their



ideology came to be called conservatism: the idea that what had worked for centuries was inherently better at keeping the peace both within and between kingdoms than were the forces unleashed by the French Revolution.

Conservatism held that the old traditions of rule were the best and most desirable principles of government, having proven themselves relatively stable and successful over the course of 1,000 years of European history. It was totally opposed to the idea of universal legal equality, let alone suffrage (i.e. voting rights), and it basically amounted to an attempt to maintain a legal political hierarchy to go along with the existing social and economic hierarchy of European society.

The fundamental argument of conservatism was that the French Revolution and Napoleon had already proved that too much change and innovation in politics was *inherently* destructive. According to conservatives, the French Revolution had started out, in its moderate phase, by arguing for the primacy of the common people, but it quickly and inevitably spun out of control. During the Terror, the king and queen were beheaded, French society was riven with bloody conflict, tens of thousands were guillotined, and the revolutionary government launched a blasphemous crusade against the church. Napoleon's takeover - itself a symptom of the anarchy unleashed by the Revolution - led to almost twenty years of war and turmoil across the map of Europe. These events *proved* to conservatives that while careful reform might be acceptable, rapid change was not.



*Images like the above (from the French Revolution) were used by conservatives to illustrate the violence and bloodshed they claimed were an intrinsic part of revolutionary change.*

Many conservatives believed that human nature is basically bad, evil, and depraved. The clearest statement of this idea in the early nineteenth century came from Joseph de Maistre, a conservative French nobleman. De Maistre argued that human beings are not enlightened, not least because (as a staunch Catholic), he believed that all human souls are tainted by original sin. Left unchecked, humans with too much freedom would always indulge in depravity. Only the allied forces of a strong monarchy, a strong nobility, and a strong church could hold that inherent evil in check. It is worth noting that De Maistre wrote outside of France itself during the revolutionary period, first in the small Italian kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia (he was a noble in both France and Piedmont) and then in Russia. His message resonated strongly with the arch-conservative Russian Tsar Alexander I in particular.

A more pragmatic conservative take was exemplified by a British lord, Edmund Burke. He argued that, given the complexity and fragility of the social fabric, only the force of tradition could prevent political chaos. As the French Revolution had demonstrated, gradual reforms had the effect of unleashing a tidal wave of pent-up anger and, more to the point, foolish decisions by people who had no experience of making political decisions. In his famous pamphlet *Reflections On The Revolution in France*, he wrote "It is said that twenty-four millions ought to prevail over two hundred thousand. True; if the constitution of a kingdom be a problem of arithmetic." To Burke, the common people were a mob of uneducated, inexperienced would-be political decision-makers and had no business trying to influence politics. Instead, it was far wiser to keep things in the basic form that had survived for centuries, with minor accommodations as needed.

Burke was an eminently practical, pragmatic political critic. De Maistre's ideas may have looked back to the social and political thought of past centuries, but Burke was a very grounded and realistic thinker. He simply believed that "the masses" were the last people one wanted running a government, because they were an uneducated, uncultivated, uncivilized rabble. Meanwhile, the European nobility had been raised for centuries to rule and had developed both cultural traditions and systems of education and training to form leaders. It was a given that not all of them were very good at it, but according to Burke there was simply no comparison between the class of nobles and the class of the mob – to let the latter rule was to invite disaster. And, of course, conservatives had all of their suspicions confirmed during the Terror, when the whole social order of France was turned upside down in the name of a perfect society (Burke himself was particularly aggrieved by the execution of the French Queen Marie Antoinette, whom he saw as a perfectly innocent victim).

Early nineteenth-century conservatism at its best was a coherent critique of the violence, warfare, and instability that had accompanied the Revolution and Napoleonic wars. In practice, however, conservatism all too often degenerated into the stubborn defense of corrupt, incompetent, or oppressive regimes. In turn, despite the practical impossibility of doing so in most cases, there were real attempts on the part of many conservative regimes after the defeat of Napoleon to completely turn back the clock, to try to sweep the reforms of the revolutionary era under the collective rug.

One additional conservative figure who lived a generation later than Burke and De Maistre deserves particular attention: the French aristocrat Arthur de Gobineau (1816 - 1882). By the time Gobineau was an adult, the earlier versions of conservatism seemed increasingly outdated, especially De Maistre's theological claims regarding original sin. Gobineau chose instead to adopt the language of the prevailing form of intellectual authority of the later nineteenth century: science. From 1853 to 1855 he published a series of volumes collectively entitled *Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*. The *Essay* claimed that the European nobility had once been an unsullied "pure" example of a superior race rightfully ruling over social inferiors who were born of lesser racial stock. Over time, however, the nobility had foolishly mixed with those inferiors, diluting the precious racial characteristics that had sustained noble rule. Likewise, by conquering the Americas and parts of Africa and Asia, Europeans as a whole undermined their "purity" and hence their superiority to non-Europeans.

The *Essay's* power to persuade was in large part because Gobineau claimed that his arguments were "scientific." In debates with his friend and patron Alexis de Tocqueville, one of the major intellectual voices of liberalism, Gobineau asserted that he was merely describing reality by pointing out that some people were racially superior to others. Needless to say, Gobineau's claims were nonsense in terms of actual scientific reality, but by using the language of science Gobineau's grandiose celebration of racial hierarchy served to support the authority and wealth of those already in power behind a facade of a "neutral" analysis.

Gobineau's work was enormously influential over time. It would inspire the Social Darwinist movement that arose later in the nineteenth century that claimed that the lower classes were biologically inferior to the upper classes. It would be eagerly taken up by antisemites who claimed that Jews were a "race" with inherent, destructive characteristics. In the twentieth century it would directly inspire Nazi ideology as well: Hitler himself cited Gobineau in his own musings on racial hierarchy. Thus, Gobineau represents a transition in nineteenth-century conservatism, away from the theological and tradition-bound justifications for

social hierarchy of a De Maistre or Burke and towards pseudo-scientific claims about the supposed biological superiority of some people over others.

## Ideologies

Following Napoleon's final defeat in 1815, conservatives faced the daunting task of not just creating a new political order but in holding in check the political ideologies unleashed during the revolutionary era: liberalism, nationalism, and socialism. Enlightenment thinkers had first proposed the ideas of social and legal equality that came to fruition in the American and French Revolutions. Likewise, the course of those revolutions along with the work of thinkers, writers, and artists helped create a new concept of national identity that was poised to take European politics by storm. Finally, the political, social, and economic chaos of the turn of the nineteenth century (very much including the Industrial Revolution) created the context out of which socialism emerged.

An "ideology" is a set of beliefs, often having to do with politics. What is the purpose of government? Who decides the laws? What is just and unjust? How should economics function? What should be the role of religion in governance? What is the legal and social status of men and women? All of these kinds of questions have been answered differently from culture to culture since the earliest civilizations. In the nineteenth century in Europe, a handful of ideologies came to predominate: conservatism, nationalism, liberalism, and socialism. In turn, briefly put, three of those ideologies had one thing in common: they opposed the fourth. For the first half of the nineteenth century, socialists, nationalists, and liberals all agreed that the conservative order had to be disrupted or even dismantled entirely, although they disagreed on how that should be accomplished and, more importantly, what should replace it.

## Romanticism

Even before the era of the French Revolution, the seeds of nationalism were planted in the hearts and minds of many Europeans as an aspect of the Romantic movement. Romanticism was not a political movement – it was a movement of the arts. It emerged in the late eighteenth century and came of age in the nineteenth. Its central tenet was the idea that there were great, sometimes terrible, and literally “awesome” forces in the universe that exceeded humankind's rational ability to understand. Instead, all that a human being could do

was attempt to pay tribute to those forces – nature, the spirit or soul, the spirit of a people or culture, or even death – through art.

The central themes of romantic art were, first, a profound reverence for nature. To romantics, nature was a vast, overwhelming presence, against which humankind's activities were ultimately insignificant. At the same time, romantics celebrated the organic connection between humanity and nature. They very often identified peasants as being the people who were "closest" to nature. In turn, it was the job of the artist (whether a writer, painter, or musician) to somehow gesture at the profound truths of nature and the human spirit. A "true" artist was someone who possessed the real spark of creative genius, something that could not be predicted or duplicated through training or education. The point of art was to let that genius emanate from the work of art, and the result should be a profound emotional experience for the viewer or listener.

Quite by accident, Romanticism helped plant the seeds of nationalism, thanks to its ties to the folk movement. The central idea of the folk movement was that the essential truths of national character had survived among the common people despite the harmful influence of so-called civilization. Those folk traditions, from folk songs to fairytales to the remnants of pre-Christian pagan practices, were the "true" expression of a national spirit that had, supposedly, laid dormant for centuries. By the early eighteenth century, educated elites attracted to Romanticism set out to gather those traditions and preserve them in service to an imagined national identity.

The iconic examples of this phenomenon were the Brothers Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm, who were both expert philologists and avid collectors of German folk tales. The Brothers Grimm collected dozens of folk ("fairy") tales and published them in the first definitive collection in German. Many of those tales, from Sleeping Beauty to Cinderella, are best known in American culture thanks to their adaptation as animated films by Walt Disney in the twentieth century, but they were famous already by the mid-nineteenth. The Brothers Grimm also undertook an enormous project to compile a comprehensive German dictionary, not only containing every German word but detailed etymologies (they did not live to see its completion; the third volume E – Forche was published shortly before Jacob's death).

The Grimm brothers were the quintessential Romantic nationalists. Many Romantics like them believed that nations had spirits, which were invested with the core identity of their "people." The point of the Grimm brothers' work was reaching back into the remote past to grasp the "essence" of what it meant to be "German." At the time, there was no country called Germany, and yet romantic nationalists like the Grimms believed that there was a kind of

German soul that lived in old folk songs, the German language, and German traditions. They worked to preserve those things before they were further "corrupted" by the modern world.

In many cases, romantic nationalists did something that historians later called "inventing traditions." One iconic example is the Scottish kilt. Scots had worn kilts since the sixteenth century, but there was no such thing as a specific color and pattern of plaid (a "tartan") for each family or clan. The British government ultimately assigned tartans to a new class of soldier recruited from Scotland: the Highland Regiments, with the wider identification of tartan and clan only emerging in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. The point was instilling a nationalist pride in a specific group of military recruits, not celebrating an "authentic" Scottish tradition. Likewise, in some cases folk tales and stories were simply made up in the name of nationalism. The great epic story of Finland, the *Kalevala*, was written by a Finnish intellectual in 1827; it was based on actual Finnish legends, but it had never existed as one long story before.



*British soldiers of the Highland Regiments in government-issued kilts in 1744.*

The point is not, however, to emphasize the falseness of the folk movement or invented traditions, but to consider *why* people were so intent on discovering (and, if necessary, inventing) them. Romanticism was, among other things, the search for stable points of identity in a changing world. Likewise, folk traditions - even those that were at least in part invented or adapted - became a way for early nationalists to identify with the culture they now connotated with the nation. It is no coincidence that the vogue for kilts in Scotland, ones now identified with clan identity, emerged for the first time in the 1820s rather than earlier.

## Nationalism

Romantic nationalism was an integral part of actual nationalist political movements, movements that emerged in earnest in the immediate aftermath of the Napoleonic wars. Those movements would ultimately succeed in seeing their goals realized almost without exception, although that process took over a century in some cases (as in Poland and Ireland). Central to nationalist movements was the concept that the state should correspond to the identity of a “people,” although who or what defines the identity of “the people” proved a vexing issue on many occasions.

The discussion of nationalism starts with the French Revolution, because more than any other event, it provided the model for all subsequent nationalisms. The French revolutionaries declared from the outset that they represented the whole “nation,” not just a certain part of it. They erased the legal privileges of some (the nobles) over others, they made religion subservient to a secular government, and when threatened by the conservative powers of Europe, they called the whole “nation” to arms. The revolutionary armies sang a national anthem, the *Marseillaise*, whose lyrics are as warlike as the American equivalent. Central to French national identity in the revolutionary period was fighting for *la patrie*, the fatherland, in place of the old allegiance to king and church.

The irony of the French revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, however, was that the countries invaded by the French eventually adopted their own nationalist beliefs. The invaded countries turned the democratic French principle of self-determination into a sacred right to defend their own national identities, shaped by their own particular histories, against the universalist pretensions of the French. That was reflected in the Spanish revolt that began in 1808, the revival of Austria and Prussia and their struggles of “liberation” against Napoleon, Russia's leadership of the anti-Napoleonic coalition that followed, and fierce British pride in their defiance to French military pretensions.

## Nationalisms Across Europe

As the Napoleonic wars drew to a close for the first time in 1814, the great powers of Europe convened a gathering of monarchs and diplomats known as the Congress of Vienna, discussed in detail in the next chapter, to deal with the aftermath. That meeting lasted months, thanks in part to Napoleon's inconvenient return from Elba and last stand at Waterloo, but in 1815 it concluded, having rewarded the victorious kingdoms with territorial gains and restored

conservative monarchs to the thrones of states like Spain and France itself. Nothing could have mattered less to the diplomatic representatives present at the Congress of Vienna than the “national identity” of the people who lived in the territories that were carved up and distributed like pieces of cake to the victors - the inhabitants of northeastern Italy were now subjects of the Austrian king, the entirety of Poland was divided between Russia and Prussia, and Great Britain remained secure not only in its growing global empire, but in its possession of the entirety of Ireland.

Thus, many of Europe's peoples found themselves without states of their own or in states squeezed between the dominant powers of the time. Among the notable examples are the Italians and the Poles. Italy had suffered from the domination of one great power or another since the Renaissance; after 1815 it was the Austrians who were in control of much of northern Italy. Poland had been partitioned between Austria, Prussia, and Russia in the eighteenth century, simply vanishing from the map in the process. Germany, of course, was not united; Prussia and Austria vied with each other for dominance of the German lands, but both were fundamentally conservative powers uninterested in “German” unification until later in the century.

What had changed, however, was that the language of nationalism and the idea of national identity had come into its own by the late Napoleonic period. For example, German nationalism was powerful and popular after the Napoleonic wars; in 1817, just two years after the end of the Congress of Vienna, German nationalists gathered in Wartburg where Martin Luther had first translated the Bible into German, waving the black, red, and gold tricolor flag that would (over a century later) become the official flag of the German nation. Two years later, a nationalist poet murdered a conservative one, and the Austrian Empire passed laws that severely limited freedom of speech, specifically to contain and restrict the spread of nationalism. Despite this effort, and the Austrian secret police, nationalism continued to spread, culminating in a large and self-consciously nationalistic movement seeking German unity.

The 1830s were a pivotal decade in the spread of nationalism. The Italian nationalist leader Giuseppe Mazzini founded Young Italy in 1831, calling for a “springtime of peoples” in which the people of each “nation” of Europe would topple conservative monarchs and assert their sovereignty and independence. That movement would quickly spread beyond Italy: “young” became the rallying word and idea of nationalism. In addition to Young Italy, there was a Young Germany and a Young Ireland, among others - the idea was that *all* people should and would eventually inhabit nations, and that this new “youthful” manner of politics would lead to peace and prosperity for everyone. The old, outdated borders abandoned, everyone would live



where they were supposed to: in nations governed by their own people. Nationalists argued that war itself could be rendered obsolete. After all, if each “people” lived in “their” nation, what would be the point of territorial conflict? To the nationalists at the time, the emergence of nations was synonymous with a more perfect future for all.

Central to the very concept of nationalism in this early, optimistic phase was the identity of “the people,” a term with powerful political resonance in just about every European language: *das Volk*, *le peuple*, *il popolo*, etc. In every case, “the people” was thought to be something more important than just “those people who happen to live here.” Instead, the people were those tied to the soil, with roots reaching back centuries, and who deserve their own government. This was a profoundly romantic idea because it spoke to an essentially *emotional* sense of national identity - a sense of camaraderie and solidarity with individuals with whom a given person might not actually share much in common.

When scrutinized, the “real” identity of a given “people” became more difficult to discern. For example, were the Germans people who speak German, or who lived in Central Europe, or who were Lutheran, or Catholic, or who think that their ancestors were from the same area in which they themselves were born? If united in a German nation, who would lead it - were the Prussians or the Austrians more authentically German? What of those “Germans” who lived in places like Bohemia (i.e. the Czech lands) and Poland, with their own growing sense of national identity? The nationalist movements of the first half of the nineteenth century did not need to concern themselves overmuch with these conundrums because their goals of liberation and unification were not yet achievable. When national revolutions of various kinds did occur, however, they proved difficult to overcome.

## Liberalism

Nationalism’s supporters tended to be members of the middle classes, including everyone from artisans to the new professional class associated with commerce and industry in the nineteenth century. Many of the same people supported another doctrine that had been spread by the Napoleonic wars: liberalism. The ideas of liberalism were based on the Enlightenment concepts of reason, rationality, and progress from the eighteenth century, but as a movement liberalism came of age in the post-Napoleonic period; the word itself was in regular use by 1830.

Nineteenth-century liberals were usually educated men and women, including the elites of industry, trade, and the professions as well as the middle classes. They shared the

conviction that freedom in all its forms—freedom from the despotic rule of kings, from the obsolete privilege of nobles, from economic interference and religious intolerance, from occupational restrictions and limitations of speech and assembly—could only improve the quality of society and the well-being of its members.

In something of a contrast to the abstract nature of national identity among nationalists, liberalism had straightforward beliefs, all of them reflecting not just abstract theories but the concrete examples of the liberal American and French Revolutions of the prior century. Perhaps liberalism's most fundamental belief was that there should be equality before the law, in stark contrast to the old "feudal" (almost a slur to liberals) order of legally-defined social estates. From that starting point of equality, the very purpose of law to liberals was to protect the rights of each and every citizen rather than enshrine the privileges of a minority.

Whereas "rights" had meant the traditional privileges enjoyed by a given social group or estate in the past, from the king's exclusive right to hunt game in his forests to the peasants' right to access the common lands, rights now came to mean a fundamental and universal privilege that was concomitant with citizenship itself. Liberals argued that freedom of speech, of a press free from censorship, and of religious expression were "rights" that should be enjoyed by all. Likewise, most liberals favored the abolition of archaic economic interference from the state, including legal monopolies on trade (e.g. in shipping between colonies) and the monopolies enjoyed by those craft guilds that remained - the "right" to engage in market exchange unhindered by outdated laws was part of the liberal paradigm as well.

Just as had the French revolutionaries in the early phase of the revolution, most early nineteenth-century liberals looked to constitutional monarchy as the most reasonable and stable form of government. Constitutions should be written to guarantee the fundamental rights of the citizenry and to define, and restrict the power of the king (thus staving off the threat of tyranny). Liberals also believed in the desirability of an elected parliament, albeit one with a restricted electorate: almost universally, liberals at the time thought that voting should be restricted to those who owned significant amounts of property, thereby (they thought) guaranteeing social stability.

Unlike nationalists, liberals saw at least some of their goals realized in post-Napoleonic Europe. While its Bourbon monarchy was restored in France, there was now an elected parliament, religious tolerance, and relaxed censorship. Britain remained the most "liberal" power in Europe, having long stood as the model of constitutional monarchy. A liberal monarchy emerged as a result of the Belgian Revolution of 1830, and by the 1840s limited liberal reforms had been introduced in many of the smaller German states as well. Thus,

despite the opposition of conservatives, much of Europe slowly and haltingly liberalized in the period between 1815 and 1848.

## Socialism

The third and last of the new political ideologies and movements of the early nineteenth century was 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 a 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 turn, after 1848, socialism was

increasingly *militant* because socialists realized that a major restructuring of society could not happen peacefully, given the strength of both conservative and liberal opposition. The most important militant socialism was Marxism, named after its creator Karl Marx.

Three early socialist movements stand out as exemplary of so-called "utopian" socialism: the Saint-Simonians, the Owenites, and the Fourierists. Each was named after its respective founder and visionary. The binding theme of these three early socialist thinkers was not only radical proposals for the reorganization of work, but the idea that economic competition was a moral problem, that competition itself is in no way natural and instead implies social disorder. The Saint-Simonians called egoism, the selfish pursuit of individual wealth, "the deepest wound of modern society."

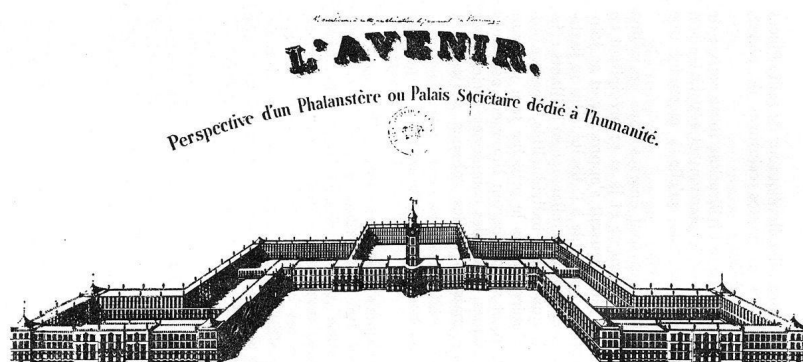
In that, they found a surprisingly sympathetic audience among some aristocratic conservatives who were also afraid of social disorder and were nostalgic for the idea of a reciprocal set of obligations that had existed in pre-revolutionary Europe between the common people and the nobility. In turn, the early socialists believed that there was nothing inherent in their ideas threatening to the rich – many socialists expected that the privileged classes would recognize the validity of their ideas and that socialism would be a way to bridge the class divide, not widen it.

The Saint-Simonians, named after their founder Henri de Saint-Simon, were mostly highly educated young elites in France, many from privileged backgrounds, and many also graduates of the *École Polytechnique*, the most elite technical school in France founded by Napoleon. Their ideology, based on Saint-Simon's writings, envisaged a society in which industrialism was harnessed to make a kind of heaven on earth, with the fruits of technology going to feed, clothe, and house, potentially, everyone. They were, in a word, the first "technocrats," people who believe that technology can solve any problem. The Saint-Simonians did not inspire a popular movement, but individual members of the movement went on to achieve influential roles in the French industry, and helped lay the intellectual foundations of such ventures as the creation of the Suez Canal between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean.

The Owenites were initially the employees of Robert Owen, a British factory owner. He built a community for his workers in New Lanark, Scotland that provided health care, education, pensions, communal stores, and housing. He believed that productivity was tied to happiness, and his initial experiments met with success, with the New Lanark textile mill realizing consistent profits. He and his followers created a number of cooperative, communalist "utopian" communities (many in the United States), but those tended to fail in fairly short order. Instead, the lasting influence of Owenism was in workers organization, with the Owenites helping to

organize a number of influential early trade unions, culminating in the London Working Men's Association in 1836.

The Fourierists were part of a very peculiar movement, because their founder Charles Fourier was a *very* peculiar man. Fourier, who may have been at least partially insane, believed that he had unlocked a "science of the passions." According to Fourier, the reason that most people detested what they did to survive was that they were not doing the right kind of work. There were 810 specific kinds of personalities in the world, each of which was naturally inclined toward a certain kind of work. Thus, if 1,620 people (one man and one woman of each type) were to come together in a community, and each did the kind of work they "should" do, perfect happiness became possible. For example, according to Fourier, murderers were just people who should have been butchers, and children should be trash collectors, because they loved to play in the dirt. These planned communities would be called "Phalanxes," after the fighting formations of ancient Greece.



*Illustration of a Fourierist phalanx. The heading simply reads "The Future."*

Fourier was far more radical than most other self-understood socialists. For one, he advocated complete gender equality and even sexual liberation - he was very hostile to monogamy, which he believed to be unnatural. Regarding marriage as an outdated custom, he imagined that in his phalanxes children would be raised in common rather than lorded over by their parents. Above and beyond forward-thinking ideas about gender, some of his concepts were a bit more puzzling. Among other things, he claimed that planets mated and gave birth to baby planets, and that once all of humanity lived in phalanxes the oceans would turn into lemonade.

Practically speaking, the importance of the Fourierists is that many phalanxes were actually founded, including several in the United States. While the more oddball ideas were conveniently set aside, they were still among the first real experiments in planned, communal

living. Likewise, many important early feminists began their intellectual careers as Fourierists. For instance, Flora Tristan was a French socialist and feminist who emerged from Fourierism to do important early work on tying the idea of social progress to female equality.

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. These early movements also tended to cross over with liberal and nationalist movements, sharing a vision of more just and equitable laws and a more humane social order in contrast to the repression all three movements identified with conservatism. Few socialists in this period believed that violence would be necessary in transforming society.

Considered in detail in the next chapter, 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 typically voted for 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 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.

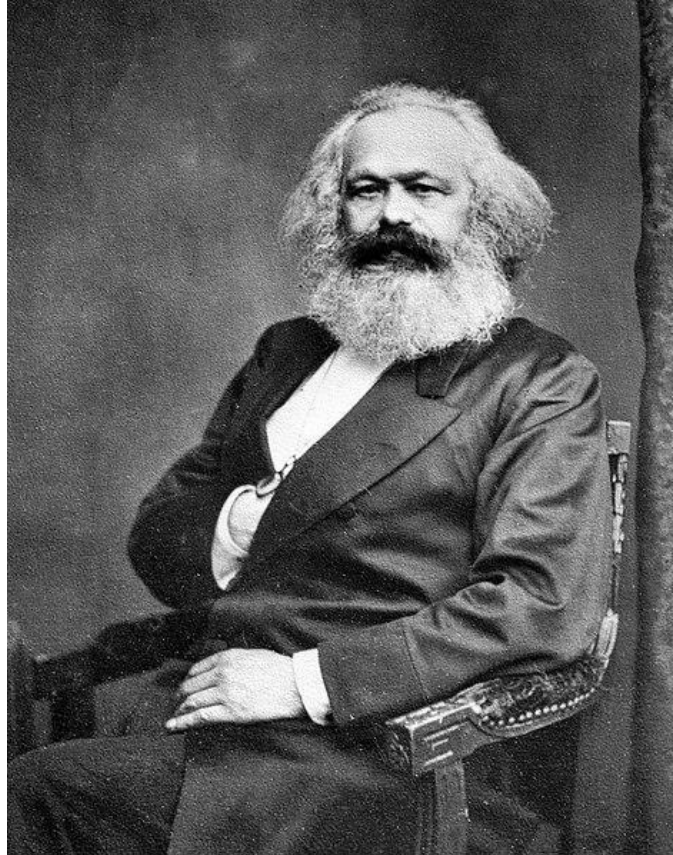
In stark contrast was anarchist socialism. A semantic point: anarchism means the rejection of the state, not the rejection of all forms of social organization or even hierarchy (i.e. it

is perfectly consistent for there to be an organized anarchist movement, even one with leaders). In the case of nineteenth-century anarchist socialism, there were two major thinkers: the French Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Russian Mikhail Bakunin.

Proudhon was the author of a book entitled “What Is Property?” in which he answered unequivocally that “property is theft.” The very idea of ownership was vacuous and false to Proudhon, a conceit that ensured that the wealthy maintained their hold on political and legal power. Unlike his rival Louis Blanc, Proudhon was skeptical of the state's ability to effect meaningful reform, and after the failure of the French revolution of 1848 he came to believe that all state power was inherently oppressive. Instead of a state, Proudhon advocated local cooperatives of workers in a kind of “economic federalism” in which cooperatives would exchange goods and services between one another, and each cooperative would reward work with the fruits of that work. Simply put, workers themselves would keep all profit. He believed that the workers would have to emancipate themselves through some kind of revolution, but he was not an advocate of violence.

The other prominent anarchist socialist was Mikhail Bakunin, a contemporary, sometimes friend, and sometimes rival of Proudhon. Briefly, Bakunin believed in the necessity of an apocalyptic, violent revolution to wipe the slate clean for a new society of free collectives. He loathed the state and detested the traditional family structure, seeing it as a useless holdover from the past. Bakunin thought that if his contemporary society was destroyed, the social instincts inherent to humanity would flower and people would “naturally” build a better society. He was also the great champion of the outcasts, the bandits, and the urban poor. He was deeply skeptical about both the industrial working class, who he noted all wished could be middle class, and of western Europe, which was shot-through with individualism, egoism, and the obsession with wealth. He ended up organizing large anarchist movements in Europe's “periphery,” especially in Italy and Spain. By about 1870 both countries had large anarchist movements.

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.”



*The best-known portrait of Marx, dating from 1875.*

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 endogenous tendencies of capitalist economics, 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.

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.

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 workings 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.

## Social Classes

How much did European society resemble the sociological description provided by Marx? At first sight, nineteenth-century Europe seems more similar to how it was in earlier centuries than it does radically new – most people were still farmers, every country but Britain was still mostly rural, and the Industrial Revolution took decades to spread beyond its British heartland. That being said, European society *was* undergoing significant changes, and Marx was right in identifying the new professional middle class, the bourgeoisie, as the agents of much of that change.

The term “bourgeoisie” is French for “business class.” The term originally meant, simply, “townspeople,” but over time it acquired the connotation of someone who made money from commerce, banking, or administration but did not have a noble title. The bourgeoisie made up between 15% and 20% of the population of central and western Europe by the early 1800s. The male members of the bourgeoisie were factory owners, clerks, commercial and state bureaucrats, journalists, doctors, lawyers, and everyone else who fell into that ambiguous class of “businessmen.” They were increasingly proud of their identity as “self-made” men, men whose financial success was based on intelligence, education, and competence instead of noble privilege and inheritance. Many regarded the old order as an archaic throwback, something that was both limiting their own ability to make money and society’s possibilities of further progress. At the same time, they were defined by the fact that they did not work with their hands to make a living; they were neither farmers, nor artisans, nor industrial workers.

The growth of the bourgeoisie arose from the explosion of urbanization that took place due to both industrialism and the breakdown of the old social order that started with the French

Revolution. Cities, some of which grew almost 1000% in the course of the century, concentrated groups of educated professionals. It was the middle class that reaped the benefits of a growing, and increasingly complex, economy centered in the cities.

While the bourgeoisie was proud of its self-understood sobriety and work ethic, in contrast to the foppery and frivolity of the nobility, successful members of the middle class often eagerly bought as much land as they could, both in emulation of the nobles and because the right to vote in most of western Europe was tied for decades to land-ownership. In turn, nobles were wary of the middle class, especially because so many bourgeois were attracted to potentially disruptive ideologies like liberalism and, increasingly, nationalism, but over the course of the century the two classes tended to mix based on wealth. Old families of nobles may have despised the “nouveau riche,” but they still married them if they needed the money.

The bourgeoisie had certain *visible* things that defined them as a class, literal “status symbols.” They did not perform manual labor of any kind, and insisted on the highest standards of cleanliness and tidiness in their appearance and their homes. In turn, all but the most marginal bourgeois families employed at least one full-time servant (recruited from the working class and always paid a pittance) to maintain those standards of hygiene. If possible, bourgeois women did no paid work at all, serving instead as keepers of the home and the maintainers of the rituals of visiting and hosting that maintained their social network. Finally, the bourgeoisie socialized in private places: private clubs, the new department stores that opened in for the first time in the mid-nineteenth century, and the foyers of private homes. The working classes met in taverns (“public houses” or just “pubs” in Britain), while bourgeois men and women stayed safely inside.



*Clothing among the bourgeoisie came to resemble a specific “uniform” of respectability in the nineteenth century - the top hat in particular was an iconic mark of class identity by the middle of the century.*

In addition, the members of the bourgeoisie were supposed to live by certain codes of behavior. In contrast to the sexual libertinage of the old nobility, bourgeois men and women were expected to avoid extra-marital affairs (although, practically speaking, bourgeois men regularly took advantage of prostitutes). A bourgeois man was to live up to high standards of honesty and business ethics. What these concepts shared was the fear of *shame* – the literature of the time describing this social class is filled with references to the failure of a bourgeois to live up to these standards and being exposed to vast public humiliation.

What about the nobility? The legal structures that sustained their identity slowly but surely weakened over the course of the nineteenth century. Even more threatening than the loss of legal monopolies over land-owning, the officer corps of the army, and political status was the enormous shift in the generation of wealth away from land to commerce and industry. Relatively few noblemen had been involved in the early Industrial Revolution, thanks in large part to their traditional disdain for commerce, but by the middle of the century it was apparent that industry, banking, and commerce were eclipsing land-ownership as the major sources of

wealth. Likewise, the one thing that the bourgeoisie and the working class had in common was a belief in the desirability of voting rights; by the end of the century universal manhood suffrage was on the horizon (or had already come to pass, as it did in France in 1871) in almost every country in Europe.

Thus, the long-term pattern of the nobility was that it came to culturally resemble the bourgeoisie. While stubbornly clinging to its titles and its claims to authority, the nobility grudgingly entered into the economic fields of the bourgeoisie and adopted the bourgeoisie's social habits as well. The lines between the upper echelons of the bourgeoisie and the bulk of the nobility were very blurry by the end of the century, as bourgeois money funded old noble houses that still had access to the social prestige of a title.

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## Chapter 4: The Politics of the Nineteenth Century

The nineteenth century is, among many other things, a study in contrasts. On the one hand, it witnessed spectacular political, economic, and social changes that saw the birth of new nations and the demise of old kingdoms. On the other, even its newborn nations often looked back to the most traditional form of political sovereignty: dynastic identity. One of the great historians of the period, Eric Hobsbawm, noted in his *The Age of Empire* that Europe had never seen so many states ruled by “emperors” as it did at the turn of the twentieth century: the Empress of the British Empire, the Kaiser of the German Reich, the Kaiser of the Austrian Reich, and the Tsar of the Russian Empire were not just contemporaries, they were all related by dynastic marriages. And yet, each emperor ruled over a profoundly different “empire” than had his or her predecessors, ones in which (even in Russia by 1905) at least some men voted to elect representatives with real political power.

At its simplest, nineteenth-century European politics can be seen as a series of struggles and compromises between different political ideologies and their corresponding movements. From 1815 until 1848, those struggles normally pitted conservatives against liberals and nationalists. A series of revolutions shook much of Europe in 1848, but in their aftermath conservative monarchs regained control almost everywhere. After 1848, conservatism itself slowly adopted liberal and nationalistic traits, culminating in the conservative-led national unifications of Italy and Germany. Of the new political movements considered in the last chapter, only socialism failed to achieve its stated goals at least somewhere in Europe, instead becoming an increasingly militant movement opposed not just to conservatives, but its occasional former allies: liberals and nationalists.

The backdrop of these struggles was a wholly uncharacteristic state of peace that held for most of the nineteenth century. After the Napoleonic wars, the great powers of Europe deliberately crafted a new political arrangement whose purpose was, in part, to maintain peace between them. That peace was broken occasionally starting in 1853, but the subsequent wars were shorter, less bloody, and less frequent than those of any previous century. Historians have often noted that the nineteenth century *technically* ended in 1900, but in terms of its prevailing

political, social, and cultural patterns, it *really* ended in 1914, with the advent of the horrendous bloodshed and destruction of World War I.

## The Congress of Vienna

This period of peace began as a product of the post-Napoleonic order. When Napoleon was first defeated in 1814, representatives from the victorious states gathered in the Austrian capital of Vienna to establish what was to be done in the aftermath of his conquests.

Napoleon's escape from Elba and inconvenient attempt to re-establish his empire forced the representatives to suspend their meetings while British and Prussian armies finally ended his reign for good. The conference, known later as the Congress of Vienna, was then re-convened, finally concluding in 1815. While various states in Europe, including the Ottoman Empire, sent representatives, the Congress was dominated by the five "great powers": the Austrian Empire, Great Britain, Prussia, Russia, and (by the end) France itself.

By its conclusion, the Congress of Vienna had redrawn the map of Europe with the goal of preventing France from threatening the balance of power again. But unlike the conference that ended the First World War a century later, the Congress of Vienna did not impose a huge penalty on the aggressor. Once it had been agreed to place Louis XVIII, the younger brother of the executed Louis XVI, on the throne of France, the powers that had defeated Napoleon had the good sense to see that it would be illogical to punish the French (not least because the French might opt to have yet another revolution in response). Much of the credit was due to a wily diplomat, Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord, himself a former official under Napoleon, who convinced the other representatives to include France as an equal partner rather than an enemy to be punished. Instead, the victors deprived the French of their conquests and imposed a modest indemnity, but they did not dismember the country. They did, however, redraw the map of Europe.

The powers that defeated Napoleon had a few specific goals at the conference. They sought to create a lasting conservative order in France itself. They hoped to restrain French ambition and stave off the threat of another revolution. They sought to reward themselves with territory taken from weaker states like Poland and the formerly independent territories of northern Italy. And, finally, they devoted themselves to the suppression of future revolutionary movements. The political order that emerged in 1815 became known as the Congress System (also known as the Concert of Europe): a conservative international political network maintained by the five great powers.



The Congress System was devoted to peace, stability, and order. While Great Britain was content with any political arrangement that prevented a disruption like the Napoleonic wars from occurring again, the more conservative states were not: led by the Russian Tsar Alexander I, Russia, Austria, Prussia, and France (the latter under its new Bourbon monarch Louis XVIII) joined in a “Holy Alliance” that promised to put down revolutions wherever they might occur. Now, war was to be waged in the name of dynastic sovereignty and the conservative political order, not territorial ambition. In other words, the next time France invaded Spain and Russia invaded Hungary, they did so in the name of restoring foreign conservative monarchs to their “rightful” position of power, not in order to enrich themselves.

## Revolts and Revolutions

As it turns out, they did not have long to wait to put the military commitment of the Holy Alliance into action. The first liberal revolt against a conservative monarch occurred in the immediate aftermath of the Congress of Vienna in what had traditionally been one of the most conservative states of Europe: Spain.

During the Napoleonic period, Spanish liberal intellectuals had been stuck in an awkward position. Their country was ruled by a foreign power, France, one that taxed it and extracted resources for its wars, but it was also one that represented the best hope of liberal reform. The French Revolution was the symbol, for liberals all over Europe, of progress, even if they had misgivings about the Terror. When the Spanish resistance sprung up against the French under Napoleon, it was an alliance of conservative priests and peasants, along with conservative nobles, who spearheaded it. Most Spanish liberals did end up supporting the resistance, but they still hoped that the post-Napoleonic order would see liberal reforms to the Spanish monarchy.

Toward the end of the Napoleonic period, the Spanish representative assembly, the *cortes*, approved a liberal constitution. Once he was back in power, however, the restored Spanish King Ferdinand VII refused to recognize the constitution, and he also refused to summon the *cortes*. With the approval of the other conservative monarchies of Europe, Ferdinand essentially moved to turn back the clock in Spain to the pre-revolutionary period.

Ferdinand was able to force Spain back toward the old order, but he proved unable to squelch independence movements in Spain’s American colonies. In 1816 an anti-Spanish uprising in Argentina began and soon spread to the other colonies. By 1824 all of Central and South America was independent. In the midst of the failure of Spanish military expeditions to

stop the revolutions, in 1820 an alliance of liberal politicians and military officers staged a coup against Ferdinand and began remaking Spain as a liberal state.



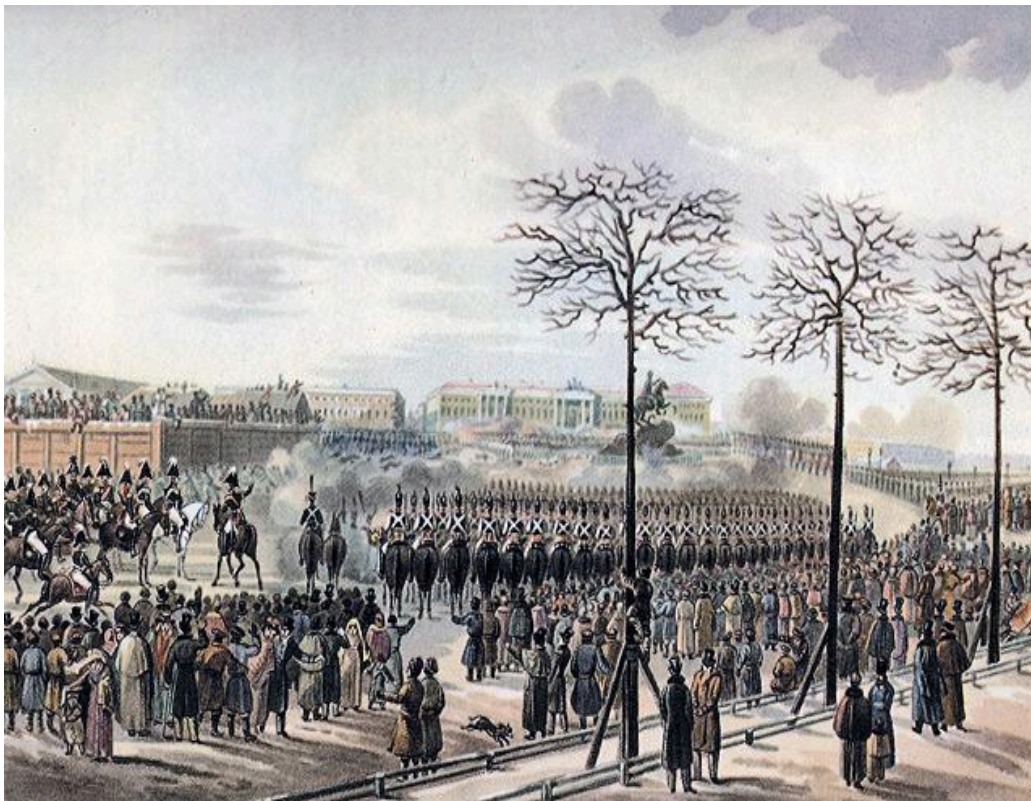
*The Arch-Conservative Spanish King Ferdinand VII*

The Spanish liberal coup of 1820 was the first major test of the Holy Alliance's commitment to prevent revolution anywhere in Europe. True to form, the continental members of the alliance supported a French army of 200,000 in invading Spain and restoring Ferdinand to the throne. The liberals were persecuted and hounded, and Spain was essentially ruled by an arch-conservative order for the next few decades. Incidentally, it was in this context that the American president James Monroe issued the Monroe Doctrine, which forbid European powers from interfering in the politics of the Americas. Monroe was afraid that the Holy Alliance would try to extend its intervention to the now-former Spanish colonies and he thus issued a proclamation that any attempt by a European power to intervene in the western hemisphere would be considered a threat to US peace and safety.

The next liberal revolt occurred in the *most* conservative political context in Europe at the time: that of Russia. Late in the Napoleonic wars, some Russian officers in the Tsarist army underwent a pair of related revelations. First, they came to admire the bravery and loyalty of their soldiers, all of whom were drawn from the ranks of the serfs. In turn, they experienced the

west firsthand as Russian armies fought Napoleon's forces and then during the occupation of France. There, the sheer backwardness of Russia stood in contrast to the dynamism and vitality they discovered in French society (especially in Paris itself). The officers came to see serfdom as both fundamentally immoral and as totally incompatible with any hope of progress for Russia. Thus, as Russian armies returned home after the Congress of Vienna, a conspiracy of liberal officers emerged, intent on creating a liberal political order for the Russian state once the aging, fanatically religious, and arch-conservative Tsar Alexander I died.

Ten years later (in 1825) he did die, and the result was the "Decembrist" uprising. During the years that followed Napoleon's defeat, the conspiracy of army officers put plans in motion to force the government to accept liberal reforms, especially a constitution guaranteeing basic rights and freeing the serfs. When the new Tsar, Nikolai I, was crowned in December of 1825, the officers staged a rebellion in the square in front of the royal palace in St. Petersburg, hoping that the army as a whole would side with them and force the Tsar to accept reforms. Instead, after a tense day of waiting, troops loyal to the Tsar opened fire and crushed the uprising.



*The Decembrist uprising, depicted at the moment troops loyal to the tsar opened fire.*

The Decembrist uprising was the one and only attempt at implementing liberal reform in Russia in the nineteenth century; it would take until 1905 for the next revolution to come to pass.

Nikolai I was the ultimate reactionary, personally overseeing the police investigation of the Decembrist conspiracy and creating Europe's first secret police force, The Third Section. He would go on to a long rule (r. 1825 - 1855) guided by the principles he defined for the Russian state: autocracy, orthodoxy, and nationality. In the decades that followed, the slightest sign of dissent from a Russian subject was grounds for imprisonment or exile to a Siberian prison-village, and the political and social changes that swept across the rest of Europe were thus held at bay. Tsarist power remained intact, but Russian society (and the Russian economy) stagnated.

Even as the Decembrist uprising failed, another revolt was being fought in the heartland of "Western Civilization" itself: Greece. The Balkans, including not only Greece but territories like Bosnia, Serbia, and Macedonia, had been part of the Ottoman Empire for hundreds of years. There, the predominantly Christian subjects of the Ottomans enjoyed official religious toleration, but chafed at the tax burden and, increasingly by the late eighteenth century, resented the "foreign" rule of the Turks. This resentment coalesced around the new political ideology of nationalism by the early nineteenth century - just as "Germans" resented the conservative Austrian regime and Poles detested the Russian and Prussian states that had divided up Polish territory, Greeks (as well as Serbs, Croats, and the other peoples of the Balkans) increasingly saw themselves as autonomous peoples artificially ruled by a foreign power.

In 1821, a Greek prince named Alexander Ypsilantis organized a revolt centered on the demand for a Greek state. A series of uprisings occurred in Greece and on various islands in the Aegean Sea. Despite the fact that the Ottoman Empire was a nominal ally of the members of the Holy Alliance and an official part of the Congress System, and despite the fact that the Greek uprising was precisely the kind of thing that the Holy Alliance had been organized to prevent, Europeans soon flocked to support the rebellion. European scholars wrote impassioned articles about how Greece, as the birthplace of European culture, needed to be liberated from the "oriental" tyranny of the Turks.

After reports of a Turkish massacre of Greeks were publicized in Europe, the Holy Alliance demanded that Turkey grant Greek independence. The Ottomans refused, so in 1827 a combined fleet of Britain, France, and Russia sunk an Ottoman fleet. Fighting continued between the rebels and the Ottomans for a few years, with support going to the rebels from the European powers (and Russia actually declaring war in 1829), and in 1833 the Ottomans finally relented and granted independence to Greece.

Thus, in this case, the cultural bias pitting European Christians against (perceived) non-European Muslims proved stronger than the pragmatic, conservative concern with suppressing revolutions among the European powers. Following the Greek uprising, the Ottoman Empire entered a period of marked decline in power, its territories attracting the unwanted attention of the European states. Europeans soon referred to the Ottoman Empire as the “sick man of Europe,” and squabbling over Ottoman territory became an increasing source of tension between the European great powers by the middle of the century.

While the Greek uprising was raging in the eastern Mediterranean, revolution was brewing once again in France. King Charles X, the arch-conservative and nearly delusional king of France from 1824 – 1830, was one of the most unpopular monarchs in Europe. Under his watch the small group of rich politicians allowed to sit in the French Chamber of Deputies passed a law making religious sacrilege punishable by death (no one was ever actually executed), and he re-instituted harsh censorship even as French society had become increasingly literate and liberal. In July of 1830, angered at the growing strength of liberalism, Charles disenfranchised most of those who had been able to vote at all and further clamped down on the freedom of the press.

The result was a kind of accidental revolution in which angry crowds took to the streets and the king lost his nerve and fled. Just as they had in the first French Revolution, the army sided with the crowd of protesters, not with the king. Charles X fled to exile in England, the last ever Bourbon monarch to have held the throne of France, and his cousin Louis-Philippe of the Orléans branch of the royal line became the king. The “citizen king” as he was called expanded the electorate, reinstituted freedom of the press, and abandoned the kind of medieval court etiquette favored by Charles X.

The irony of the “July Monarchy” of Louis-Philippe is that it demonstrated some of the limitations of liberalism at the time. The electorate was very small, comprised of the wealthy (both noble and bourgeois). The government essentially ran like a company devoted to making the rich and connected richer and better connected, while leaving the majority of the population without access to political power. Workers were banned from forming unions and even relatively prosperous bourgeois were not rich enough to vote. Louis-Philippe himself became increasingly unpopular as the years went on (satirical cartoons at the time often depicted him as an obese, spoiled pear). The July Monarchy only lasted fourteen years, toppled during the revolutions of 1848.

Meanwhile, in Great Britain, it seemed possible that a revolution might come to pass as well. Britain as of 1815 was comparatively “liberal” already, having been a constitutional

monarchy since 1689, but there was still plenty for British liberals to attack. There was a limited representative government in the parliament, and the electorate mostly represented the landowning gentry class. Furthermore, the electoral districts were either totally out of sync with the British population or were, in fact, complete nonsense. Voting districts had not been revised to reflect changes in population since the eighteenth century, and thus, the north was sorely underrepresented. Also, there were “rotten boroughs,” electoral districts with no one in them which were controlled remotely by a lord. One was a pasture. Another, called Dunwich, was literally underwater; due to changes in sea walls, it had been inundated for centuries. It still sent a representative to parliament, however, namely the descendant of the lords who had controlled it before it was submerged.

A series of reforms in Britain, however, staved off a revolution along continental lines. First, in 1828 and 1829, separate bills made it legal for Catholics and non-Anglican Protestants to hold office. Then, the Great Reform Bill of 1832 expanded the electorate to encompass most of the urban middle class and eliminated the rotten boroughs entirely; it only passed the arch-conservative House of Lords because the lords were terrified that the disgruntled middle class would join with workers in an actual revolution. The newly liberalized parliament that followed swiftly voted to end slavery in British territories (1833), passed the controversial Poor Laws that created public workhouses (1834) for the unemployed, and eliminated corrupt and archaic city governments and replaced them with elected councils. A decade later, the hated Corn Laws were finally repealed after a protracted political struggle (1846). Thus, the pattern in British politics in the nineteenth century was a slow, steady liberalization, even as Britain clinched its position as the most powerful single state in Europe by the middle of the century.

## The Revolutions of 1848

The new political ideologies that had emerged from the backdrop of the French Revolution and Napoleonic period coalesced in 1848. That year, all across Europe, there were a series of revolutions that combined the liberal, socialist, and nationalist movements in a temporary alliance against the conservative order. Starting in France, but quickly spreading to Prussia, Austria, the smaller German kingdoms, and regions like Italy and Hungary, coalitions rose up and, temporarily, succeeded in either running their monarchs out of their capital cities (as in Paris) or forcing their monarchs to agree to constitutions and rationalized legal systems (as in Prussia and Austria).



In February of 1848 in France, the unpopular king Louis-Philippe unwisely tried to crack down on gatherings of would-be reformers. A revolutionary crowd gathered and, after panicked soldiers fired and killed forty protesters, began to build barricades and prepare to fight back. The king promptly fled the city. A diverse group of liberals and socialists formed a provisional government, declared France to be a new republic, and began to draw up plans for a general election for representatives to a new government. There would be no property restrictions on voting - although women remained disenfranchised, as they did everywhere else - and never again would a monarch hold the throne of France simply because of his or her dynastic birth.

Meanwhile, in Austria, crowds took to the streets of Vienna after learning of the revolution in Paris (telegraphs now carried information across Europe in hours; thus, this was the first time revolutions were tied together via "social media"). Peasants marched into the capital demanding the end of feudalism. Workers demanded better wages and conditions. Liberals demanded a constitution. In non-German areas like the Czech lands and Hungary, after learning of the news in Vienna, nationalists rose up in the regional capitals of Prague and Budapest demanding their own independent nations. For a time it looked like the Austro-Hungarian Empire itself was on the verge of collapse.



Europe in 1848. Note the red marks on the map - those denote major revolutionary outbreaks.

In Prussia and the other German kingdoms, a series of revolutions saw a gathering of hundreds of would-be politicians in the city of Frankfurt. The first popularly elected national assembly in German history gathered to draw up a constitution based on the principle of German unity and a liberalized legal order. Not only Prussians, but representatives of the various other kingdoms of Germany came together and began the business of creating a unified state. The representatives, however, had to debate some thorny issues. Should the German liberals support free enterprise or a guaranteed "right to work," as demanded by German socialists? Should they support the independence of Poland at the expense of the German minority there? Should they favor Bohemian independence at the expense of the German minority in the Czech lands? There were about 800 delegates gathered, elected from all over the German states, operating without the official sanction of any of the kings and princes of their homelands, and they *all* wanted the chance to speak.

In turn, the major debate that broke out among the delegates was about the form of German nationalism that should be adopted: should Germany be a "smaller German" state defined by German-speakers and excluding Austria, or a "greater German" state including Austria and all of its various other ethnicities and languages? It took months for the former position to win out in debate, and the final conclusion was that any state could join Germany, but only if it "left behind" non-German territories (like Hungary). It should be noted, however, that the delegates agreed that Polish and Czech nationalism had to be crushed because of German "racial" superiority, an early anticipation of the Germanic ethnocentrism that would eventually give rise to Nazism almost a century later.

This flowering of revolutionary upheaval, however, proved shockingly short-lived. The coalitions of artisans, students, and educated liberals who had spearheaded the uprisings were good at arguing with one another about the finer points of national identity, but not at establishing meaningful links to the bulk of the population who did not live in or near the capital cities. The Frankfurt Congress was the quintessential expression of that form of dysfunction: impassioned, educated men, most of them lawyers, with few direct links to the majority of the German population, despite the growing popularity of German nationalism. The problem for the revolutionaries across Europe was that only in France did the king stay out of power permanently. In the German kingdoms, Italy, and Austria, monarchs and their officials worked behind the scenes to re-establish control of their armies and to shore up their own support while hastily-created assemblies were trying to draw up liberal constitutions.

Likewise, revolutionary coalitions soon discovered that their constituent elements did not necessarily agree on the major political issues that had to be addressed in creating a new



government. The first sign of this dissent was in France: the socialists in the new French parliament (called the National Assembly, just as it was in the first French republic half a century earlier) created new "National Workshops" in Paris that offered good wages to anyone in need of work. Soon, however, the alliance between liberals and socialists broke down over resentment at the costs of running the workshops and the Assembly shut them down. The workers of Paris rose up in protest and a series of bloody street battles called the June Days broke out in which thousands of Parisian workers were killed or imprisoned. Conservative peasants were sent by railroad from the countryside under orders from the Assembly and in just a few days, the great socialist experiment was crushed.

In the aftermath of the June Days, the government of the Second Republic was torn between liberals, socialists, and conservatives (the latter of whom wanted to restore the French monarchy). In the midst of the chaos, Napoleon Bonaparte's nephew, Louis Napoleon, successfully ran for president of the Republic, winning in large part because of the simple power of his name. Posing as a unifying force above the fray of petty politics, he was genuinely popular across class and regional lines throughout France. In 1852 he staged a coup and declared himself Emperor of France, just as his uncle had decades earlier. And, also like the first Napoleon, he had his power ratified by bypassing the Assembly entirely and calling for a plebiscite (vote of the entire male population) in support of his title, which he won by a landslide. He took the title of Napoleon III (Napoleon II, the first Napoleon's son, had died years earlier). Thus, in a few short years the second experiment in democratic politics in France ended just as the first one had: a popular dictator named Napoleon took over.

In both Austria and Prussia (as well as the smaller German kingdoms) conservative forces turned the tide as the revolutionary coalitions wasted time debating the minutiae of the new political order. Forces loyal to the Austrian emperor, aided by a full-scale Russian invasion of Hungary in the name of Holy Alliance principles, restored Habsburg rule across the entirety of the empire by the autumn of 1849. In the meantime, by the time the representatives had finally drafted a constitution for a united Germany under Prussian rule, the Prussian king Wilhelm IV had verified the loyalty of the army. When he was presented with the constitution, he simply refused to accept it (he called the offered position a "crown from the gutter"), and one by one the kings of the smaller German states reasserted their control across the German lands.

Ultimately, all of the revolutions "failed" in their immediate goals of creating liberal republics, to say nothing of socialist dreams of state-sponsored workshops for the unemployed. One prominent historian, much later, noted that 1848 was the year that European history (specifically, German history, although the comment was often applied to the whole

revolutionary enterprise) “reached its turning point and failed to turn.” That is not entirely true, however. Even though conservative regimes ultimately retained power, the very definition of conservatism and the methods conservatives used were altered by the revolutions.

First, some limited constitutional and parliamentary reforms did occur in many kingdoms. Even though (again, relying on Russian support) the Austrian Empire had been restored by conservative forces, the new constitution of 1849 did institute a parliament, and elected representative bodies became the norm across Europe by the latter decades of the century. Electorates were almost always limited to property-owners, and nowhere did those electorates include women until the twentieth century, but they still represented a major shift toward a key element of liberal politics. Likewise, the very fact that conservative monarchies accepted the need for written constitutions, and the final end of the old feudal obligations of peasants in areas where those still existed, were marked steps toward liberalism.

Second, just as significantly, the power of nationalism was obvious to everyone in the aftermath of 1848, conservative monarchs included. Only Russian invasion had prevented Hungary from achieving its independence, and Italian uprisings against Austria had been contained only with great difficulty. Subsequently, conservatives themselves began to adopt some of the trappings of nationalism in the name of retaining their own power - as considered below, the most noteworthy success stories of nineteenth-century nationalism, those of Italy and Germany, were led by conservative politicians, not by utopian insurgents.

## National Unifications

The most spectacular successes of the nationalist movements of the nineteenth century were in Italy and Germany, two areas with ancient regional identities but a total lack of political unity. Italy had last been united during the period of the Roman Empire, whereas Germany had *never* been truly united. Each term - Italy and Germany - referred to a region and a language, not a kingdom or nation, places where people spoke similar lingual dialects and had some kind of a shared history, but were divided between various kingdoms, cities, and empires.

This very lack of unity was, however, a source of inspiration for the nationalists of the first half of the nineteenth century. One of the great nationalist thinkers was an Italian, Giuseppe Mazzini, whose Young Italy movement inspired comparable movements all over Europe in the 1830s. Mazzini was the quintessential romantic nationalist, someone who believed that nations would organically emerge to replace the tyranny of the old feudal order of conservative monarchs. Young Italy was just one of a number of “Young Europes” (e.g. Young Germany,

Young Ireland) that shared this essentially optimistic, even utopian, outlook. In turn, many Germans dreamed of a united Germany that might escape the oppressive influence of censorship and oppression. Those kind of radical nationalists had their day in the Revolutions of 1848, but then saw their hopes dashed when the conservative kings of Prussia and Austria rallied their military forces and re-took power.

That being noted, in the aftermath of 1848, even kings came to accept that the popular desire for nations was too strong to resist forever, and at least in Prussia, the idea that a conservative monarch might “use” nationalism to enhance his power came to the fore. Instead of allowing a popular uprising that might permanently replace them, conservative monarchs began maneuvering to co-opt the very idea of nationalism. This was not a great, sinister master plan, but instead a series of pragmatic political calculations, usually led by high-ranking royal officials rather than the kings themselves. Through a combination of deliberate political manipulation and sheer chance, the first nation to unite under conservative leadership was Italy.

Italy had been dominated by foreign powers since about 1500, when Spain and France jostled for control and extinguished the independence of most of the Italian city-states of the Renaissance during the Italian Wars. Later, it was Austria that came to dominate in the north, adding Italian regions and cities to the Austrian Empire. The south was an essentially feudal kingdom, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, dominated by lesser branches of first the Habsburg and then the Bourbon royal lines. In the middle was the Papal States, ruled directly by the pope and still controlling Rome as of the 1850s (after a short-lived republic in 1848 was dismantled by the French under Napoleon III). Despite the popularity of the concept of nationalism among the members of the small northern-Italian middle class, it had relatively little mass support (and less than 3% of the population was literate in the standard “Italian” language, the dialect spoken in the region of Tuscany).

The core of Italian unification was the kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, a small kingdom consisting of a large island in the Mediterranean and a chunk of land wedged between France, Spain, and the Austrian-dominated northern Italian states. Its king, Vittorio Emanuele II, was from the old royal house of Savoy, and the kingdom retained independence following the Napoleonic period because it served as a useful buffer state between the French and Austrian spheres of influence. Vittorio Emanuele enjoyed interfering in foreign policy and took pride in his military prowess, but he was too lazy to become involved in domestic affairs, which he left to his ministers. In turn, the most intelligent and important of his ministers was Count Camillo di Cavour (1810-1861), the true architect of Italian unification.



*Vittorio Emmanuele II of Piedmont-Sardinia. Even by the standards of the time, he favored an impressive mustache.*

Cavour was determined to increase Piedmont-Sardinia's power, and he used Italian nationalism to do it. He did not have any sentimental attachment to the concept of "Italy." Instead, he wanted to make Piedmont-Sardinia the center of a larger, more powerful kingdom. As of the 1850s, a war (the Crimean War, described below) had torn apart the system of alliances that had been so crucial in maintaining the balance of power after the Congress of Vienna, and Cavour knew that he could play one great power off against the other to Piedmont's benefit. His plan was to use the rivalry between France and Austria to his advantage, by having France support some kind of Italian independence from Austria in order to weaken the Habsburgs. Cavour successfully bargained with Napoleon III, the new emperor of France as of 1852, and in 1859, with French military support, Piedmont-Sardinia pushed the Austrians out of northern Italy and gained political ascendancy in the name of a new "Italian nation." Cavour gave France the city of Nice in return for continued support in holding the Austrians in check.

Out of nowhere, another figure entered the story: Giuseppe Garibaldi, an unexpected political leader who brought southern Italy into the equation. Garibaldi was an adventurer, a romantic nationalist, and a revolutionary who had spent most of his adult life as a mercenary battling in independence campaigns and wars, mostly in South America. He rushed back to Italy during the Revolutions of 1848 only to see his hopes of both a united Italy and freedom from foreign control dashed thanks to the machinations of the Austrians, the French, and the papacy.

Following Piedmont-Sardinia's success in pushing Austria back in the north, however, Garibaldi returned. In May 1860, Garibaldi, with a tiny force of 1,000 red-shirted volunteers (mostly townsmen from the north, including numerous under-employed professional men and students hoping to avoid their examinations) packed aboard two leaky steamships, set out to invade Sicily. Very rapidly, Garibaldi captured Palermo, the chief city of Sicily. He succeeded because he won the support of the Sicilian peasants by suspending taxes and promising to divide up the large estates and distribute the land. The landowners of Sicily, even those who were most reactionary, were forced to see that the only hope of law and order lay in protection by this radical dictator and his revolution. Their gradual and reluctant transference of allegiance to the insurrection was a decisive event and helped to make possible the next phase of Garibaldi's astonishing conquest.

On August 18 Garibaldi crossed to mainland Italy, entering Naples. He planned an invasion of the Papal States, but Cavour convinced Napoleon III that it was necessary to block the further progress of Garibaldi's adventurers and assured him that the position of the papacy itself (under French protection) would not be affected. Cavour threw the bulk of the Piedmontese army into the Papal States, annexing them and heading off Garibaldi. When he arrived, Garibaldi ceded his conquests to Vittorio Emanuele, and Italy thus grew to encompass both Sicily and the south. Thus, in about six months, the northern conquests of Piedmont-Sardinia were united with Garibaldi's bizarre conquest of the south.

Cavour's schemes for a Piedmontese-led united Italy had not included the south, which like most northern Italians he held in contempt. Thus, in a real sense southern Italy emerged as the unfortunate loser of the wars of unification, even more so than did Austria. Taxes had to be increased, because the war of 1859 had to be paid for, and the new Italian state needed a larger army and navy. There was also the fact that the extension of low tariffs from Piedmont to economically backward regions often completely extinguished the few local industries that existed. Nor did the new state have funds to alleviate distress or to undertake public works and infrastructure projects in the south. The rural poor became more totally dependent than ever on

the local landowning class in their adjustment to the new scheme of things. Some refused to adjust and became "brigands" who rose up against the new political order almost immediately. The restoration of order in the south required a major military operation, the so-called Bandit Wars, which over three years that cost more lives than had the wars of the unification itself. In the aftermath of the wars, the south was treated almost like a colony rather than a full-fledged part of the Italian nation, and politics in the south revolved around the growing relationship between the official Italian government and (as of the 1880s) organized crime.

At the time of Cavour's death in 1861 the new state had a population of twenty-two million but an electorate of only half a million, limited to property-owners. Politics in the new Italian state (a constitutional monarchy in which the king still had considerable power) was about patronage: getting jobs for one's cronies and shifting the burden of taxation onto those who could least afford to pay it. In many respects, unification had amounted to the occupation of the rest of the country by the north. It would be many years before the new state would begin to serve the needs and interests of the majority of its citizens.

## Germany

In Prussia, it was an official similar to Cavour, but far more memorable, chancellor Otto Von Bismarck, who was personally responsible for unifying Germany for the first time. Bismarck was ruthless, practical, and completely amoral in his service to the Prussian king. He was the inventor of "*Realpolitik*": a political philosophy that insisted on being completely pragmatic and realistic, rather than pursuing empty goals like "glory" or pulling punches in the name of moral rectitude. He was such a pragmatist that he ended up introducing social reforms to blunt the growth of socialism, even though he was an arch-conservative (and thus detested the very idea of reform). He was from an old Prussian noble family, a *Junker*, and he had no time for romantic nationalist drivel, yet he directly brought about German unification. He once said that "the great questions of the time are not determined by speeches and majority decisions – that was the error of 1848 – but by iron and blood."

After 1815, "Germany" was nothing more than the "German Confederation," a free trade zone containing a number of independent kingdoms. German nationalism, however, was very strong, and in 1848 it culminated in the roughly year-long standoff between the elected group of self-understood German nationalist politicians in Frankfurt and the kings of Prussia and Austria (and those of the smaller German kingdoms). Despite the fact that the revolution failed to create a "Germany" in 1848, it was now clear that a German state probably would come into

being at some point; the question remained, however, of whether it would be a “greater Germany” under Austrian leadership or a “smaller Germany” under Prussia.

During the eighteenth century Prussia had risen from being a fairly poor backwater in the north, lacking natural resources and remote from the centers of intellectual and cultural life farther south, to being one of the great kingdoms of Europe. That was thanks largely to its royal house, the Hohenzollerns, who relied on a combination of ruthless administrative efficiency and a relentless focus on building up Prussia’s military. Whereas the other royal houses sought to live in the style of the glorious French kings, the Hohenzollerns lived like reasonably well-off nobles, pouring state revenues into the army and insisting on brutal discipline. By the middle of the eighteenth century, Prussia was an established Great Power, part of the coalition that had defeated Napoleon, a military equal with Austria, and was poised to exert an even greater role in Central Europe.



*The Holy Roman Empire in 1789. While many of the smallest states of the region vanished during the Napoleonic period, “Germany” remained nothing more than an idea in the early nineteenth century.*

Otto Von Bismarck was an inheritor of these Prussian traditions, a Prussian conservative who served in various diplomatic posts in the Prussian kingdom before being promoted to

chancellor by the Prussian King Wilhelm I. Bismarck did not have a master plan to unify Germany. His goal was always to maintain or, preferably, increase Prussia's power (in that sense, he was a lot like Cavour in Piedmont-Sardinia). He became highly skilled at manipulating nationalist passions to inflame popular support for Prussian wars, but he was, personally, deeply skeptical about a "national spirit" animating the need for unification.

Bismarck achieved German unification through war. He egged Austria on in a conflict over control of a region in northwestern Germany, recently seized from Denmark, and succeeded in getting the Austrians to declare war on Prussia. Prussia's modernized and well-trained army smashed the Austrians in a few months in 1866. Significantly, however, Bismarck convinced the Prussian king not to order a march on Vienna and the occupation of Austria itself; the goal for Bismarck had been to knock Austria out of contention as the possible governing power of Germany, *not* to try to conquer and control it. Conquest of Austria, he thought, would just lead to more headaches for Prussia since the Austrians would resent the Prussian takeover. This decision - not to conquer Austria when Prussia could have - was a perfect example of *Realpolitik*: a bloodless, realistic, coldly calculating approach to achieving greater political power without succumbing to some kind of ill-considered quest for "glory."

After defeating Austria, Bismarck essentially tricked France into going to war. Bismarck had toyed with Napoleon III, ignoring French demands for territory if it came to war between Austria and Prussia. In the aftermath of the war itself, the Spanish throne suddenly became available because of a coup, and Bismarck sponsored a Prussian candidate related to the former Spanish ruling line, none other than the Bourbons of France. Even though Napoleon III was not a Bourbon, this was a direct attack on France's sphere of influence. Napoleon III was infuriated - Bismarck even humiliated Napoleon by leaking a memo to the press in which Napoleon's machinations for territory before the Austro-Prussian War were revealed. Feeling both threatened and belittled, Napoleon insisted that France declare war on Prussia.

The ensuing Franco-Prussian War was short and sweet for Prussia; it started in late 1870 and was over by early 1871. Napoleon III foolishly led the French army into battle personally (sick with the flu and without an ounce of his famous uncle's tactical expertise) and was subsequently captured in the field. French forces were poorly led and could not stand up to Prussian training and tactics, and every important engagement was won by the Prussians as a result. In one fell swoop, the myth of French military supremacy, a legacy from the first Napoleon, was destroyed, and Europeans were confronted with the fact that a new military power had asserted its strength in its stead.



In the aftermath of the Prussian victory, a new German empire was declared at Versailles, with Wilhelm I taking the title of Kaiser (emperor) of the German Reich (empire). The various smaller German kingdoms renounced their independence and pledged themselves to the newborn state in the process. France lost two important eastern regions, Alsace and Lorraine, and had to pay a considerable war indemnity, inspiring an enormous amount of resentment among the French (and leading to a desire for *revanche* – revenge). The German Empire became a constitutional monarchy in which all men over 25 could vote for representatives in the Reichstag, the parliament, but an unelected federal council held considerable power and the emperor held more. Thus, even though Germany was a constitutional monarchy, it was hardly the liberal vision of a democratic state.

In one of the more bizarre historical episodes of the time, the city of Paris refused to concede defeat and fought on against the Prussians for a short while before the Prussians simply fell back and handed off the issue to the hastily-declared Third Republic of France (Napoleon III went into exile). Paris declared itself an independent city-state organized along socialist lines, the “Paris Commune,” and for a few months (from March through late May) the French army besieged the *communards* in the capital. In the end, a French army stormed the city and approximately 20,000 *communards* were executed.

While Italian unification had redrawn the map of Europe and disturbed the balance of power at least somewhat, German unification utterly destroyed it. Germany was not just Prussia, it was Prussia and most of the rest of what once had been the Holy Roman Empire. It had a large population, a rapidly industrializing, wealthy economy, and proven military might. The period after German unification, from 1871 until the start of World War I in 1914, was one in which the European great powers jockeyed for position, built up their respective military strength, and scrambled to seize territory overseas before their rivals did. Long gone were the days of the Congress System and a balance of power based on the desire for peace.



*Germany after unification. Note that the color-coded regions were the states of the German Empire: they retained considerable autonomy despite now being part of a single unified nation.*

## Russia

In many ways, the histories of Great Britain and Russia were *always* exceptional in the context of nineteenth-century European politics. Neither underwent revolutionary upheavals, and neither had much difficulty suppressing nationalist movements from within their respective empires. And yet, the two countries were in many ways polar opposites: Britain was an advanced industrial economy with a liberal constitution and a monarchy whose real political power declined over time, while Russia was an overwhelmingly agricultural - even feudal - economy with a powerful, autocratic head of state: the Tsar. The modernizing trends that changed much of the rest of Europe over the course of the century had the least impact on Russia of any of the major states.

Tsar Alexander I, who ruled from 1801 – 1825, was present at the Congress of Vienna. He was intensely conservative and had a powerful attraction to Orthodox Christian mysticism.

In turn, he sincerely believed that he had a mission from God to maintain the sacred order of monarchy, nobility, and clergy. In this, he was influenced by timing: he became Tsar shortly after Napoleon seized power in France. To Alexander, the French Revolution was not just a bad idea or a threat to his personal power, it was an unholy abomination, a perversion of the proper order of society as it had been ordained from on high. Ultimately, it was the Russians who defeated Napoleon's armies in 1812, thanks largely to the winter and their brilliant tactical decision to camp out and wait for the French to run out of supplies. Alexander sat in a position of great power at the Congress of Vienna because of the strength of his armies and the prestige he had earned chasing the French forces back to France and aiding in their defeat in 1814 and 1815.

In 1815, Russia, along with Austria and Prussia (and, technically, the restored French monarchy), formed the Holy Alliance that vowed to crush attempts to overthrow the social and political order with force. For Austria, this was a pragmatic gesture because the Habsburgs had the most to lose in the face of nationalism. For Prussia, it was a way to cement their great power status and to be treated as an equal by the other members of the anti-Napoleonic coalition. For Russia and for Alexander, however, it was nothing less than a true holy mission that had to happen regardless of any practical benefits. Russia did indeed intervene to crush rebellions over the course of the next few decades, most importantly in 1848 when it decimated the Hungarian Revolution and returned Hungary to the Austrians.

Alexander I died in 1825 and his death promptly set off the Decembrist Uprising (noted above). Not only was the uprising crushed, but Alexander's younger brother and heir Nikolai I took a personal hand in interrogating its organizers. Nikolai was much less of a mystic than his brother had been, but he was equally trenchant in his opposition to any loosening of the Russian social order. He went on to rule for decades (r. 1825 - 1855), and during that time he did everything in his power to champion the conservative cause. As noted earlier, not only was he a staunch supporter of the Holy Alliance, but he formed the world's first modern secret police force, The Third Section. Nikolai declared his three principles of government in 1832: autocracy, orthodoxy, and nationality, the last of the three in service to the idea of Russian supremacy over its enormous empire (and the other ethnic groups present in it).

Not only were the Tsars of the nineteenth century arch-conservatives, the vast majority of the Russian population had no interest in political change. They were among the poorest, least educated, and most oppressed in Europe: the Russian serfs. The Russian Orthodox Church was closely tied to the government and preached total obedience to the authority of the Tsar. For that tiny sliver of educated society that could read and had access to foreign books, even to discuss politics at all, let alone advocate reform of any kind, was a punishable crime,

with thousands exiled to Siberia for the crime of having made an off-hand remark about politics or owning a book describing a political concept originating in the west.



*Tsar Nikolai I, architect of nineteenth-century Russian autocracy.*

These people, almost all of whom were nobles, formed the Russian intelligentsia: a small class of educated and very self-consciously cultured people who were at the forefront of Russian literature and artistic creation. They were the ones who began modern Russian literature itself in this period, producing great Russian novelists like Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov. The themes of their art dealt with both the thorny political issues of their time and a kind of ongoing spiritual quest to understand the Russian “soul,” something that was usually identified with both nature and the mystical qualities of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The problem with being a member of the intelligentsia in Russia, however, was that reading or discussing anything to do with politics was itself sufficient cause for arrest and exile to Siberia. Many of the great novelists spent at least part of their lives in Siberia as a result; even Dostoevsky, who ended up being a deeply conservative thinker who was hostile to radical, or even disruptive, politics, spent part of his life in exile. To be an intellectual was almost the equivalent of being a criminal in the eyes of the state. It was a short step for intellectuals to simply act like criminals. It was in large part thanks to the police apparatus that matured under Nikolai I’s rule that this phenomenon occurred.

That being noted, a momentous event occurred late in Nikolai’s reign unrelated to Tsarist autocracy per se: the destruction of the Congress System created at the Congress of Vienna, thanks to the Crimean War. From 1854 - 1856, France and Britain fought a war against Russia in the Crimea, a peninsula on the northern shore of the Black Sea. The war was fought over

great power politics: Russia tried to take advantage of the political decline of the Ottoman Empire to assert total control in the region of the Black Sea, and both France and Britain recognized those machinations as a threat to the balance of power. The Austrian government unwisely stayed neutral during the ensuing war, which ruptured the alliance between it and Russia (after all, Russia had just put down the Hungarian uprising on Austria's behalf during the Revolutions of 1848).

The Crimean War, while not long by the standards of the Napoleonic period, was nevertheless a major conflict. 600,000 men died in the war, the majority from disease thanks to the abysmal conditions at the front. Russia ultimately lost, and the end result was that the Congress System was finally undone. From that point on, the great powers of Europe were in open competition with one another, fearing and resenting each other more so than they feared revolutionary forces from within - one manifestation of this newfound rivalry was the wars that saw the birth of Italy and Germany, described above.

Nikolai finally died in 1855, and his son Alexander II took the throne (in the midst of the war). In 1861, following Russia's defeat, Alexander made the momentous decision to emancipate the serfs, two years before the Emancipation Proclamation in the United States freed the African-American slaves. It was thought by many Russian elites that one of the reasons Russia had lost the war was its backwardness, a backwardness that Alexander and many others believed could not be mitigated with serfdom weighing down the possibility of progress. The emancipation, however, had surprisingly little immediate impact on Russian society, because the serfs legally owed the government the money that had been distributed to buy their freedom from the nobility. Thus, for generations, serfs were still tied to the same land, laboring both to survive and to pay off the debt incurred with their "freedom."

The emancipation of the serfs was the single most significant reform spearheaded by a Russian Tsar of the nineteenth century. It is thus ironic that Alexander II was the only Tsar assassinated by a radical terrorist group. The group that killed him, The People's Will, believed that the assassination of a Tsar would result in an enormous uprising of the newly-"liberated" peasants (i.e. the former serfs). In this, they were inspired by the anarchist socialism of the exiled Mikhail Bakunin, whose vision of an apocalyptic revolutionary transformation spoke directly to the social and political conditions of his native Russia.

Before the assassination, young members of the intelligentsia formed a social movement known as the Narodniks. The Narodniks advocated going "back to the people," living among and trying to educate the former serfs, which they did during the spring of 1874. The Narodniks believed that the serfs would form the nucleus of a revolutionary class that would rise up and

dismantle Tsarist autocracy if properly educated. Instead, the serfs were deeply suspicious of the urban, educated Narodniks, and in many cases the serfs actually turned the Narodniks in to the local authorities. It was disappointed Narodniks that formed the People's Will, and in March of 1881 they succeeded in killing Alexander II.

While The People's Will had hoped that their assassination of Alexander II would result in a spontaneous uprising of the peasants against Tsarist despotism, nothing of the sort occurred. Instead, another reactionary Tsar, Alexander III, came to the throne and ruthlessly hunted down the terrorist groups. What had changed by the 1880s, however, was that there *were* terrorist groups, not just intellectuals guilty of discussing politics, and the one thing that practically every intellectual in Russian society (terrorist or not) believed was that meaningful change would require a significant, even radical, restructuring of Russian society. To many intellectuals and terrorists, there was no room for weak-kneed reformism; it was revolution or nothing. This is the context into which Vladimir Lenin and the other future Bolsheviks, the leaders of the Russian Communist Party who seized power in 1917, were born. Lenin was a brilliant intellectual who synthesized the writings of Marx with the tradition of Russian radical terrorism, producing a potent combination of theoretical and practical political concepts that were realized in 1917.

Thus, by the late nineteenth century Russia had changed the least among the great powers of Europe. Whereas the other states, from Austria to the new Germany to France, had all adopted at least some form of representative government, Russia remained staunchly autocratic and monarchical. The Russian economy was overwhelmingly agricultural and rural, with industrialization only arriving at the very end of the century in and around some of the large cities of western Russia. Russia was, in a sense, stuck in a historical impasse. That impasse would only end with outright revolution, first in 1905 and again in 1917.

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## Chapter 5: Culture, Science, and Pseudo-Science

### Victorian Culture

Along with the enormous economic and political changes that occurred in Europe over the course of the nineteenth century came equally momentous shifts in culture and learning. The cultural era of this period is known as “Victorianism,” the culture of the dominant bourgeoisie in the second half of the nineteenth century. That culture was named after the British Queen Victoria, who presided over the zenith of British power and the height of British imperialism. Victoria’s astonishingly long reign, from 1837 to 1901, coincided with the triumph of bourgeois norms of behavior among self-understood elites.



*Queen Victoria, the symbolic matriarch of Western culture in the nineteenth century.*

Victorianism was the culture of top hats, of dresses that covered every inch of the female body, of rigid gender norms, and of an almost pathological fear of sexuality. Its defining characteristic was the desire for security, especially security from the influence of the lower classes. Class divisions were made visible in the clothing and manners of individuals, with each class outfitted in distinct “uniforms” – this was a time when one’s hat indicated one’s income and class membership. It was a time in which the bourgeoisie, increasingly mixed with the old nobility, came to assert a self-confident vision of a single European culture that, they thought, *should* dominate the world. Social elites insisted that scientific progress, economic growth, and their own increasing political power were all results of the superiority of European civilization, a civilization that had reached its pinnacle thanks to their own ingenuity. Particularly by the latter decades of the century, they characterized that superiority in racial terms.

According to the great Victorian psychologist Sigmund Freud, Victorianism was fundamentally about the repression of natural instincts. There were always threats present in the lives of social elites at the time: the threat of sexual impropriety, the threat of financial failure, the threat of immoral behavior being discovered in public, threats which were all tied to *shame*. There was clearly a Christian precedent for Victorian obsessions, and Victorianism was certainly tied to Christian piety. What had changed, however, is that the impulse to tie morality to a code of shame was secularized in the Victorian era to apply to everything, especially in economics. Simply put, there was a moral connection between virtue and economic success. The wealthy came to regard their social and economic status as proof of their strong ethical character, not just luck, connections, or hard work. Thus, Victorian culture included a belief in the existence of good and evil in the moral character of individuals, traits that science, they thought, *should* be able to identify just as it was now able to identify bacteria.

In turn, the Victorian bourgeoisie accused the working class of inherent weakness and turpitude. In the minds of the bourgeoisie, as the labor movements and socialist parties grew, the demands of the working class for shortened working days spoke not to their exhaustion and exploitation, but to their laziness and lack of work ethic. The Victorian bourgeoisie were the champions of the notion that everyone got what they deserved and that science itself would eventually ratify the social order. What the Victorian elite feared more than anything was that the working class would somehow overwhelm them, through a communist revolution or by simply “breeding” out of control. They tended to fear a concomitant national decline, sometimes even imagining that western civilization itself had reached its pinnacle and was doomed to degenerate.



There were some remarkable contrasts between the ideology of Victorian life and its lived reality. Even though much of the fear of social degeneration was exaggerated, it is also true that alcoholism became much more common (both because alcohol was cheaper and because urbanization lent itself to casual drinking), and drug use spread. Cocaine was regarded as a medicinal pick-me-up, and respectable diners sometimes finished meals with strawberries dipped in ether. Many novels written around the turn of the twentieth century critiqued the hypocrisy of social elites and their pretensions to rectitude. Two classics of horror writing, *Dracula* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, are both about the monsters that lurked within bourgeois society. Both were written about Victorian elites who were actually terrible beasts, just under the surface of their respectable exteriors.

Nowhere was the Victorian obsession with defining and restricting people into carefully-defined categories stronger than in gender roles. Male writers, theorists, and even scientists claimed that men and women were opposites: rational, forceful, naturally courageous men were contrasted with irrational, but gentle and demure, women. Men of all social classes dressed increasingly alike, in sensible, comfortable trousers, jackets, and hats (albeit with different hats for different classes). Women wore wildly impractical dresses with sometimes ludicrously tight corsets underneath, the better to serve their social function as ornaments to beautify the household. The stifling restrictions on women and their infantilization by men were major factors behind the rise of the feminist movement in the second half of the century, described below.

## Scientific and Pseudo-Scientific Discoveries and Theories

Science made incredible advances in 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).



*Pasteur, with some of his early experimental subjects.*

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.

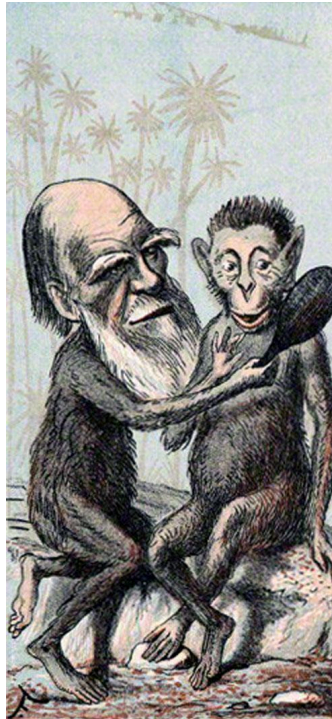
Comparable scientific breakthroughs occurred in the fields of natural history and biology. For centuries, naturalists (the term for what would later be known as biologists) had been puzzled by the fact that the fossils of marine animals could be found on mountaintops. Likewise, fossils embedded in rock 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.

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 *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.



*Caricatures of Darwin as a monkey appeared almost as soon as the *Descent of Man* was published.*

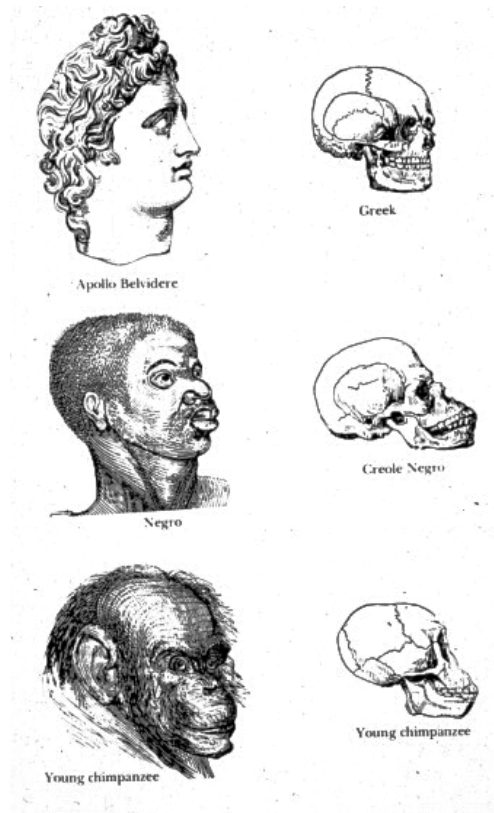
The mechanism of *how* evolution occurred was not known during Darwin's lifetime, at least to very many people. Unknown to anyone at the time, during the 1850s and 1860s an Austrian monk named Gregor Mendel carried out a series of experiments with pea plants in his monastery's garden and, in the process, 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 Science and Pseudo-Science

Many Europeans regarded Darwinian theory as 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 male 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. Drawing on the work of Arthur de Gobineau, the great nineteenth-century proponent of racial hierarchy described in a previous chapter, the British writer and engineer Herbert Spencer emerged as the most significant proponent of Social Darwinism. He summarized his outlook with the phrase "the survival of the fittest," a phrase often misattributed to Darwin himself. Spencer was a fierce proponent of free market economics and also contributed to the process of defining human races in biological terms, rather than cultural or historical ones.

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."



*A typical pseudo-scientific racial hierarchy. (In fact, all human races have skulls of identical dimensions and shapes, not to mention identical intellectual and moral capacities.)*

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.

Not all of the theories to explain behavior were so morally and scientifically questionable, however. In the late nineteenth century, a Frenchman (Emile Durkheim) and a German (Max Weber) independently began the academic discipline that would become sociology: the systematic study of how people behave in complex societies. Durkheim treated Christianity like just another set of rituals and beliefs whose real purpose was the regulation of behavior, while Weber provided an enormous number of insights about the operation of governments, religious traditions, and educational institutions. Another German, Leopold von Ranke, created the first truly systematic forms of historical research, in turn creating the academic discipline of history itself.

Sociology and academic history were part of a larger innovation in human learning: the social sciences. These were disciplines that tried to deduce facts about human behavior that were equally valid to natural science's various insights about the operations of the natural world. The dream of the social sciences was to arrive at rules of behavior, politics, and historical development that were as certain and unshakable as biology or geology. Unfortunately, as academic disciplines proliferated and scholars proposed theories to explain politics, social organization, and economics it was often difficult to distinguish between sound theories based on empirical evidence and pseudo-scientific or pseudo-scholarly theories (like those surrounding racial hierarchy) based instead on ideology and sloppy methodology.

## Mass Culture

The Victorian era saw the emergence of the first modern, industrialized, "mass" societies. One of the characteristics of industrial societies, above and beyond industrial technology and the use of fossil fuels themselves, is the fact that culture itself becomes mass produced. Written material went from the form of books, which had been expensive and treated with great care in the early centuries of printing, to mass-market periodicals, newspapers, and cheap print. People went from inhabitants of villages and regions that were fiercely proud of their identities to inhabitants of larger and larger, and hence more anonymous and alienating, cities. Material goods, mass-produced, became much cheaper over the course of the nineteenth century thanks to industrialization, and in the process they could be used up and

thrown away with a much more casual attitude by more and more people. Two examples of this phenomenon were the spread of literacy and the rise of consumerism.

The nineteenth century was *the* century of mass literacy. In France, male literacy was just below 50% as of the French Revolution, but it was almost 80% in 1870 and almost 100% just thirty years later. Female literacy was close behind. This had everything to do with the spread of printing in vernacular languages, as well as mass education. In France, mass secular free education happened in 1882 under the prime minister of the Third Republic, Jules Ferry. Free, public primary school did more to bind together the French in a shared national culture than anything before or since, as every child in France was taught in standard French and studied the same subjects.

Paper became vastly cheaper as well. Paper had long been made from rags, which were shredded, compressed together, and reconstituted. The resulting paper was durable but expensive. In the late nineteenth century printers began to make paper out of wood pulp, which dropped it to about a quarter of the former price. As of 1880, the linotype machine was invented, which also made printing much cheaper and more simple than it had been. Thus, it became vastly cheaper and easier to publish newspapers by the late nineteenth century.

There was also a positive change in the buying power of the average person. From 1850 to 1900, the average French person saw their real purchasing power increase by 165%. Comparable increases occurred in the other dynamic, commercial, and industrial economies of western Europe (and, eventually, the United States). This increase in the ability of average people to afford commodities above and beyond those they needed to survive was ultimately based on the energy unleashed by the Industrial Revolution. Even with the struggles over the quality of life of working people, by the late nineteenth century goods were simply so cheap to produce that the average person actually *did* enjoy a better quality of life and could buy things like consumables and periodicals.

One result of the cheapening of print and the rise in buying power was “yellow” journalism, sensationalized accounts of political events that stretched the truth to sell copies. In France, the first major paper of this type was called *Le Petit Journal*, an extremely inexpensive and sensationalistic paper which avoided political commentary in favor of banal, mainstream expressions of popular opinion. Rival papers soon sprang up, but what they had in common was that they did not try to change or influence opinion so much as they *reinforced* it - each political persuasion was now served by at least one newspaper that “preached to the choir,” reinforcing pre-existing ideological outlooks rather than confronting them with inconvenient facts.



Overall, the kind of journalism that exploded in the late nineteenth century lent itself to the cultivation of scandals. Important events and trends were tied to the sensationalizing journalism of the day. For instance, a naval arms race between Britain and Germany that was one of the causes of World War I had much to do with the press of both countries playing up the threat of being outpaced by their national rival. The Dreyfus Affair, in which a French Jewish army officer was falsely accused of treason, spun to the point that some people were predicting civil war thanks largely to the massive amount of press on both sides of the scandal (the Dreyfus Affair is considered in detail below). Likewise, imperialism, the practice of invading other parts of the world to establish and expand global empires, received much of its popular support from articles praising the civilizing mission involved in occupying a couple of thousand square miles in Africa that the reader had never heard of before.

In short, the politics of the latter part of the nineteenth century were embedded in journalism. As almost all of the states of Europe moved toward male suffrage, leaders were often shocked by the fact that they had to cultivate public opinion in order to pass the laws they supported. Journals became the mouthpieces of political positions, which both broadened the public sphere to an unprecedented extent and, in a way, sometimes cheapened political opinions to the level of banal slogans.

Another seismic shift occurred in the sphere of acquisition. In the early modern era, luxury goods were basically reserved for the nobility and the upper bourgeoisie. There simply was not enough social wealth for the vast majority of Europeans to buy many things they did not need. The average peasant or shopkeeper, even fairly prosperous ones, owned only a few sets of clothes, which were repaired rather than replaced over time. More to the point, most people did not think of money as something to “save” – in good years in which the average person somehow had “extra” money, he or she would simply spend it on more food or, especially for men, alcohol, because it was impossible to anticipate having a surplus again in the future.

Perhaps the iconic example of a shift in patterns of acquisition and consumerism was the advent of department stores. Department stores represented the shift into recognizably modern patterns of buying, in which people shopped not just for necessities, but for small luxuries. The former patterns of consumption had been of small, family-run shops and traveling peddlers, a system in which bargaining was common and there was next to no advertising to speak of. With department stores, prices were fixed and a wide variety of goods of different genres were on display together. Advertising became ubiquitous and branded products could be found across the length and breadth of a given country - just as print and primary education inculcated national identity, so did the fact that consumer goods were increasingly standardized.

The first area to be affected by these shifts was textiles, both in terms of clothing and housewares like sheets and curtains. Manufacturing and semi-skilled labor dramatically decreased the price of textiles, and department stores carried large selections that many people could afford. People below the level of the rich came not only to own many different items of clothing, but they voluntarily replaced clothing due to shifts in fashion, not just because it was worn out.

The first real department store was the Bon Marché in Paris. It was built in the 1840s but underwent a series of expansions until it occupied an entire city block. By 1906 it had 4,500 employees. During the 1880s it had 10,000 clients a day, up to 70,000 a day during its February “white sales” in which it sold linens for reduced prices. The 1860s were the birth of the seaside holiday, which the Bon Marché helped invent by selling a whole range of holiday goods. By the 1870s there were mail-order catalogs and tourists considered a visit to the Bon Marché to be on the same level as one to the Arc de Triomphe built by Napoleon to commemorate his victories.



*The Bon Marché - the “temple of consumerism.”*

Ultimately, the Victorian Era saw the birth of modern consumerism, in which economies became dependent on the consumption of non-essential goods by ordinary people. The “mass society” inaugurated by the industrial revolution came of age in the last decades of the nineteenth century, a century after it had begun in the coal mines and textile mills of Northern England. That society, with its bourgeois standards, its triumphant self-confidence, and its deep-seated “scientific” social and racial attitudes, was in the process of taking over much of the world at precisely the same time.

# Culture Struggles

As demonstrated by the conservative appropriation of nationalism in the cases of Italy and Germany, the stakes of political and cultural identity had changed significantly over the course of the nineteenth century. Within the nations of Europe - and for the first time in history it was appropriate to speak of nations instead of just “states” - major struggles erupted centering on national identity. After all, liberal and nationalistic legal frameworks had triumphed almost everywhere in Europe by turn of the twentieth century, but in significant ways the enfranchisement of each nation’s citizens was still limited. Most obviously, nowhere did women have the right to vote, and women’s legal rights in general were severely curtailed everywhere. Likewise, while voting rights existed for some male citizens in most nations by 1900 (generally, universal manhood suffrage came about only in the aftermath of World War I), conflicts remained concerning citizenship itself.

These struggles over national identity and legal rights occurred across Europe. The term “culture struggle” itself comes from Germany. Following German unification, Otto von Bismarck led an officially-declared culture struggle – a *Kulturkampf* – against Roman Catholicism, and later, against socialism. The term lends itself, however, to a number of conflicts that occurred in Europe (and America) around the turn of the century, most significantly those having to do with feminism and with the legal and cultural status of European Jews.

The *Kulturkampf* was in part a product of Germany’s unique form of government. The political structure of the newly-united nation of Germany set it apart from the far more liberal regimes in Britain and France. While there was an elected parliament, the *Reichstag*, it did not exercise the same degree of political power as did the British parliament or the French Chamber of Deputies and Senate. The German chancellor and the cabinet answered not to the Reichstag but to the Kaiser (the emperor), and while the regional governments had considerable control locally, the federal structure was highly authoritarian. In turn, there was a comparatively weak liberal movement in Germany because most German liberals saw the unification of Germany as a triumph and held Bismarck in high regard, despite his arch-conservative character. Likewise, most liberals detested socialism, especially as the German socialist party, the SPD, emerged in the 1870s as one of the most powerful political parties.

Bismarck represented the old Lutheran Prussian nobility, the *Junkers*, and he not only loathed socialism but also Catholicism. He (along with many other northern Germans) regarded Catholicism as alien to German culture and an existential threat to German unity. Since the Reformation of the sixteenth century, the majority of northern Germans had been Lutherans, and many were very hostile to the Catholic church. Still, 35% of Germans were Catholic, mostly in the south, and the Catholic Center Party emerged in 1870 to represent their interests. The same year the Catholic church issued the doctrine of papal infallibility - the claim that the Pope literally could not be wrong in matters of faith and doctrine - and Bismarck feared that a future pope might someday order German Catholics not to obey the state.

Thus, in 1873 he began an official state campaign against Catholics. Priests in Germany had to endure indoctrination from the state in order to be openly ordained, and the state would henceforth only recognize civil marriages. More laws followed, including the right of the state to expel priests who refused to abide by anti-Catholic measures. A young German Catholic tried to assassinate Bismarck in 1874, which only made him more intent on carrying forward with his campaign.

Soon, however, Bismarck realized that the state might need the alliance of the Catholic Center Party against the socialists, as the SPD continued to grow. Thus, he relaxed the anti-Catholic measures (although Catholics were still kept out of important state offices, as were Jews) and instead focused on measures against the SPD. Two assassination attempts against the Kaiser, despite being carried out by men who had nothing to do with socialism, gave Bismarck the pretext, and the Reichstag immediately passed laws that amounted to a ban on the SPD itself.

The SPD itself represented a major shift in the identity of socialism following the Revolutions of 1848. Whereas early socialists rarely organized into formal political parties - not least because most states in Europe before 1848 were not democracies of any kind - socialists in the post-1848 era became increasingly militant and organized. In September of 1864, a congress of socialists from across Europe and the United States gathered in London and founded the International Workingmen's Association - the "First International" - in order to better coordinate their efforts. Within the nations of Europe, socialist parties soon acquired mass followings among the industrial working class, with the SPD joined by sister parties in France, Britain (where it was known as the Labour Party), Italy, and elsewhere.

The SPD was founded in 1875 out of various other socialist unions and parties that united in a single socialist movement. Bismarck was utterly opposed to socialism, and after mostly abandoning the anti-Catholic focus of the Kulturkampf, he pushed laws through the

Reichstag in 1878 that banned the SPD and trade unions entirely. Ironically, however, individual socialists could still run for office and campaign for socialism. Bismarck's response was typically pragmatic: he supported social legislation, including pensions for workers, in a bid to keep the socialists from attracting new members and growing even more militant. Thus, in an ironic historical paradox, some of the first "welfare state" provisions in the world were passed by a conservative government to *weaken* socialism.

The SPD was legalized again in 1890 (following the new Kaiser's firing of Bismarck himself) and it issued a new manifesto for its goals. Like many of the other European socialist parties at the time, its ideological stance was explicitly Marxist. The party's leaders asserted that Marx had been right in all of his major analyses, that capitalism would inevitably collapse, and that the party's primary goal was thus to prepare the working class to rise up and take over in the midst of the coming crisis. Its secondary goals, the "in the meantime" activities, were focused on securing universal manhood suffrage and trying to shore up the quality of life of workers. This amounted to an uncomfortable hybrid of a revolutionary waiting game and a very routine pursuit of legislative benefits for workers.

This tension culminated in a fierce debate between two of the leaders of the SPD in the late 1890s: Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein. Kautsky, the party leader who had written most of its theoretical manifestos, continued to insist that the real function of the party was to reject parliamentary alliances and to agitate for revolution. Bernstein, however, claimed that history had already proven that what the party should be doing was to improve the lives of workers in the present, not wait for a revolution that may or may not ever happen in the future. Bernstein was still a socialist, but he wanted the SPD to build socialism gradually; he called his theory "revisionism." Ironically, the SPD rejected Bernstein's revisionism, but what the party actually *did* was indeed "revisionist": fighting for legal protection of workers, wages, and conditions of labor.

Comparable cases of historical irony marked many of the other socialist parties (Britain's Labour Party was a noteworthy exception in that it never adopted Marxism). On the one hand, there were increasingly democratic parliaments and mass parties, and at least in some cases the beginning of social welfare laws. On the other hand, rather than the state socialist doctrines of Louis Blanc, the revolutionary, "scientific" socialism of Marxism became the official ideology of the majority of these parties. This practical split between socialism as social welfare and socialism as the revolutionary rejection of capitalism was to have serious consequences for the next hundred years of world history.

## First-Wave Feminism

Even as socialist parties were growing in size and strength, another political and cultural conflict raged: the emergence of feminism. A helpful definition of feminism from the historians Bonnie Anderson and Judith Zinsser's *A History of Their Own* asserts that feminism consists of the claim that women are fully human, not secondary or inferior to men, that women have been oppressed throughout history, and that women must recognize their solidarity with other women in order to end that oppression and create a more just and equitable society. Those claims go back centuries; perhaps the first distinctly feminist thinker in Western society was the Renaissance courtier Christine de Pizan (noted in the previous volume of this textbook), and later feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft explicitly linked the feminist demand for equality to the revolutionary promise of the American and French Revolutions of the late eighteenth century. It was not until the late *nineteenth* century, however, that a robust feminist movement emerged to champion women's rights.

In the context of the Victorian era, most Europeans believed in the doctrine of gender relations known as "separate spheres." In separate spheres, it was argued that men and women each had useful and necessary roles to play in society, but those roles were distinct from one another. The classic model of this concept was that the man's job was to represent the family unit in public and make decisions that affected the family, while the woman's job was to maintain order in the home and raise the children, albeit under the "veto" power of her husband. The Code Napoleon, in Article 231, proclaimed that the husband owed his wife protection, and the wife owed her husband obedience. Until the late nineteenth century, most legal systems officially classified women with children and the criminally insane in having no legal identity.

As of 1850, women across Europe could not vote, could not initiate divorce (in those countries in which divorce was even possible), could not control custody of children, could not pursue higher education, could not open bank accounts in their own name, could not maintain ownership of inherited property after marriage, could not initiate lawsuits or serve as legal witnesses, and could not maintain control of their own wages if working and married. Everywhere, domestic violence against women (and children) was ubiquitous - it was taken for granted that the "man of the house" had the right to enforce his will with violence if he found it necessary, and the very concept of marital rape was nonexistent as well. In sum, despite the claim by male socialists that the working class were the "wretched of the earth," there is no

question that male workers enjoyed vastly more legal rights than did women of any social class at the time.

What had changed since the dawn of the nineteenth century, however, was the growth of liberalism. It was a short, logical step from making the claim that “all men are equal” to “all *people* are equal,” and indeed some women (like Wollstonecraft) had very vocally emphasized just that point in the early liberal movement in the era of the French Revolution. By the late nineteenth century, liberal legal codes were present in some form in most of Europe, and after World War I all men won the vote in Britain, France, and Germany (along with most of the smaller countries in Central and Western Europe). Thus, early feminists argued that their enfranchisement was simply the obvious, logical conclusion of the political evolution of their century.

Late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century feminism is referred to by historians as “first-wave” feminism (there have been three “waves” so far). Its defining characteristic was the battle against legally-mandated discrimination against women in terms of property laws, control over children within the family, and the right to vote. Of all of the culture struggles and legal battles of the period, however, first-wave feminism faced the greatest opposition from those in power: men. Biologists routinely claimed that women were simply physiologically less intelligent than men. Women who, against the odds, had risen to positions of note were constantly attacked and belittled; one example is the inaugural address of a new female scientist at the University of Athens in the early 1900s, whose speech was interrupted by male students shouting “back to the kitchen!” Queen Victoria herself once said that the demand for equal rights for women was “a mad, wicked folly...forgetting every sense of womanly feelings and propriety.”

In response, first-wave feminists argued that women were only “inferior” because of their inferior education. If they were educated at the same level and to the same standards as men, they would be able to exercise their reason at the same level as well, and would hence deserve to be treated as full equals by the law. As early as the French Revolution, some women had demanded equal rights for women as a logical outgrowth of the new, more just society under construction in the Revolution. The most famous revolutionary feminist of French Revolution, Olympe de Gouges, was executed for daring to argue that things like “equality” and “liberty” obviously implied that men and women should be equals. A century later, her vision remained unfulfilled.

One of first-wave feminism’s major goals was women’s suffrage: the right of women to vote. In 1867 in Britain the National Society for Women’s Suffrage was founded. Comparable

movements spread across the continent over the next three decades. The word “feminist” itself came about in 1890, after a French Suffrage activist, Hubertine Auclert, described herself as such (Auclert made a name for herself in part because she refused to pay taxes, arguing that since she was not represented politically, she had no obligation to contribute to the state). Only in Finland and Norway, however, did women gain the vote before World War I. In some cases, it took shockingly long for women to get the vote: France only granted it in 1944 as a concession to the allies who liberated the country from the Nazis, and it took Switzerland until 1971(!).

The struggle for the vote was closely aligned to other feminist campaigns. In fact, it would be misleading to claim that first-wave feminism was primarily focused on suffrage, since suffrage itself was seen by feminists as only one component of what was needed to realize women's equality. An iconic example is the attitude of early feminists to marriage: for middle class women, marriage was a necessity, not a choice. Working class women worked in terrible conditions just to survive, while the truly desperate were often driven to prostitution not because of a lack of morality on their part but because of brutal economic and legal conditions for unmarried poor women. In turn, middle class women suffered the consequences when their husbands, succumbing to the temptation of prostitution, brought sexually transmitted diseases into the middle class home. Women, feminists argued, needed economic independence, the ability to support themselves before marriage without loss of status or respectability, and the right to retain the property and earnings they brought to and accumulated during marriage. Voting rights and the right to initiate divorce were thus “weapons of self defense” according to first wave feminists.

After decades of campaigns by feminists, divorce became a possibility in countries like Britain and France in the late nineteenth century, but it remained difficult and expensive to secure. For a woman to initiate divorce, she had to somehow have the means to hire a lawyer and navigate labyrinthine divorce laws; as a result, only the well-off could do so. In other countries, like Russia, divorce remained illegal. Much more common than legal separation was the practice of men simply abandoning their wives and families when they tired of them; this made the institutions of middle-class family life open to mockery by socialists, who, as did Marx and Engels, pointed out that marriage was nothing but a property contract that men could choose to abandon at will (the socialist attitude toward feminism, incidentally, was that gender divisions were byproducts of capitalism: once capitalism was eliminated, gender inequality would supposedly vanish as well).

Even as the feminist movement in Britain became focused on voting rights, feminists waged other battles as well. In the 1870s and 1880s, British feminists led by Josephine Butler



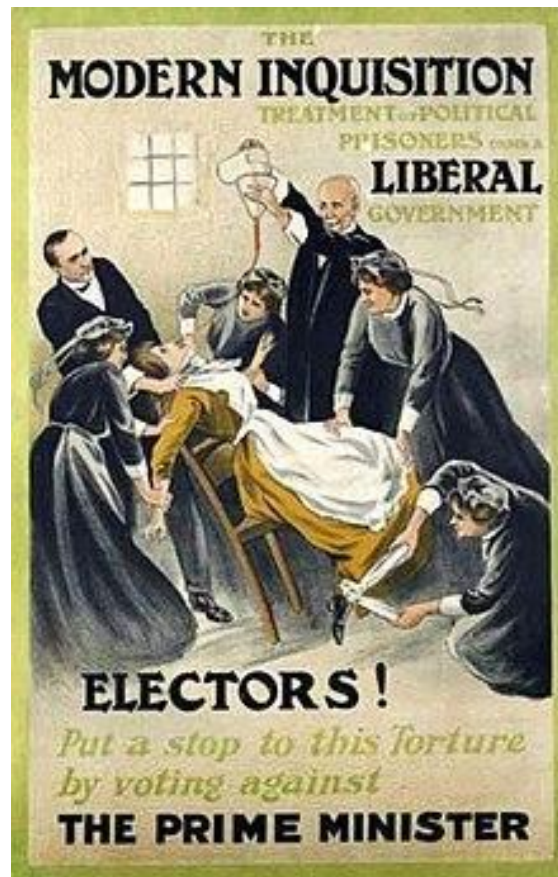
attacked the Contagious Diseases Act, which subjected prostitutes to mandatory gynecological inspections (but did *not* require the male clients of prostitutes to be examined), and drew the radical conclusion that prostitution was simply the most obvious example of a condition that applied to practically *all* women. In marriage, after all, women exchanged sexual access to their bodies in return for their material existence. Butler's campaign weathered years of failure and scorn before finally triumphing: the Contagious Diseases Act was repealed and the age of consent for girls was raised from *twelve(!)* to sixteen.

The demand for the vote, however, was stymied by the fact that male politicians across the political spectrum refused to champion the issue, albeit for different reasons. On the political right, the traditional view that women had no place in politics prevailed. On the left, however, both liberal and socialist politicians were largely in support of women's suffrage, at least in theory. In practice, however, leftist politicians (falling prey to yet more sexist stereotypes) feared that women would vote for traditional conservatives because women "naturally" longed for the comfort and protection of tradition. Thus, even nominally sympathetic male politicians repeatedly betrayed promises to push the issue forward in law.

While most feminists persisted in peaceful demands for reform, others were galvanized by these political betrayals and turned to militancy. In Britain, the best known militant feminists were the Pankhursts: the mother Emmeline (1858 – 1928) and daughters Christabel and Sylvia, who formed a radical group known as the Suffragettes in 1903. Much of the original membership came from the ranks of Lancashire textile workers before the group moved its headquarters to London in 1906. The Pankhursts soon severed their links with the Labour Party and working class activists and began a campaign of direct action under the motto "deeds, not words". By 1908 they had moved from heckling to stone-throwing and other forms of protest, including destroying paintings in museums and, on one occasion, attacking male politicians with horsewhips on a golf course. In the meantime, both militant and non-militant feminists did succeed in making women's suffrage a mainstream political issue: as many as 500,000 women and pro-feminist men gathered at one London rally in 1908.

Militant activists who staged public demonstrations were on several occasions treated brutally by police, and those who were arrested were subjected to coercive feeding when they went on hunger strikes. That brutality led to more widespread public support for the Suffragettes, but there were still no legal changes forthcoming; even the British Liberal Party that had, on various occasions, claimed to support women's suffrage always ended up putting it on the back-burner in parliament. In the most spectacular and tragic act of protest, a Suffragette named Emily Davison threw herself under the horse owned by the British king George V during

the Derby (the hugely popular national horse race) of 1913 and was killed - in the aftermath it was discovered that she had stuffed her dress with pamphlets demanding the vote for women.



*Suffragettes who went on hunger strikes were often brutally force-fed while jailed; here, their jailors are described as a "modern inquisition."*

Somewhat ironically, given the importance of the suffrage movement, feminists secured other legal rights before they did the right to vote in the period before World War I. By and large, women secured the right to enter universities by the early twentieth century and the first female academics secured teaching positions soon after - the first woman to hold a university post in France was the famous Marie Curie, whose work was instrumental in understanding radiation. Women secured the right to initiate divorce in some countries even earlier, along with the right to control their own wages and property and to fight for the custody of children. In short, thanks to feminist agitation, women had secured a legal identity and meaningful legal rights in at least some of the countries of Europe, and the United States, by the onset of World War I in 1914, but as mentioned above, only in two Scandinavian countries could they yet vote.

## Modern antisemitism

The great irony of feminism - or, rather, the *need* for feminism - was that women were not a “minority” but nevertheless faced prejudice, violence, and legal restrictions. European Jews, on the other hand, were a minority everywhere they lived. Furthermore, because of their long, difficult, and often violent history facing persecution from the Christian majority, Jews faced a particularly virulent and deep-seated form of hatred from their non-Jewish neighbors. That hatred, referred to as antisemitism (also spelled antisemitism), took on new characteristics in the modern era that, if anything, made it even more dangerous

Jews had been part of European society since the Roman Empire. In the Middle Ages, Jews were frequently persecuted, expelled, or even massacred by the Christian majority around them. Jews were accused of responsibility for the death of Christ, were blamed for plagues and famines, and were even thought to practice black magic. In most regions, Jews were unable to own land, to marry Christians, or to practice trades besides sharecropping, peddling goods, and lending money (since Christians were banned from lending money at interest until the late Middle Ages, the stereotypes of Jewish greed originated with the fact that money-lending was one of the only trades Jews *could* perform). Starting with the late period of the Enlightenment, however, some Jews were grudgingly “emancipated” legally, being allowed to move to Christian cities, own land, and practice professions they had been banned from in the past.

That legal emancipation was complete almost everywhere in Europe by the end of the nineteenth century, although the most conservative states like Russia still maintained antisemitic restrictions. Anti-Jewish hatred, however, did not vanish. Instead, in the modern era, Jews were vilified for representing everything that was wrong with modernity itself. Jews were blamed for urbanization, for the death of traditional industries, for the evils of modern capitalism, but also for the threat of modern socialism, for being anti-union and for being pro-union, for both assimilating to the point that “regular” Germans and Frenchmen and Czechs could no longer tell who was Jewish, and for failing to assimilate to the point that they were “really” the same as everyone else. To modern antisemites, Jews were the scapegoat for all of the problems of the modern world itself.

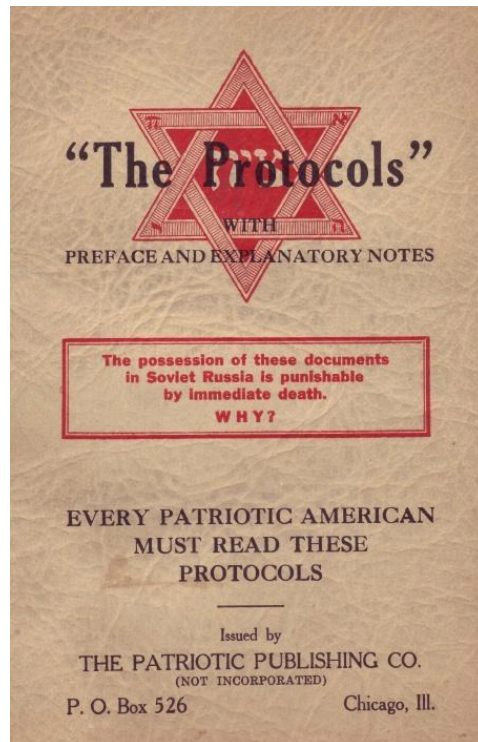
At the same time, modern antisemitism was bound up with modern racial theories, including Darwinian evolutionary theory, its perverse offspring Social Darwinism, and the Eugenics movement which sought to purify the racial gene pool of Europe (and America). Many theorists came to believe that Jews were not just a group of people who traced their ancestry

back to the ancient kingdom of Judah, but were in fact a “race,” a group defined first and foremost by their blood, their genes, and by supposedly inexorable and inherent characteristics and traits.

Between vilification for the ills of modernity and the newfound obsession with race that swept across European and American societies in the late nineteenth century, there was ample fuel for the rise of antisemitic politics. The term antisemitism itself was invented and popularized by German and Austrian politicians in the late nineteenth century – an antisemitic League emerged in Germany in the 1870s under the leadership of a politician named Wilhelm Marr. Marr claimed that Jews had “without striking a blow” “become the socio-political dictator of Germany.” In fact, Jews were about 1% of the German population and, while well-represented in business and academia, they had negligible political influence. Following Marr’s efforts, other parties emerged over the course of the 1880s.

Parties whose major platform was antisemitism itself, however, faded from prominence in the 1890s. The largest single victory won by antisemitic political parties in the German Empire was in 1893, consisting of only 2.9% of the vote. Subsequently, however, mainstream right-wing parties adopted antisemitism as part of their platform. Thus, even though parties that defined themselves solely by antisemitism diminished, anti-republican, militaristic, and strongly Christian-identified parties on the political right in France, Austria, and Germany soon started using antisemitic language as part of their overall rhetoric.

Along with the new, racist, version of antisemitism, the modern conspiracy theory of global Jewish influence was a distinctly modern phenomenon. A Prussian pulp novelist named Hermann Goedsche published a novel in 1868 that included a completely fictional meeting of a shadowy conspiracy of Rabbis who vowed to seize global power in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through Jewish control of world banking. That “Rabbi’s Speech” was soon republished in various languages as if it had actually happened. Better known was the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a document claiming to be the minutes from a meeting of international Jewish leaders that copied whole sections of Goedsche’s “Speech” and combined them with various equally spurious accounts of Jewish political machinations. The Protocols were first published in 1903 by the Russian secret police as justification for continued antisemitic restrictions in the Russian Empire, and they subsequently became important after World War I when they were used as “proof” that the Jews had caused the war in order to disrupt the international political order.



*An American copy of the “Protocols” published in 1934.*

Another iconic moment in the history of antisemitism occurred in France in the 1890s, when a French Jewish military officer named Alfred Dreyfus was framed for espionage, stripped of his rank, and imprisoned. An enormous public debate broke out in French society over Dreyfus's guilt or innocence which revolved around his identity as a French Jew. “Anti-Dreyfusards” argued that no Jew could truly be a Frenchman and that Dreyfus, as a Jew, was inherently predisposed to lie and cheat, while “Dreyfusards” argued that anyone could be a true, legitimate French citizen, Jews included.

In the end, the “Dreyfus Affair” culminated in Dreyfus’s exoneration and release, but not before antisemitism was elevated to one of the defining characteristics of anti-liberal, authoritarian right-wing politics in France. Some educated European Jews concluded that the pursuit of not just legal equality, but cultural acceptance was doomed given the strength and virulence of antisemitism in European culture, and they started a new political movement to establish a Jewish homeland in the historical region of ancient Israel. That movement, Zionism, saw a slow but growing migration of European Jews settling in the Levant, at the time still part of the Ottoman Empire. Decades later, it culminated in the emergence of the modern state of Israel in 1948.

# Conclusion

The growth of science, the pernicious development of pseudo-science, and the culture struggles that raged in European society all occurred simultaneously, lending to an overall sense of disruption and uncertainty as the twentieth century dawned. Lives were transformed for the better by consumerism and medical advances, but many Europeans still found the sheer velocity of change overwhelming and threatening. At least some of the virulence of the culture struggles of the era was due to this sense of fear and displacement, fears that spilled over to the growing rivalries between nations. In turn, the world itself provided the stage on which those rivalries played out as European nations set themselves the task of conquering and controlling vast new empires overseas.

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## Chapter 6: Imperialism

“Imperialism” in the context of modern history refers to global empire-building by modern states - to distinguish it from the earlier expansion of European states (e.g. the Spanish Empire in the Americas), it is sometimes referred to as “neo-imperialism.” Specifically, imperialism refers to the enormous growth of European empires in the nineteenth century, culminating in the period before World War I in which European powers controlled over 80% of the surface of the globe. The aftershocks of this period of imperialism are still felt in the present, with national borders and international conflicts alike tied to patterns put in place by the imperialist powers over a century ago.

Modern imperialism was a product of factors that had no direct parallel in earlier centuries. For a brief period, Europe (joined by the United States at the end of the century) enjoyed a monopoly on industrial production and technology. The scientific advances described in the last chapter lent themselves directly to European power as well, most obviously in that modern medicine enabled European soldiers and administrators to survive in regions like Sub-Saharan Africa that had been deathtraps for them in the past because of the prevalence of tropical diseases. In addition, ideological developments like the emergence of Social Darwinism and the obsession with race inspired Europeans to consider their conquests as morally justified, even necessary. It was, in short, a “perfect storm” of technology and ideology that enabled and justified Europe’s global feeding frenzy.

While Europeans tended to justify their conquests by citing a “civilizing mission” that would bring the guiding lights of Christianity and Western Civilization to supposedly benighted regions, one other factor was at work that provided a much more tangible excuse for conquest: the rivalry between European states. With the Congress System a dead letter in the aftermath of the Crimean War, and with the wars of the Italian and German unifications demonstrating the stakes of intra-European conflict, all of the major European powers jockeyed for position on the world stage during the second half of the century. Perhaps the most iconic example was the personal obsession of the King of Belgium, Leopold II, with the creation of a Belgian colony in Africa, which he thought would elevate Belgium’s status in Europe (and from which he could derive enormous profits). In the end, his personal fiefdom - the Congo Free State - would become the most horrendous demonstration of the mismatch between the high-minded “civilizing mission” and the reality of carnage and exploitation.

## Technology

Technology made the new imperialism possible. It vastly increased the speed of communication, it armed European soldiers with advanced weapons that overwhelmed resistance, and it protected Europeans from tropical diseases. Simply put, technology explains how European dominance grew from about 35% of the globe to over 80% over the course of the nineteenth century. In hindsight, European technological dominance was nothing more or less than a historical accident, the circumstantial development of tools and techniques that originated with the Industrial Revolution. At the time, however, most Europeans and Americans considered their technology as proof of their “racial” and cultural superiority.

For example, for the first time cities in Europe acquired the means to communicate almost instantaneously (via telegraph) with their colonies. Before telegraphs, it could take up to two years for a message and reply to travel between England and India, but after telegraph lines were constructed over the course of the middle decades of the nineteenth century, a message and reply could make the circuit in just two days. This, of course, vastly increased the efficiency of governing in the context of global empires.

Europeans were not just able to communicate with territories thousands of miles away thanks to technology - they could survive there as well. Africa had never been colonized by Europeans before the nineteenth century, except for relatively small territories along the coasts. The continent was largely impenetrable to Europeans thanks to its geography: there were few harbors for ships, the interior of the continent had no rivers that were navigable by sail, and most importantly, there were numerous lethal diseases (especially a particularly virulent form of malaria) to which Europeans had little resistance. Until the second half of the century, Africa was sometimes referred to as the “white man’s graveyard,” since Europeans who traveled there to trade or *try* to conquer territory often died within a year.

That started changing even before the development of bacteriology. In 1841, British expeditions discovered that daily doses of quinine, a medicine derived from a South American plant, served as an effective preventative measure against the contraction of malaria. Thus, since malaria had been the most dangerous tropical disease, Europeans were able to survive in the interior of Africa at much higher rates following the quinine breakthrough. Once Pasteur’s discoveries in bacteriology did occur, it became viable for large numbers of European soldiers and officials to take up permanent residence in the tropical regions of Africa and Asia.



Advances in medicine were joined by those in transportation. The steamboat, with its power to travel both with and against the flow of rivers, enabled Europeans to push into the interior of Africa (and many parts of Asia as well). Steamboats were soon armed with small cannons, giving rise to the term “gunboat.” In turn, when Europeans began steaming into harbors from Hong Kong to the Congo and demanding territory and trading privileges, the term “gunboat diplomacy” was invented, the quintessential example of which was in the unwilling concession to western contact and trade on the part of Japan, considered below.



*A typical small and, in this case, unarmed steamship on the Congo River in Central Africa. “Steamers” as they were called varied greatly in size and armaments.*

In addition, major advances in weapons technology resulted in an overwhelming advantage in the ability of Europeans to inflict violence in the regions they invaded. In the 1860s, the first breech-loading rifles were developed, first seeing widespread use in the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 in which Prussian infantry utterly overwhelmed Austrian soldiers armed with older muskets. Breech-loaders were incredibly accurate and quick to reload compared to earlier muzzle-loading firearms. A European soldier armed with a modern rifle could fire accurately up to almost half a mile away in any weather, while the inhabitants of Africa and Asia were armed either with older firearms or hand weapons. Likewise, the first machine

gun, the Maxim Gun, was invented in the 1880s. For a few decades, Europeans (and Americans) had a monopoly on this technology, and for that relatively brief period the advantage was decisive in numerous conquests. A smug Franco-British poet, Hilaire Belloc, invented a saying that summarized that superiority: “whatever happens, we have got, the Maxim Gun, and they have not...”



*A British soldier with a maxim gun in South Africa.*

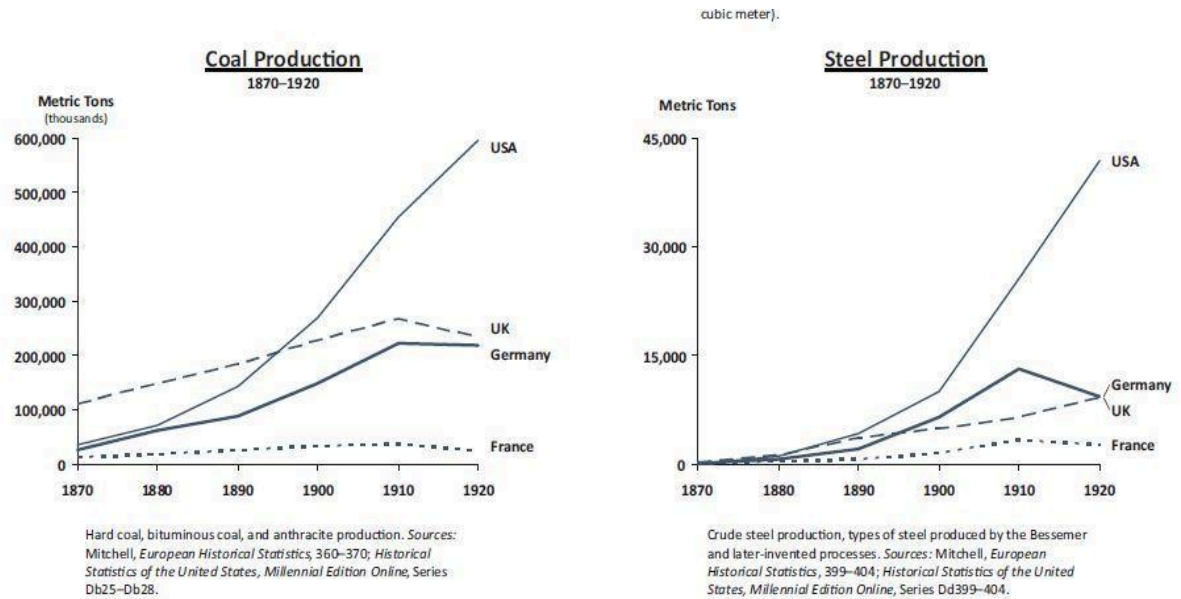
## The Second Industrial Revolution

Technology thus enabled imperialism. It also created a *motive* for imperialism, because of a phenomenon referred to by historians as the “Second Industrial Revolution.” The Second Industrial Revolution consisted of the development and spread of a new generation of technological innovation: modern steel, invented in 1856, electrical generators in 1870 (leading to electrical appliances and home wiring by 1900 in wealthy homes), and both bicycles and automobiles by the 1890s. The American inventor Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone in 1876, and thousands of phones, carrying millions of calls annually, were in operation already by the early 1880s. These advances created a huge demand for the raw materials – rubber, mineral ores, cotton – that were components of the new technologies.

In the initial phases of the Industrial Revolution, the raw materials necessary for production had been in Europe itself: coal deposits and iron ore. The other raw material, cotton, that played a key role in the Industrial Revolution was available via slave labor in the American south and from weaker states like Egypt (which seized virtual independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1833). The raw material of the Second Industrial Revolution, however, was mostly located outside of the older areas under European control, which meant that European business interests pressured their respective governments to seize as much territory overseas as possible. For example, when oil fields were discovered in Persia in 1908, European interest in Middle Eastern imperialism reached a fever pitch, with European powers cultivating contacts among Arab nationalist groups and undermining the waning unity of the Ottoman Empire.

Mines and plantations were crucial to this phase of imperialism in Africa and Asia, as they had been to the early European exploitation of the Americas. Mining in particular offered the prospect of huge profits. There were Canadian nickel deposits for steel alloys, Chilean nitrates, Australian copper and gold, and Malaysian tin, just to name a few mineral resources coveted by Europeans (of course, in the case of Canada, the people being colonized were Indigenous Canadians, and the colonists were themselves of European descent). Thus, while the motives behind imperialism were often strongly ideological, they were also tied to straightforward economic interests, and many of the strongest proponents of imperialism had ties to industry.

While the United States was not one of the major imperial powers per se (although it did seize control of the Philippines from Spain in 1898 and exercised considerable power in Central America), it played a major role in imperialism nonetheless. The US eclipsed Europe as the major manufacturing power and the major source of exports in a shockingly short period - from about 1870 into the early 1900s - driving Europeans to sometimes-hysterical levels of fear of being rendered economically obsolete. The response of European politicians and businessmen alike was to focus on territorial acquisition overseas to counterbalance the vast natural resources of the US, which had achieved its dominance thanks to the enormity and richness of American territory (seized by force from Native Americans). Thus, even though the US did not join in the Scramble for Africa or assert direct control of East Asian territories, fear of American economic strength was a major factor driving European imperialism forward.



*American resource production and industrial output vastly outpaced European production over time; already by the 1870s astute European observers correctly anticipated the rapid acceleration of American production.*

## The British Empire

The best known phrase associated with the British Empire from the middle of the nineteenth century until the early twentieth was that "the sun never set" over its dominions. That was, quite literally, true. Roughly 25% of the surface of the globe was directly or indirectly controlled by the British in the aftermath of World War I (1918). Enormous bureaucracies of "natives" worked under white British officials everywhere from the South Pacific to North Africa. The ultimate expression of British imperialism was in India, where just under 100,000 British officials governed a population of some 300,000,000 Indians.

Until 1857, India was governed by the British East India Company (the EIC), the state-sponsored monopoly established in the seventeenth century to profit from overseas trade and which controlled a monopoly on Indian imports and exports. Through a long, slow creep of territorial expansion and one-sided treaties with Indian princes, the EIC governed almost all of the Indian subcontinent by 1840. India produced huge quantities of precious commodities, including cotton, spices, and narcotics. In fact, the EIC was the single largest drug cartel in world history, with the explicit approval of the British government. Most of those narcotics consisted of opium exported to China.

In past centuries, China (governed by the Qing Dynasty since 1644) had always held a position of power in foreign trade. China produced numerous commodities, including silk, porcelain, and tea, that were highly sought after overseas. In return, about the only commodity foreigners could offer was silver, which served as the basis of the Chinese currency. Vast quantities of silver flowed to China from its trade partners, and following the Spanish invasion of Central and South America, silver mined in the Americas became the primary source of this exchange. Thus, it was a trade revolution for the British when Indian-produced opium proved to be even more desirable in the Chinese market thanks to a simple biological fact: opium is highly addictive, and addiction spread like an epidemic across much of Chinese society in the early nineteenth century. This is reflected in a simple statistic: opium imports to China increased by 500% between 1800 and 1830 despite the fact that the trade in opium was banned by the Chinese state (it was easy for British drug dealers to collude with Chinese officials - so much money was changing hands that bribes were available for everyone involved).

Meanwhile, the Chinese political concept that China was the “middle kingdom” between heaven and earth, superior to all other states and countries, persisted into the modern period. Annoyed by the expansion of European mercantile intrusion in Asia, the Qing dynasty's government imposed trade limitations in 1760 that forced European merchants to trade only through the city of Canton, working with 13 designated Chinese merchant houses. European liberal economic ideas, first and foremost the desirability of a free market in trade with limited governmental restrictions, inspired two British diplomatic missions to China, first in 1793 and then again in 1816. Both were colossal failures, with the Qing government refusing to modify the trade arrangements and the British diplomats returning humiliated. After the failure of these missions, the British were even more intent on generating profits through the opium trade, despite its illegality.

In 1839, the Qing government finally moved to shut down the trade once and for all, with the Qing official Lin Zexu seizing and destroying a huge cargo of opium in Canton and the Chinese state pressuring the British government to forbid further opium trafficking. With so much wealth tied up in the opium trade, and with the sting of the humiliating diplomatic missions earlier still a living memory, Great Britain simply took the ban on trade as the excuse to launch an open war: the First Opium War of 1839 - 1842. A single British gunboat, the *Nemesis*, arrived after inconclusive fighting had gone on for five months. In short order, the *Nemesis* began an ongoing rout of the Chinese forces. The Chinese navy and imperial fortresses were nearly helpless before gunboats with cannons, and steamships were able to penetrate Chinese rivers and the Chinese Grand Canal, often towing sailing vessels with full cannon batteries



behind them. The major city of Nanjing was swiftly seized by British forces and, despite the best efforts of the Chinese navy and land forces, the Qing had to concede defeat in 1842.



*A British commemoration of victory in the Opium War. The Nemesis is in the background on the right.*

The resulting peace treaty was lopsided and humiliating for the Qing. China had to open four ports to European trade and offer vast sums in compensation for the lost opium revenue. Soon after, Britain was granted favored nation status, greatly reducing taxes and tariffs on British goods. In turn, in the aftermath of the Opium War, other European states secured the legal right to carry on trade in China, administer their own taxes and laws in designated port cities, and support Christian missionary work. Needless to say, the authority of the Qing dynasty itself was seriously undermined in the process.

The 1850s proved to be even more disastrous for the Qing as more European powers, not just Britain, muscled in on both Chinese trade and Chinese territory itself. A dispute arose between Britain and China over the death of a handful of Chinese sailors on a British ship, and then a French Christian missionary was killed while proselytizing. Seeking even greater powers in China, Britain, and France joined forces to launch a Second Opium War (1856 - 1860), which

resulted in the nearly complete destruction of Canton, the occupation of the capital city of Beijing, and the destruction of the summer palace of the Qing emperor. In the midst of the war, Russia took advantage of the overtaxed state of the Chinese military to seize territory in the north. In the aftermath, the dynasty had to concede eleven additional “treaty ports” for trade. Christian missionaries were authorized to operate throughout China, and most European merchants were granted the equivalent of diplomatic immunity from Chinese laws.

The mid-nineteenth century thus saw the complete reversal of the Chinese-European relationship. Whereas in the past, China enjoyed both economic dominance in trade relations and a powerful sense of political superiority, Europeans came to regard Chinese traditions and culture with contempt as the Qing military proved utterly unable to resist European intrusion. Simultaneously, and partly because of the blow to Qing authority brought about by the First Opium War, a massive uprising remembered as the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864) led to unbelievable bloodshed and famine, with over 20 million dying in the fighting or of starvation caused by the chaos. Qing power remained frayed but intact for the rest of the century, but the writing was on the wall: sooner or later, the military weakness and diminishing political authority of the dynasty would spell its end, something that finally came to pass in the first decade of the twentieth century.

## India

Trouble for the British was brewing in India, however. In 1857, Indian soldiers in the employ of the EIC, known as *sepoys*, were issued new rifles whose bullet cartridges were, according to rumors that circulated among the sepoys, lubricated with both pig fat and cow fat. Since part of loading the gun was biting the cartridge open, this would entail coming into direct contact with the fat, which was totally forbidden in Islam and Hinduism (note that there is no evidence that the cartridges actually *were* greased with the fat of either animal - the rumors were enough). Simultaneously, European Christian missionaries were at work trying to convert both Muslims and Hindus to Christianity, sometimes very aggressively. This culminated in an explosion of anti-Christian and anti-British violence that temporarily plunged India into a civil war. The British responded to the uprising, which they dubbed “The Mutiny” by massacring whole villages, while sepoy rebels targeted any and all British they could find, including the families of British officials. Eventually, troops from Britain and loyal Sepoy forces routed the rebels and restored order.



*A British depiction of the Sepoy Rebellion, attributing the uprising to greed rather than its actual causes. Note also the use of racial caricatures in depicting the sepoys.*

After this Sepoy Rebellion (a term that has long since replaced “The Mutiny” among historians), the East India Company was disbanded by the British parliament and India placed under direct rule from London. India was henceforth referred to as the “British Raj,” meaning British Rulership, and Queen Victoria became Empress of India in addition to Queen of Great Britain. She promised her Indian subjects that anyone could take the civil service examinations that entitled men to positions of authority in the Indian government, and elite Indians quickly enrolled their sons in British boarding schools. The first Indian to pass the exam (in 1863) was Satyendranath Tagore, but white officials consistently refused to take orders from an Indian (even if that Indian happened to be more intelligent and competent than they were). The result was that elite Indians all too often hit a “glass ceiling” in the Raj, able to rise to positions of importance but not real leadership. In turn, resentful elite Indians became the first Indian nationalists, organizing what later became the Indian independence movement.

That movement was truly born in 1885 with the founding of the Indian National Congress. Initially, a body of moderate reformers who sought a degree of local autonomy and protested the Raj’s indifference to the living conditions of most Indians (such as the total lack of



concern during the Great Famine of 1876 - 1878, which killed over 10 million people), the Congress came to be split between moderates and radicals by about 1900. Government officials in the Raj flatly ignored Congress petitions, and the Raj continued to be controlled by white Britons, supported by small groups of Indian elites in the cities. Police repression of nationalist groups grew in the early years of the twentieth century, with violence and prison time directed against protesters or even those who dared to advocate for a boycott of British goods. The latter movement, *swadeshi* ("own country") was an effective economic tool against the dominance of British companies, much to the fury of British officials.

The nationalist movement, however, was split between regional, linguistic, caste-based, and religious factions. The enormous diversity of India was such that it was impossible to maintain true unity even among those who agreed on the need to achieve home rule for the country. The most important manifestation of this lack of unity was in 1906 when Muslim leaders within the Congress founded the Muslim League, eventually pursuing the complete independence of a Muslim state separate from that of the Hindu majority. Raj officials often exploited these divisions by offering modest reforms that satisfied moderates while launching further repression against radicals, including, by definition, those in favor of complete independence. It would take another forty years of struggle, and the impact of the world wars, to see the dream of independence realized, which finally came to pass in 1947 with the independence of (and violent partition between) India and Pakistan.

## Africa

While India was the most important, and lucrative, part of the British Empire, it was the conquest of Africa by the European powers that stands as the highpoint of the new imperialism as a whole. Africa represents about a quarter of the land area of the entire world, and as of the 1880s it had about one-fifth of the world's population. There were over 700 distinct societies and peoples across Africa, but Europeans knew so little about the African interior that maps generally displayed huge blank spots until well into the 1880s. Likewise, as of 1850 Europeans only controlled small territories on the coasts, many of them little more than trading posts. The most substantial European holdings consisted of Algeria, seized by France in the 1830s, and South Africa, split between British control and two territories held by the descendents of the first Dutch settlers, the Boers. The rest of the continent was almost completely free of European dominance (although the Portuguese did maintain sparsely populated colonies in two areas).

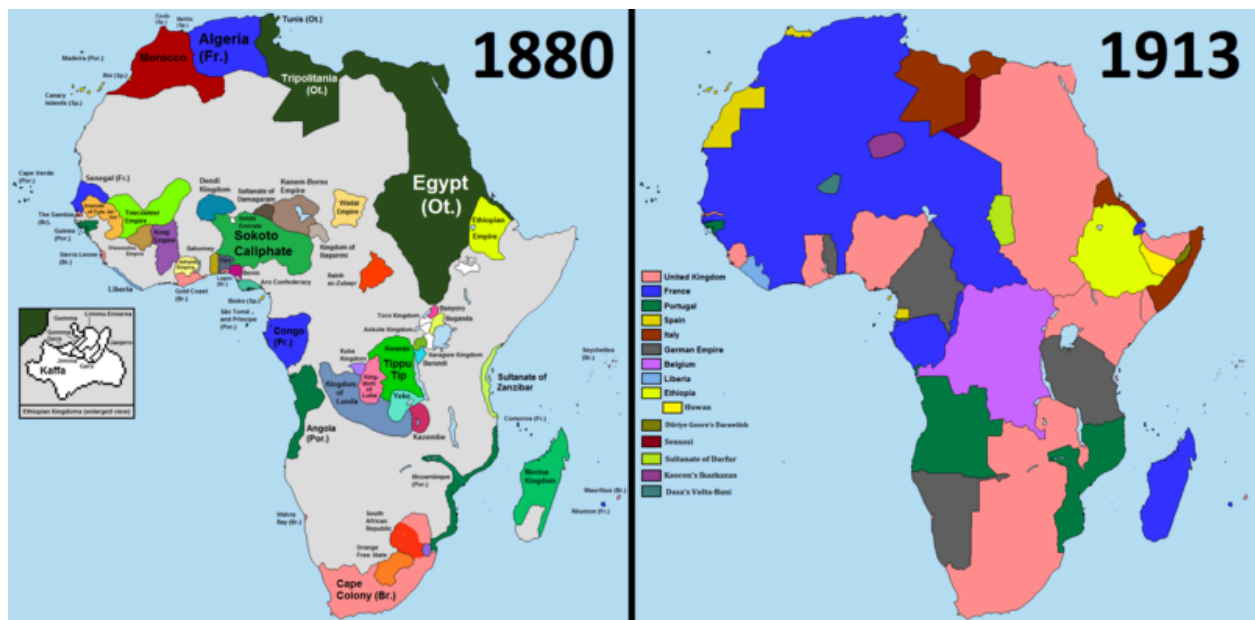
Thus, European influence in Africa since the fifteenth century had not revolved around actual territorial conquest, but instead the vast impact of the transatlantic slave trade. Roughly 13 million Africans were torn from their homelands in West Africa between the late fifteenth and early nineteenth centuries and transported to the Americas, primarily to the Caribbean and Brazil. That trade reached its peak in the eighteenth century, but simultaneously, a combination of Christian humanitarianism and new “enlightened” ideas having to do with human rights led to the dramatic growth of the abolitionist movement that sought to end slavery entirely. Given how lucrative the slave trade was for European merchants, the fact that abolitionism succeeded in bringing about major legal changes in the early nineteenth century is shocking in historical hindsight. Succeed it did, however, with Great Britain banning the slave trade in 1807 (the power of the British navy effectively ended the trade for other European powers as well) and ending slavery itself in British colonies in 1833.

The end of the slave trade, however, had unanticipated consequences for both Africans and Europeans. Part of abolitionism was an emphasis on the so-called “civilizing mission” noted above, with Europeans seeking to explore African territories in earnest in the name of both trade, missionary work, and soon, actual territorial conquest (all in the name of “improving” the lives of Africans). Many West and Central African states had relied on slavery as a major facet of their own economies, and thus a series of bloody wars tore across Sub-Saharan Africa in the decades that followed the end of the trade. In turn, Europeans sometimes used the pretext of bringing “peace” to Africa as a further justification for their own political dominance.

Thanks to the power of the technological changes noted at the start of this narrative, and now inspired by the desire for commerce, converts, and “civilization,” Europeans set out to acquire African markets and territory in the middle and, especially, later decades of the nineteenth century. The results were dramatic: in 1876, roughly 10% of Africa was under European control. By 1900, just over twenty years later, the figure was roughly 90%. All of the factors discussed above, of the search for profits, of raw materials, of the ongoing power struggle between the great powers, and of the “civilizing mission,” reached their collective zenith in Africa. The sheer speed of the conquest is summed up in the phrase used ever since to describe it: “the Scramble for Africa.” Even the word “imperialism” itself went from a neologism to an everyday term over the course of the 1880s.

In 1884, the German chancellor Otto Von Bismarck organized a “Berlin Conference” in order to determine what was to be done with a huge territory in central Africa called the Congo, already falling under the domination of the King of Belgium at the time. At the Congress, the representatives of the European states, joined by the United States and the Ottoman Empire,

divided Africa into spheres of influence and conquest. No Africans were present at the meeting. Instead, the Europeans agreed on trade between their respective territories and stipulated which (European) country was to get which piece of Africa. The impetus behind the seizure of Africa had much more to do with international tension than practical economics; there were certainly profits to be had in Africa, but they were mostly theoretical at this point since no European knew for sure what those resources were or where they were to be found (again, fear of American economic power was a major factor - Europeans thought it necessary to seize more territory, regardless of what was actually in that territory). Thus, in a collective land grab, European states emerged from the conference intent on taking over an entire continent.



*The map above demonstrates the sheer speed with which Africa was taken over by Europe empires during the “scramble.” Only Ethiopia and Liberia remained independent on the eve of World War I.*

The Berlin Conference was the opening salvo of the Scramble for Africa itself, the explosion of European invasions of the African continent. In some territories, notably French North Africa and parts of British West Africa, while colonial administrations were both racist and enormously secure in their own cultural dominance, they usually did embark on building at least some modern infrastructure and establishing educational institutions open to the “natives” (although, as in the Raj, Europeans jealously guarded their own authority everywhere). Likewise, there were genuine economic opportunities as European merchants and companies

established markets, built rail lines and telegraphs, etc., but predictably, the bulk of the profits remained squarely in European hands.

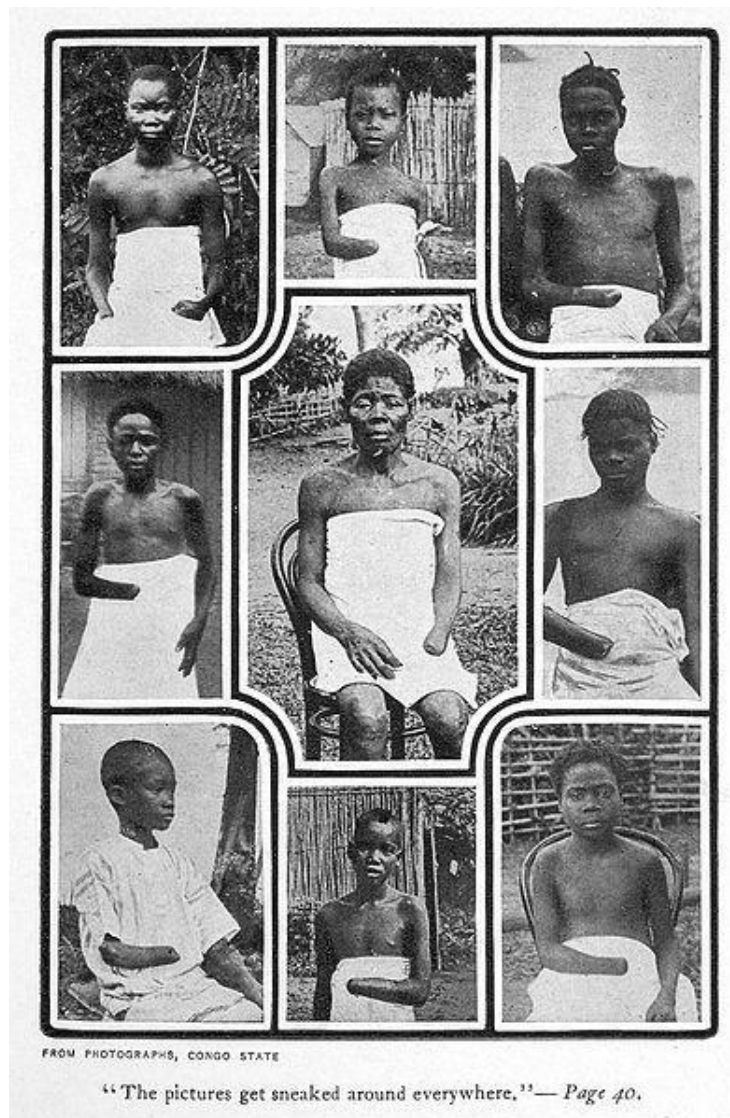
While European intrusion was always supported by force of arms, neither was the scramble simply a series of wars. Instead, very often European control was built over the course of a few decades by strategic alliances with African elites, the latter of whom readily took advantage of European backing to assert their own authority over local rivals. To cite a few examples, French forces first allied with the Tukolor Empire (based in present-day Senegal) against its rival, the Mandinka Empire. Following the Tukolor victory, the French simply placed both territories under their own overall authority. Far to the east, British agents allied with key political leaders of the Ganda Kingdom, eventually leading to British holdings in both “Uganda” (a British mistranslation) and Kenya.

In one case that would have terrible consequences in the later twentieth century, first the Germans, then (following German defeat in WWI) the Belgians established control over Rwanda in south-central Africa by favoring the Tutsi over the Hutu. “Tutsi” was in fact a status designation rather than an ethnicity or “tribe,” but it proved convenient for the Belgian authorities to treat the Tutsis as if they were a separate, and superior, ethnic group over the majority Hutus. Decades of resentment exploded in the 1990s, well after Rwanda had achieved its independence, when groups of Hutus carried out a full-scale genocide of the Tutsi. In this case, the imposition of European-born ideas of race and ethnicity resulted in horrific bloodshed long after actual colonial control had vanished.

Genocide, however, was nothing new to Africa - while some European colonies operated with at least a modicum of a genuine legal order, others represented horrific cases of abuse, enslavement, and suffering. Among the worst cases was that of the Belgian Congo in West Africa. King Leopold II of Belgium created a colony in the Congo in 1876 under the guise of exploration and philanthropy, claiming that his purpose was to protect the people of the region from the ravages of the slave trade. His acquisition was larger than England, France, Germany, Spain, and Italy combined; it was eighty times larger than Belgium itself. In fact, the Berlin Conference’s official purpose was authorizing Leopold’s already-existing control of the Congo, and at the Conference, the European powers declared the territory to be the “Congo Free State,” essentially a royal fiefdom ruled and owned by Leopold directly, not by the government of Belgium.

Leopold’s real purpose was personal enrichment for himself and a handful of cronies, and his methods of coercing African labor were atrocious: raids, floggings, hostages, destruction of villages and fields, and murder and mutilation. (This is the setting of Joseph Conrad’s brilliant

and disturbing novel, *Heart of Darkness*.) Belgian agents would enter a village and take women and children hostage, ordering men to go into the jungle and harvest a certain amount of rubber. If they failed to reach the rubber quota in time, or sometimes even if they did, the agents would hack off the arms of children, rape or murder the women, or sometimes simply murder everyone in the village outright. No attempt was made to develop the country in any way that did not bear directly on the business of extracting ivory and rubber. In a period of 25 years, the population of the region was cut in half. It took until 1908 for public outcry (after decades of dangerous and incredibly brave work by a few journalists who discovered what was happening) to prompt the Belgian Parliament to strip Leopold of the colony – it then took over direct administration.



*A few of the millions of victims of Belgian imperialism in the Congo.*

One comparable example was the treatment of the Herero and Nama peoples of Southwest Africa by the German army over the course of 1904 - 1905. When the Herero resisted the German takeover, they were systematically rounded up and left in concentration camps to starve, with survivors stalked across the desert by the German army, the Germans poisoning or sealing wells and water holes as they went. When the Nama rose up shortly afterward, they too were exterminated. In the end, over two-thirds of the Herero and Nama, with a death toll of at least 65,000 people, were murdered. This was the first, but not the last, genocide carried out by German soldiers in the twentieth century.

## Effects

Almost without exception, the economics of imperialism can be described as “plunder economies.” This entailed three tendencies. First, colonial regimes expropriated the land from the people who lived there. This was accomplished through force, backed by pseudo-legal means: unless a given person, or group, had a legal title in the western sense to the land they lived on, they were liable to have it seized. Likewise, traditional rights to hunt, gather material, and migrate with herds were lost. Second, colonial regimes expropriated raw materials like rubber, generally shipped back to Europe to be turned into finished products. Third, colonial regimes exploited native labor. This was sometimes in the form of outright slavery like the Congo, the Portuguese African colonies, and forced labor in French and German colonies. In other cases, it consisted of “semi-slavery” as on the island of Java where the Dutch imposed quotas of coffee and spices on villages. In other areas, like most of the territories controlled by Britain, it was in the form of subsistence-level wages paid to workers.

In addition to the forms of labor exploitation, European powers imposed “borders” where none had existed, both splitting up existing kingdoms, tribes, and cultures and lumping different ones together arbitrarily. Sometimes European powers favored certain local groups over others in order to better maintain control, such as the British policy of using the Tutsi tribe (“tribe” in this case being something of a misnomer - “class” is more accurate) to govern what would later become Rwanda over the majority Hutus. Thus, the effects of imperialism lasted long after former colonies achieved their independence in the twentieth century, since almost all of them were left with the borders originally created by the imperialists, often along with starker ethnic divisions than would have existed otherwise.

In a somewhat ironic twist, only certain specific forms and areas of exploitation ever turned a profit for Europeans, especially for European governments. Numerous private

merchant companies founded to exploit colonial areas went bankrupt. The entire French colonial edifice never produced significant profits – one French politician quipped that the only French industry to benefit from imperialism was catering for banquets in Paris, since French colonial interests hosted so many conferences. Since governments generally stepped in to declare protectorates and colonies after merchant interests went under, the cost of maintaining empire grew along with the territorial claims themselves. Thus, while economic motives were always present, much of the impetus behind imperialism boiled down to jockeying for position on the world stage between the increasingly hostile great powers of Europe.

## The Decline of the Ottoman Empire

While it is not always considered as part of the history of European imperialism, not least because the core of its empire was never conquered by European powers, it is still appropriate to examine the decline of the Ottoman Empire alongside more conventional expressions of European empire-building. Simply put, while the Ottoman Empire suffered from its fair share of internal problems, European imperialism played the single most significant role in undermining its sovereignty and coherence until it finally collapsed in World War I.

By the late nineteenth century Europeans casually referred to the Ottoman Empire as the “sick man of Europe” and debated “the eastern question,” namely how Ottoman territory should be divided between the great powers of Europe. That attitude was a microcosm of the attitude of Europeans toward most of the world at the time: foreign territories were prizes for the taking, the identities of the people who lived there and the states that ruled them of little consequence thanks to the (short-lived, as it turned out) superiority of European arms and technology. The great irony in the case of the Ottomans, however, was that the empire had been both a European great power in its own right and had once dominated its European rivals in war. How did it become so “sick” over time?

Some of the reasons for Ottoman decline were external, most obviously the growth in European power. The Ottomans were never able to make headway against European powers in the Indian Ocean, and as European states built their global trade empires the Ottoman economy remained largely landlocked. Likewise, the European Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had no analog in Ottoman lands; it took until 1727 for a state-approved printing house printing secular works and there were no significant technological breakthroughs originating in the later Ottoman Empire.

The state that proved the greatest threat to Ottoman power was Russia. Russia went from a backwards, politically fractured region to a powerful and increasingly centralized state

under its Tsar Peter the Great (whose reign is described in the previous volume of this textbook). Peter launched the first major Russo-Ottoman war and, while he did not achieve all of his military objectives, he did demonstrate the growing strength of the Russian military by seizing Ottoman territory. In 1744 the empress Catherine the Great's army crushed Ottoman forces and captured the Crimean Peninsula, securing the Russian dream of warm water (i.e. they did not freeze during the winter) ports for its navy. Catherine also forced the Ottomans to agree to the building of an Orthodox cathedral in Constantinople and the "protection" of Orthodox Christians in Ottoman lands - this was a massive intrusion into Ottoman sovereignty over its own subjects.

Other issues that undermined Ottoman strength were internal. Notably, the *Janissaries* (who had once been elite slave-soldiers who had bested European forces during the height of Ottoman power) that had played such a key role in Ottoman victories under sultans like Selim I and Suleiman the Magnificent were nothing more than parasites living off the largess of the state by the mid-eighteenth century, concentrating their time on enrichment through commerce rather than military training. In 1793 a reforming sultan, Selim III, created a "New Force" of soldiers trained in European tactics and using up-to-date firearms, but it took until 1826 for the Janissaries to be eliminated completely (they were slaughtered by members of the New Force under the next sultan, Mahmud II).

Meanwhile, the Ottoman economy was largely in the hands of Europeans by the turn of the nineteenth century. "Capitulation Agreements" that had begun as concessions to religious minorities had been extended to European merchants over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By the late eighteenth century, both Europeans and their local (i.e. Ottoman) agents were basically above the law in Ottoman territories and they also enjoyed freedom from most forms of taxation. The state was helpless to reimpose control over its own economy or to restrain European greed because of the superiority of European military power, and European trading companies reaped huge profits in the process.

The nineteenth century was thus an era of crisis for the empire. Many officials in the Ottoman state concluded that major reforms were necessary in the name of modernizing and strengthening the empire before it was too late. As a result, in 1839 Resid Pasha, a high-ranking official serving Sultan Abd al-Macid, instituted a broad reform movement, the *Tanzimat*, that introduced sweeping changes to Ottoman governance and law. The military was modernized, and systematic conscription was introduced. Slavery was abolished in 1847, almost two decades before the 13th Amendment to the American Constitution did the same, and all Ottoman citizens were made equal before the law regardless of ethnicity or religion. A secular



civil service was introduced to the state, and secular schools and universities were opened. In other words, the Tanzimat represented a triumph of liberalism and nationalism, building on the strengths of those ideologies in large part to push back against European intrusion in Ottoman affairs. This culminated in 1876 with the passage of a constitution and the first meeting of an elected parliament.



*A Greek lithograph celebrating the liberation of the people of the Ottoman Empire during the Tanzimat.*

The same year, however, the reactionary Sultan Abdulhamid II (r. 1876 - 1909) came to power and soon did everything he could to roll back the reforms. Abdulhamit heavily emphasized the empire's Muslim identity, inviting conservative Sunni Muslim clerics from across the Islamic world to settle in the empire and playing up the Christian vs. Muslim aspect of European aggression. In the process, he moved the empire away from its traditional identity as religiously diverse and tolerant. He refused to acknowledge limits to his own power, dissolving

the parliament in 1878, and he heavily emphasized his own status as the (nominal) caliph of Sunni Islam, supposedly the successor to the Prophet Muhammad himself in leading the Muslim ummah, or community of believers around the world.

Part of Abdulhamit's emphasis on Muslim identity was due to a simple demographic fact, however: much of the non-Muslim territories of the empire seized their independence either before or during his reign. The Greek Revolution that began in 1821 garnered the support of European powers and ultimately succeeded in seizing Greek independence. Serbia became completely independent in 1867, Bulgaria in 1878, and Bosnia passed into Austrian hands in 1908. Simply put, the Christian-majority Balkans that had been part of the Ottoman Empire for centuries slipped away thanks to the strength of modern nationalism and the military support they received from sympathetic European powers.

Meanwhile, while Abdulhamit hoped in vain that doubling down on his own role as sultan and caliph would somehow see the empire through its period of weakness, other Ottoman elites reached very different conclusions. High-ranking officers in the Ottoman military educated in the (European-style) War College established during the Tanzimat formed a conspiratorial society known as the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP) in 1889. Disgusted by what they regarded as the hopelessly archaic approach of Abdulhamit, they launched a successful coup d'état in 1909 and set out to remake the empire as a modern, secular, and distinctly *Turkish* (rather than diverse) state. World War I, however, began in 1914 and ultimately dealt the empire its death blow as European powers both attacked the empire directly and encouraged uprisings among its ethnic and religious minorities.

When the dust settled, one of the leaders of the CUP, Mustafa Kemal, led a Turkish army to expel European forces from the geographic core of the former empire, Anatolia, and form a new nation in its place. Soon known as Atatürk ("Father of the Turks"), Kemal pushed through a constitution that explicitly rejected the state's Muslim identity, adhering instead to the secularism of European and American countries. It also, however, represented a nation of ethnic Turks, with minority groups either expelled or slaughtered outright. The most horrific violence of the Turkish revolution was directed at the Armenian minority, with over a million Armenians forced on death marches into deserts or murdered outright. Likewise, hundreds of thousands of Greeks and Assyrians (a Christian minority native to what is today northern Iraq and eastern Turkey) were slaughtered as well. While the state of Turkey refuses to acknowledge it to this day, historians have long recognized that the Armenian, Greek, and Assyrian massacres amounted to a full-scale genocide.

To sum up, the Ottoman Empire was beset by external pressures in the form of growing European military might and European intrusion into its economy. It also suffered from internal issues, most notably the corruption of the Janissaries and the intransigence of reactionaries like Abdulhamit. Its reform movements culminated in the CUP revolution of 1909, but world war tore the empire apart before those reforms had time to take effect. And, while Turkey entered the world stage as a modern nation, it was a modern nation with the blood of over a million people on the hands of its leaders. In that sense, Turkey was like European imperialism in reverse: Western European states left a trail of bodies as they *built* empires around the globe while Turkey's genocidal crime came about during imperial collapse.

## Qajar Persia

Along with the Ottoman Empire, the other major Middle Eastern power had long been Persia (Iran), a country whose ancient history stretched back to the Achaemenid dynasty begun by the legendary Cyrus the Great in 550 BCE. By the modern period, however, Persia was in many ways a shadow of its glorious past. A ruling dynasty known as the Qajars seized power in 1779 but struggled to maintain control over the various clan-based groups that had long competed for power and influence. Likewise, the Qajar shahs (kings) were unable to resist the encroachment of European powers as the latter expanded their influence in Central Asia. Like the Ottoman Empire, Persia was not formally colonized by a European power, but Europeans were still able to dictate international politics in the region.

For most of the nineteenth century, Britain and Russia were the two European powers that most often competed against one another for power in Persia, with the Qajar shahs repeatedly trying and failing to play the European rivals off against each other in the name of Persian independence. Russia seized control of the Caucasus region from Persia (permanently, as it turned out) in 1813, and subsequently imposed capitulation agreements on Persia that were a direct parallel of those that so hobbled the Ottomans to the west. In the following decades succession disputes within the Qajar line were resolved by Russia and Britain choosing which heir should hold the Qajar throne, an obvious violation of Persian sovereignty. Persia was spared actual invasion largely because of what a British diplomat referred to as the "great game": the battle for influence in the region in the name of preserving the British hold on India on the one hand versus the expansion of Russian power on the other. Neither European power would allow the other to actually take over in Persia as a result.

One effect of European domination in Persia was the growth of Iranian nationalism. The central government proved utterly incapable (and mostly uninterested) in economic development, with the fruits of industry technology arriving at a glacial pace across the country. Instead of trying to expand the country's infrastructure directly, the Qajar state handed off "concessions" to European banks, companies, and private individuals to build railroads, issue bank notes, and in one notorious case, monopolize the production and sale of tobacco. Public outcry often forced the cancellation of the concessions, but foreign meddling in the Persian economy remained a constant regardless. Reformers, some of them religious leaders from the Shia *ulama* (Muslim clergy), and others members of the commercial classes familiar with European ideas, demanded a more effective government capable of protecting national sovereignty.

Mass protests finally forced the issue in 1905. The ruler Muzaffar al-Din Shah signed a "Fundamental Law" on his deathbed that created a parliamentary regime, and in 1907 his successor Muhammad Ali Shah signed a supplement to the law that introduced civil equality and recognition that national sovereignty is derived from the people. The period of reform was short-lived, however, with a near civil war followed by the dismissal of the parliament in 1911. The dynasty limped toward its end in the years that followed, losing practically all authority over the country until a Russian-trained military officer, Riza Khan, seized power in a coup in 1925.

In sum, the Qajar dynasty coincided with a dismal period in Persian history in which European powers called the shots both politically and economically. Reform movements did emerge around the turn of the twentieth century, but modernization did not begin in earnest until after the Qajar period finally came to an end. The dynasty that began with Riza Khan, known as the Pahlavis, sought to radically reform the very nature of governance and society in Iran, inspired by the one meaningful achievement of the attempt at reform in the late Qajar period: the idea that Iran was a *nation* that should assert its national identity on the world stage.

## The Counter-Examples – Ethiopia and Japan

Even the (in historical hindsight, quite temporary) European and American monopoly on advanced technology did not always translate into successful conquest, as demonstrated in the cases of both Ethiopia and Japan. As the Scramble for Africa began in earnest in the 1870s, the recently-united nation of Italy sought to shore up its status as a European power by establishing its own colonies. Italian politicians targeted East Africa, specifically Eritrea and Ethiopia. In 1889, the Italians signed a treaty with the Ethiopian emperor, Menelik II, but the

treaty contained different wording in Italian and Amharic (the major language of Ethiopia): the Italian version stipulated that Ethiopia would become an Italian colony, while the Amharic version simply opened diplomatic ties with Europe through Italy. Once he learned of the deception, Menelik II repudiated the treaty, simultaneously directing the resources of his government to the acquisition of modern weapons and European mercenary captains willing to train his army.

Open war broke out in the early 1890s between Italy and Ethiopia, culminating in a battle at Adwa in 1896. There, the well-trained and well-equipped Ethiopians decisively defeated the Italian army. The Italians were forced to formally recognize Ethiopian independence, and soon other European powers followed suit (as an aside, it is interesting to note that Russia was already favorably inclined toward Ethiopia, and a small contingent of Russian volunteers actually fought *against* the Italians at the Battle of Adwa). Thus, a non-European power could and did defeat European invaders thanks to Menelik II's quick thinking. Nowhere else in Africa did a local ruler so successfully organize to repulse the invaders, but if circumstances had been different, they certainly could have done so.

In Asia, something comparable occurred, but at an even larger scale. In 1853, in the quintessential example of "gunboat diplomacy," an American naval admiral, Matthew Perry, forced Japan to sign a treaty opening it to contact with the West through very thinly veiled threats. As Western powers opened diplomacy and then trade with the Japanese shogunate, a period of chaos gripped Japan as the centuries-old political order fell apart. In 1868, a new government, remembered as the "Meiji Restoration," embarked on a course of rapid modernization after dismantling the old feudal privileges of the samurai class. Japanese officials and merchants were sent abroad to learn about foreign technology and practices, and European and American advisers were brought in to guide the construction of factories and train a new, modernized army and navy. The Japanese state was organized along highly authoritarian lines, with the symbolic importance of the emperor maintained, but practical power held by the cabinet and the heads of the military.

The Meiji Restoration represents the single most successful modern reform movement in the nineteenth century outside of Europe and the Americas. Like the Ottoman Tanzimat considered in a previous chapter, it adopted a written constitution, secularism, military conscription, and legal equality. Unlike the Ottoman Tanzimat, it succeeded. The former elites of the pre-Meiji feudal order were incorporated into the new power structure after a brief war - the Boshin War of 1868 - 1869 - crushed an attempt to stop the reforms from moving forward. Tax revenues soared, factories were opened, and a modern army and navy were rapidly trained in

the latest military technologies. “Modernization” to the Meiji leaders meant centralization, efficiency, and power, not democracy, and they were careful to select only the elements of American and European ideas and technologies that served those ends.

Likewise, reform in this case not only meant economic, industrial, and military modernization, it also meant reaping the rewards of that modernization, one of which was an empire. Just as European states had industrialized and then turned to foreign conquest, the new leadership of Japan looked to the weaker states of their region as “natural” territories to be incorporated. After supporting an anti-Chinese movement in Korea that severed the traditional status of Korea as a tributary state to China, the Meiji state then set its sights on actual conquest, steadily increasing its power in the country at the expense of local sovereignty.

Japanese expansion, however, threatened Russian interests in both Korea and the Sea of Okhotsk (between the eastern Siberian territories of Russia and Japan itself), ultimately leading to the Russo-Japanese War in 1904. To the shock and horror of much of the Western world, Japan handily defeated Russia by 1905, forcing Russia to recognize Japanese influence in Korea and agreeing to end its own policy of expansionism in the East. Whereas Ethiopia had defended its own territory and sovereignty, Japan was now playing by the same rules and besting European powers at their own game: seizing foreign territory through force of arms.

After the Russo-Japanese War, Japan was able to proceed with its imperial ambitions in Korea, finally invading outright in 1910 and establishing direct imperial rule that lasted until 1945 (when Japan lost World War II). Likewise, in 1931 Japan invaded the northeastern Chinese territory of Manchuria, establishing a militarized colony that would also last until 1945. As we will see in our discussion of the world wars in the next few chapters, Korea and Manchuria were just two important territories that were part of a larger imperial Japanese plan to carve out a vast East Asian empire.





*Japanese depiction of an assault on Russian forces. Note the European-style uniforms worn by the Japanese soldiers.*

## Conclusion

During the early modern period (1500 - 1800 CE), Europe went from a region of little global importance to one of the richest and most powerful areas on the planet, thanks largely to the riches and resources it gained from the colonization of the Americas and the profits generated by the slave trade. Thanks to the industrial revolution, Europeans were equipped to expand that power even further during the era of imperialism described above. That era of global preeminence was about to come crashing down, however. The fruits of industrial technology spread around the globe by the early twentieth century, with Europe losing its temporary monopoly. Independence movements gained strength in the early decades of the twentieth century as well, setting the stage for the period of decolonization after World War II. Europe had played a major role in shaping world history itself for centuries, but the extent of that influence would peak, then decline, in the twentieth century.

It is easy to focus on the technologies behind the new imperialism, to marvel at its speed, and to consider the vast breadth of European empires while overlooking what lay behind it all: violence. The cases of the Congo and the genocide of the Herero and Nama are rightly

remembered and studied by historians as iconic expressions of imperialistic violence, but they were only two of the more extreme and shocking examples of the ubiquitous violence that established and maintained all of the imperial conquests of the time. The scale of that violence on a global scale vastly exceeded any of the relatively petty squabbles that had constituted European warfare itself up to that point - the only European war that approaches the level of bloodshed caused by imperialism was probably the 30 Years' War of the seventeenth century, but imperialism's death toll was still far higher. Until 1914, Europeans exported that violence hundreds or thousands of miles away as they occupied whole continents. In 1914, however, it came home to roost in the First World War.

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# Chapter 7: World War I

Those who survived it called World War I "The Great War" and "The War to End All Wars." While they were, sadly, wrong about the latter, they were right that no war had ever been like it. It was the world's first mechanized, "impersonal" war in which machines proved to be much stronger than human beings. It devastated enormous swaths of territory and it left the economies of the Western World either crippled or teetering. To make matters worse, the war utterly failed to resolve the issues that had caused it. The war began because of the culmination of nationalist rivalries, fears, and hatreds. It failed to resolve any of those rivalries, and furthermore it was such a traumatic experience for most Europeans that certain otherwise "normal" people were attracted to the messianic, violent rhetoric of fascism and Nazism.

## Background to the War

The single most significant background factor to the war was the rivalry that existed between Europe's "great powers" by the beginning of the twentieth century. The term "great power" meant something specific in this period of history: the great powers were those able to command large armies, to maintain significant economies and industrial bases, and to conquer and hold global empires. Their respective leaders, and many of their regular citizens, were fundamentally suspicious of one another, and the biggest worry of their political leadership was that one country would come to dominate the others. Long gone was the notion of the balance of power as a guarantor of peace. Now, the balance of power was a fragile thing, with each of the great powers seeking to supplant its rivals in the name of security and prosperity. As a result, there was an ongoing, elaborate diplomatic dance as each power tried to shore up alliances, seize territory around the globe, and outpace the others.

While no great power deliberately sought war out, all were willing to risk war in 1914. That was at least in part because no politician had an accurate idea of what a new war would actually be like. The only wars that had occurred in Europe between the great powers since the Napoleonic period were the Crimean War of the 1850s and the wars that resulted in the formation of Italy and Germany in the 1850s, 1860s, and early 1870s. While the Crimean War was quite bloody, it was limited to the Crimean region itself and it did not involve all of the great

powers. Likewise, the wars of national unification were relatively short and did not involve a great deal of bloodshed (by the standards of both earlier and later wars). In other words, it had been over forty years since the great powers had any experience of a war on European soil, and as they learned all too soon, much had changed with the nature of warfare in the meantime.

In the summer of 1914, each of the great powers reached the conclusion that war was inevitable, and that trying to stay out of the immanent conflict would lead to national decline. Germany was surrounded by potential enemies in France and Russia. France had cultivated a desire for revenge against Germany ever since the Franco-Prussian War. Russia feared German power and resented Austria for threatening the interests of Slavs in the Balkans. Great Britain alone had no vested interest in war, but it was unable to stay out of the conflict once it began.



*Once the war began, the Triple Entente of Russia, France, and Britain faced the Central Powers of Germany and Austria. Italy was initially allied with the Central Powers but abandoned them once the war began, switching sides to join the Entente in 1915.*

In turn, the thing that inflamed jingoism and resentment among the great powers had been imperialism. The British were determined to maintain their enormous empire at any cost, and the Germans now posed a threat to the empire since Germany had lavished attention on a naval arms race since the 1880s. There was constant bickering on the world stage between the great powers over their colonies, especially since those colonies butted up against each other in Africa and Asia. Violence in the colonies, however, was almost always directed at the native peoples in those colonies, and there the balance of power was squarely on the side of Europeans. Thus, even European soldiers overseas had no experience of facing foes armed with comparable weapons.

The nature of nationalism had changed significantly over the course of the nineteenth century as well. Not only had conservative elites appropriated nationalism to shore up their own power (as in Italy and Germany), but nationalistic patriotism came to be identified with rivalry and resentment among many citizens of various political persuasions. To be a good Englishman was to resent and fear the growth of Germany. Many Germans came to despise the Russians, in part thanks to the growth of anti-Slavic racism. The lesser powers of Europe, like Italy, resented their own status and wanted to somehow seize enough power to join the ranks of the great powers. Nationalism by 1914 was nothing like the optimistic, utopian movements of the nineteenth century; it was hostile, fearful, and aggressive.

Likewise, public opinion mattered in a way it had never mattered earlier for the simple fact that every one of the great powers had at least a limited electorate and parliaments with at least some real power to make law. Even Russia, after a semi-successful revolution in 1905, saw the creation of an elected parliament, the Duma, and an open press. The fact that all of the powers had representative governments mattered, because public opinion helped fan the flames of conflict. Newspapers in this era tended to deliberately inflame jingoistic passions rather than encourage rational calculation. A very recognizably modern kind of connection was made in the press between patriotic loyalty and a willingness to fight, kill, and die for one's country. Since all of the great powers were now significantly (or somewhat, in the case of Russia) democratic, the opinions of the average citizen *mattered* in a way they never had before. Journalism whipped up those opinions and passions by stoking hatred, fear, and resentment, which led to a more widespread willingness to go to war.

Thanks to the nationalistic rivalry described above, the great powers sought to shore up their security and power through alliances. Those alliances were firmly in place by 1914, each of which obligated military action if any one power should be attacked. Each great power needed the support of its allies, and was thus willing to intercede even if its own interests were not

directly threatened. That willingness to go to war for the sake of alliance meant that even a relatively minor event might spark the outbreak of total war. That is precisely what happened.

In 1914, two major sets of alliances set the stage for the war. German politicians, fearing the possibility of a two-front war against France and Russia simultaneously, concluded an alliance with the Austrian Empire in 1879, only a little over a decade after the Prusso-Austrian War. In turn, France and Russia created a strong alliance in 1893 in large part to contain the ambitions of Germany, whose territory lay between them. Great Britain was generally more friendly to France than Germany, but had not entered into a formal alliance with any other power. It was, however, the traditional ally and protector of Belgium, which British politicians considered a kind of toehold on the continent. Finally, Russia grew increasingly close to the new nation of Serbia, populated as it was by a Slavic people who were part of the Eastern Orthodox branch of Christianity. The relationships between Great Britain and Russia with Belgium and Serbia, respectively, would not have mattered but for the alliance obligations that tied the great powers together.

Those alliances were now poised to mobilize armies of unprecedented size. All of the great powers now fielded forces of a million men or more. Coordinating that many troops required detailed advanced planning and a permanent staff of high-ranking officers, normally referred to as the "general staff" of a given army. In the past, political leaders had often either led troops themselves or at least had significant influence in planning and tactics. By the early twentieth century, however, war plans and tactics were entirely in the hands of the general staff of each nation, meaning political leaders would be obliged to choose from a limited set of "pre-packaged" options given to them by their generals.

Thus, when the war started, what took all of the leaders of the great powers - from the Kaiser in Germany to the Tsar in Russia - by surprise was the ultimatums they received from their own generals. According to the members of each nation's general staff, it was all or nothing: either commit all forces to a swift and decisive victory, or suffer certain defeat. There could be no small incremental build ups or tentative skirmishes; this was about a total commitment to a massive war. An old adage has it that "generals fight the last war," basing their tactics on what worked in previous conflicts, and in 1914 the "last war" most generals looked to was the Franco-Prussian War, which Prussia had won through swift, decisive action and overwhelming force.

## The Start of the War

The immediate cause of the war was the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in 1914. Franz Ferdinand was the heir to the Habsburg throne, a respected Austrian politician who also happened to be friends with the German Kaiser. Ironically, he was also the politician in the Austrian state with the most direct control of the Austrian military, and he tended to favor peaceful diplomacy over the potential outbreak of war – it is possible that he would have been a prominent voice for peace if he had survived. Instead, he was assassinated not by Austria's rivals Russia or France, but by a young Serbian nationalist.

Serbia was a new nation. It had fought its way to independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1878, and its political leaders envisioned a role for Serbia like that Piedmont had played in Italy: one small kingdom that came to conquer and unite a nation. In this case, the Serbs hoped to conquer and unite the Balkans in one Serbian-dominated country. Austria, however, stood in the path of Serbian ambition since Austria controlled neighboring Bosnia (in which many Serbs lived as a significant minority of the population). Thus, the last thing Austrian politicians wanted was an anti-Austrian movement launched by the ambitious Serbs.

In 1903, a military coup in Serbia killed the king and installed a fiercely nationalistic leadership. Serbian nationalists were proud of their Slavic heritage, and Russia became a powerful ally in large part because of the Slavic connection between Russians and Serbs (i.e. they spoke related languages and the Russian and Serbian Orthodox churches were part of the same branch of Christianity). Russia also supported Serbia because of Russian rivalry with Austria. Serbian nationalists believed that, with Russian support, it would be possible to create an international crisis in Austrian-controlled Bosnia and ultimately seize Bosnia itself. The Serbs did not believe that Austria would risk a full-scale war with Russia in order to hold on to Bosnia.

Among the organizers of the coup that had murdered the king and queen were a group of Serbian officers who created a terrorist group, The Black Hand. In 1914, The Black Hand trained a group of (ethnically Serbian) college students in Bosnia to assassinate an Austrian politician when the opportunity presented itself. That happened in June of 1914, when Franz Ferdinand and his wife came to visit the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo. In a fantastically bungled attempted assassination, most of the would-be killers simply failed to act when Franz Ferdinand's motorcade drove past, with one hurling a grenade and only succeeding in injuring

some of the Archduke's security detail. After the grenade attack and a hasty speech by Ferdinand at the town hall, and quite by accident, the Archduke's driver became lost and stuck in traffic outside of a cafe, which one of the assassins happened to be walking past. The assassin, Gavrilo Princip, seized the opportunity and shot the Archduke and his wife to death.



*The leaders of the Black Hand, the conspiracy responsible for the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and sparking the beginning of World War I.*

Serbia's assumption that Austria would not risk war proved to be completely wrong. The Austrian government demanded that Serbia allow Austrian agents to carry out a full-scale investigation of the assassination; Serbian honor would never allow such a thing. Austrian troops started massing near the Serbian border, and the great powers of Europe started calling up their troops. Germany, believing that its own military and industrial resources were such that it would be the victor in a war against France and Russia, promised to stand by Austria regardless of what happened. Russia warned that Austrian intervention in Serbia would cause war. France assured Russia of its loyalty. Only Britain was as-yet unaccounted for.

No one was completely certain that a war would actually happen (the German Kaiser, Wilhelm II, left for his summer vacation as planned right in the middle of the crisis, believing no

war would occur), but if it did, each of the great powers was confident that they would be victorious in the end. A desperate diplomatic scramble ensued as diplomats, parliaments, and heads of state tried at the last minute to preserve the peace, but in the end it was too late: on July 28, Austria declared war on Serbia, activating the pre-existing system of alliances, and by August 4 all of the great powers were involved.

Thanks to the fact that Germany invaded through Belgium, Great Britain declared war on Germany and its allies. In addition to Germany and the Austrian Empire, the Ottoman Empire soon joined their alliance, known as the Central Powers. Opposing them was the Triple Entente of Great Britain, France, and Russia. Smaller states like Italy and Portugal later joined the Triple Entente, as did, eventually, the United States.

## The Early War

There was a mixture of apprehension and, in many cases, enthusiasm about the onset of war among civilians and soldiers alike. Many felt that the war would resolve nationalistic rivalries once and for all, and almost no one anticipated a lengthy war. Wilhelm II anticipated “a jolly little war” and it was widely thought in France and Germany that the war would be over by Christmas. 30,000 young men and women marched in Berlin before war was even declared, singing patriotic songs and gathering at the feet of statues of German and Prussian heroes. Everywhere, thousands of young men enlisted in the military of their own volition. There were some anti-war protests in July, mostly organized by the socialist parties in the name of socialist internationalism, but once the war was actually declared those protests abruptly stopped.

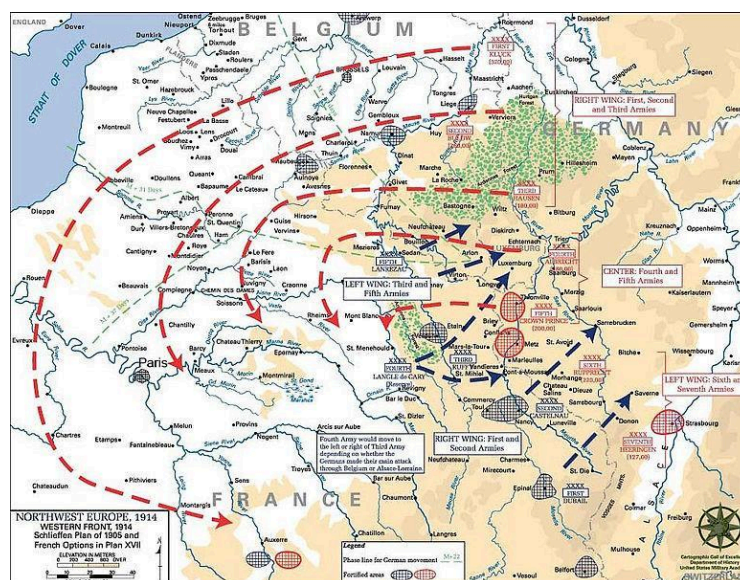
The most symptomatic moment of the defeat of socialism by nationalism as rival ideologies was the fact that 100% of the socialist parties of Europe supported their respective countries in the war, despite hard and fast promises before the war that, as socialists, they were committed to peace. Whereas pre-war socialists had argued vociferously that the working class of each country was a single, united class regardless of national differences, that internationalist rhetoric largely vanished once the war began. Wanting to be seen as patriots (whether French, German, or British), the major socialist parties voted to authorize the war and supported the sale of war bonds. In turn, the radical left of the socialist parties soon broke off and formed new parties that continued to oppose the war; these new parties were typically called “communists” whereas the old ones remained “socialists.”

War, for many people, represented a cathartic release. War did not represent real bloodshed and horror for 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. France would at last get even for the Franco-Prussian War. Germany would at least prove it was the most powerful nation in Europe. Russia would prove that it was a powerful modern nation...and so on.

The war itself began with the German invasion of France through Belgium. German tactics centered on the “Schlieffen Plan,” named after its author, Field Marshal Alfred von Schlieffen, who had devised it in the first years of the twentieth century. The Schlieffen Plan called for a rapid advance into France to knock the French forces out of the war within six weeks. Subsequently, German troops would be whisked back east via railroads in time to engage Russia, as it was believed that it would take the Russians at least that long to mobilize their armies. It not only called for rapid mobilization, but it required the German military to defeat the French military at an even more rapid pace had the Prussian forces forty years earlier in the Franco-Prussian War.



*The Schlieffen Plan, in theory. In reality, while it met with initial success, French and British troops succeeded in counter-attacking and pushing back the German advance.*



The first taste of the horror of the war to come was the German invasion of Belgium. Belgium was a neutral country leading up to the war, and German planners had expected Belgium to surrender swiftly as German troops advanced rapidly toward France. Instead, Belgian soldiers fiercely resisted the German invasion. In turn, German troops deliberately massacred civilians, destroyed towns, and raped Belgian women. Thousands of Belgian refugees fled to Britain, where they were (to the credit of the British government and civilians) welcomed and housed. The bloodshed shocked the sensibilities of the French and British reading public and emphasized the fact that the war might go very differently than many had first imagined. Britain swiftly declared war on Germany.

While the first few weeks of the German invasion seemed to match the ambitions of the Schlieffen Plan, they soon ground to a halt. A fierce French counter-attack stopped the Germans in Belgium and Northeastern France in late September. Simultaneously, the Russians surprised everyone by mobilizing their forces much more quickly than expected, attacking both Germany and Austria in the east in late August. In the autumn of 1914 the scale of battles grew to exceed anything Europe had witnessed since the Napoleonic Wars (which they soon dwarfed). To their shock and horror, soldiers on all sides encountered for the first time the sheer destructive power of modern weaponry. To shield themselves from the clouds of bullets belched out by machine guns, desperate soldiers dove into the craters created by artillery shells. In the process, trench warfare was invented.

The weapons that had been developed in the decades leading up to the war, from enormous new battleships known as dreadnoughts to high-explosive artillery shells and machine guns, had all seemed to the nations of Europe like strengths. The early months of the war revealed that they were indeed strong, in a sense, being far more lethal than anything created before. Unfortunately, human bodies were pitifully weak by comparison, and as the death toll mounted, the human (and financial) costs associated with modern warfare shattered the image of national strength that politicians and generals continued to cling to. Those generals in particular stuck to their favored, and outdated, tactics, sending cavalry in bright uniforms to their deaths in hopeless charges, ordering offensives that were doomed to fail, and calling up every soldier available on reserve.

That Christmas, in a well-remembered symbolic moment, a brief and unauthorized truce held on the Western Front between Entente and German forces long enough for French and German soldiers to climb out of their respective trenches and meet in the “no man’s land” between the lines, with a German barber offering shaves and haircuts to all comers. By then,

both sides were well aware that the conceit that the war would “be over by Christmas” had been a ridiculous fantasy. Never again in the war would a moment of voluntary peace re-emerge; while they did not know it for certain at the time, the soldiers faced four more years of carnage to come.

## The Evolution of the War

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 evolved into vast networks of fortified rifts that stretched from the English Channel in the north to the Swiss Alps 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,” in which thousands of men climbed out of their trenches and charged 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 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.



*Soldiers in a trench in 1915.*

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 and the Ottoman Empire

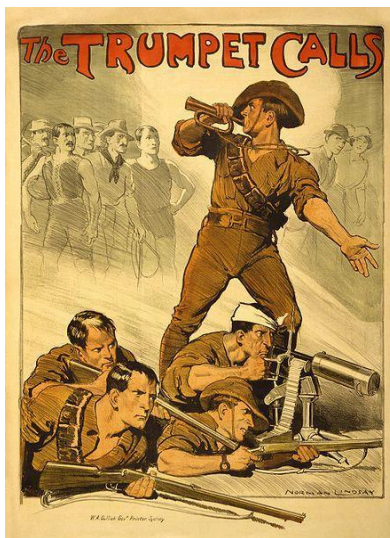
Things were different in the east, however. In contrast to the essentially static nature of trench warfare on the Western Front, the Russian, German, and Austrian armies in the east were highly mobile, sometimes crossing hundreds of miles in an attempt to outflank their enemies. The Russian army fought effectively in the early years of the war, especially against Austrian forces, which it consistently defeated. While Russian soldiers were also the match of Germans, however, Russia was hampered by its inadequate industrial base and by its lack of rail lines and cars. The Germans were able to outmaneuver the Russians, often surrounding Russian armies one by one and defeating them. A brilliant Russian general oversaw a major offensive in 1916 that crippled Austrian forces, but did not force Austria out of the war. In the aftermath, a lack of support and coordination from the other Russian generals ultimately checked the offensive.

By late 1916 the war had grown increasingly desperate for Russia. The Tsar’s government was teetering and morale was low. The home front was in dire straits, with serious food shortages, and there were inadequate munitions (especially for artillery) making it to the front. Thus, the German armies steadily pushed into Russian territory. A furious defense by the

Russian forces checked the German advance in the winter of 1916 - 1917, but the war was deeply unpopular on the home front and increasing numbers of soldiers deserted rather than face the Germans. It was in this context of imminent defeat that a popular revolution overthrew the Tsarist state - that revolution is described in the next chapter.

Meanwhile, the Ottoman Empire, long considered the “sick man of Europe” by European politicians, proved a far more resilient enemy than expected. As described in the chapter on Imperialism, in 1909 a coup of army officers and political leaders known as the Committee of Union and Progress, but more often remembered as the “Young Turks,” seized control of the Ottoman state and embarked on a rapid program of western-style reform (including a growing obsession with Turkish “racial” identity at the expense of the Empire’s other ethnicities). With war clouds gathering over Europe in 1914, the Young Turks threw in their lot with Germany, the one European power that had never menaced Ottoman territories and which promised significant territorial gains in the event of a German - Turkish victory.

In 1915 British forces staged a full-scale invasion of Ottoman territory which rapidly turned into an outright disaster. In a poorly-planned assault on the Gallipoli Peninsula near Constantinople, hundreds of thousands of British Imperial troops (including tens of thousands of Australians and New Zealanders recruited to fight for “their” empire from half a world away) were gunned down by Turkish machine guns. In the months that followed, British forces failed to make headway against the Ottomans, with the Ottoman leadership rightly judging that the very survival of the Ottoman state was at stake in the war.



*An Australian propaganda poster calling for volunteers.*

In 1916, however, British forces focused their strategy on capturing the eastern stretch of the Ottoman Empire: Mesopotamia, the site of the earliest civilization in human history (which became the country of Iraq in 1939). The British made steady progress moving west from Mesopotamia while also supporting an Arab nationalist insurgency against the Ottomans from within the Ottoman borders. By 1917 Ottoman forces were in disarray and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire looked all but certain.

Even as British and French politicians began plans to divide up the Ottoman territory into protectorates (dubbed “mandates” after the war) under their control, however, the Young Turk leader Mustafa Kemal launched a major military campaign to preserve not Ottoman but *Turkish* independence, with the other ethnicities that had lived under Ottoman rule either pushed aside or destroyed. In one of the greatest crimes of the war, Turkish forces drove hundreds of thousands of Armenians from their homes across deserts to die of abuse, exhaustion, hunger, and thirst when they were not slaughtered outright. To this day, the Turkish government (while admitting that many Armenians died) denies what historians have long since recognized: the Armenians were victims of a deliberate campaign of genocide, with over one million killed.

## Women in the War (and Afterwards)

World War I transformed, at least during the war itself, gender roles. The total commitment to the war on the part of the belligerent nations left numerous professional positions vacant as men were dispatched to fight. Women responded by taking on jobs from which they had been barred in the past, as doctors, mid-level officials and executives in private enterprise, and in wartime production in factories. Suffrage movements temporarily suspended their agitation for the vote in favor of using their existing organizations to support the war effort in the name of patriotism. Thousands of women joined the war effort directly as nurses, in many cases serving near or even in the trenches on the Western Front. The famous scientist Marie Curie (the first woman to win a Nobel Prize - she won a second a few years later) drove an ambulance near the front lines during the war.

In many cases, the labor shortage led to breakthroughs for women that simply could not be reversed at the war's end. Having established the precedent that a woman could work perfectly well at a “man's job” (as a competent streetcar conductor, for example) certain fields remained at least partially open to women after the war concluded in 1918. Other changes were cultural in nature rather than social. For example, the cumbersome, uncomfortable ankle-length dresses of the pre-war period vanished (along with corsets, the very model of

impracticality and discomfort), replaced by sensible, comfortable dresses and skirts. Women cut their hair short in “bobs” for the first time both for fashion and because short hair was more practical while working full-time for the war effort. The war, in short, *required* gender roles to change primarily for economic reasons, but women embraced those changes as forms of liberation, not just side-effects of their new jobs.

While it was not always a straightforward case of cause-and-effect, there is no doubt that women’s participation in the war effort did have a direct link to voting rights after the war. One by one, most European countries and the United States granted the vote to at least some women in the years that followed the war. One striking example is Belgium, where *only* women who were widowed, had lost sons, or had themselves been held captive during the war were granted the vote initially. Some countries stubbornly resisted this trend - France rejected women’s suffrage entirely until after the period of Nazi occupation in World War II - but there can be no doubt that, overall, the cause of women’s suffrage was aided immensely by the patriotic service of women during WWI.

## The Late War

World War I was fought primarily in Europe, along the Western Front that stretched from the English Channel south along the French border to the Alps, and on the Eastern Front across Poland, Galicia (the region encompassing part of Hungary and the Ukraine) and Russia. It was a “world” war, however, for two reasons. First, hundreds of thousands of troops from around the world fought in it, the most numerous of which were citizens of the British Empire drawn from as far away as India and New Zealand. Second, military engagements occurred in the Ottoman territories of the Middle East, in Africa between European colonial armies, and in Asia (albeit at a much smaller scale). Japan even supported the Entente war effort by taking a German-controlled Chinese port, Tsingtao.

The other major power involved in the war, the United States, was a latecomer to the fighting. The United States was dominated by “isolationist” sentiment until late in the war. Most Americans believed that the war was a European affair that should not involve American troops. America, however, was an ally of Britain and provided both military and civilian supplies to the British, along with large amounts of low-interest loans to keep the British economy afloat. In 1917, as the war dragged on and the German military leadership under Field Marshal Paul Von Hindenburg recognized that the nation could not sustain the war much longer, the German generals decided to use their new submarines, the U-boats, to attack any vessel suspected of

carrying military supplies to the British or French. When ships carrying American civilians were sunk in 1917, American public sentiment finally shifted, and the US declared war on Germany in April of 1917.

The importance of the entrance of the United States in the war was not the superiority of American troops or technology. American soldiers were as horrified as anyone when they first encountered modern, mechanized warfare. Instead, the key factor was that the US had a gigantic industrial capacity, dwarfing all of the great powers of Europe put together, and millions of fresh troops that could be called up or drafted. Germany, meanwhile, had been totally committed to the war for almost three years, and its supplies (of money, fuel, munitions, food, and people) were running very thin. Most German civilians still believed that Germany was winning, but as the carnage continued on the Western Front, the German general staff knew that they had to achieve a strategic breakthrough.

By 1918, it was clear to the German command that they were at risk of losing, despite the military resources freed up when the Bolshevik Revolution ended Russia's commitment to the war. The Germans had been able to fight the French and British to a standstill on the Western Front, but when the US entered on the side of the British and French, it became impossible to sustain the war in the long run. The only hope appeared to be one last desperate offensive that might bring the French and British to the negotiating table. Thus, German forces staged a major campaign in the spring of 1918 that succeeded in breaking through the western lines and coming within about 40 miles of Paris, but by then German troops had outpaced their supply lines, lost cover, and were now up against the combined reserves of the French, British, and Americans. Another attempted offensive in July failed, and the Entente (and American) powers began to push the German forces back.

Back in Germany, criticism of the Kaiser appeared for the first time in the mainstream press, and hundreds of thousands of workers protested the worsening economic conditions. In late September, the head of the German General Staff, Ludendorff, advised the Kaiser to sue for peace. A month later, the Reichstag passed laws making the government's ministers responsible to it instead of the Kaiser. Protest movements spread across Germany and the rapidly-collapsing Austro-Hungarian empire, as nationalist movements declared independence in Yugoslavia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the Balkans.

On November 11 of 1918, a voluntary commission of German politicians led by the German Socialist Party (SPD) formally sued for peace. The Kaiser, blaming socialists and Jews for "stabbing Germany in the back," snuck away in a train to Holland, where he abdicated. The top generals of the German General Staff, Hindenburg and Ludendorff, themselves the authors



of the myth of the “stab in the back,” did their best to popularize the idea that Germany “would have won” if not for sabotage perpetrated by a sinister conspiracy of foreign agents, communists, and (as with practically every shadowy conspiracy theory of the twentieth century) Jews. In fact, if the commission of German politicians had not sued for peace when they did, French, British, and American troops would have simply invaded Germany and even more people would have died.

## The Aftermath

The aftermath of the war was horrendous. Over twenty million people, both soldiers and civilians, were dead. For Russia and France, of the twenty million men mobilized during the war, over 76% were casualties (either dead, wounded, or missing). A whole generation of young men was almost wiped out, which had lasting demographic consequences for both countries. For Germany, the figure was 65%, including 1.8 million dead. The British saw a casualty rate of “only” 39%, but that figure still represented the death of almost a million men, with far more wounded or missing. Even the smaller nations like Italy, which had fought fruitlessly to seize territory from Austria, lost over 450,000 men. A huge swath of Northeastern France and parts of Belgium were reduced to lifeless fields of mud and debris.

Politically, the war spelled the end of three of the most venerable, and historically powerful, empires of the early modern period: the Russian Empire, the Habsburg Empire of Austria, and the Ottoman Empire of the Middle East. The Austrian Empire was replaced by new independent nations, with Austria itself reduced to a “rump state”: the remnant of its former imperial glory. France and Great Britain busily divided up control of former Ottoman territories in new “mandates,” often creating new nations (such as Iraq) without the slightest concern for the identities of the people who actually lived there, but Turkey itself achieved independence thanks to the ferocious campaign led by Mustafa Kemal, or “Atatürk,” meaning “father of the Turks.” As noted above, revolution in Russia led to the collapse of the Tsarist state and, after a bloody civil war, the emergence of the world’s first communist nation: the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. While Germany had not been a major imperial power, it also lost its overseas territories in the aftermath of the war.

The American president Woodrow Wilson, hoping to prevent future wars on the scale of World War I and, as importantly, to present an appealing anti-communist vision for a peaceful global order, helped to organize a new international body: the League of Nations. The idea behind the League was that it would work against reckless international aggression and war, coordinate diplomatic and economic relationships, and protect the “right of self-determination” of

peoples around the world. Instead, the League was quickly revealed to be weak and ineffectual, consistently failing to act when nations launched wars of invasion (starting the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, in northern China, in 1931), handing out territories in Africa and the Middle East to European imperialists instead of to the people who actually lived there, and failing to attract the membership of the very country whose leader had proposed it in the first place: the United States. Instead of inspiring confidence and hope, the League appeared to many as the symbol of international dysfunction.

For surviving soldiers everywhere, the psychological damage from years of carnage and desperation left wounds as crippling as those inflicted by poison gas and artillery strikes. From the euphoria many felt at the start of the war, the survivors were left psychologically shattered. The British term for soldiers who survived but were unable to function in society was “shell shock,” a vague diagnosis for what is now known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Whereas P.T.S.D. is now understood as a grave psychological issue that requires medical and therapeutic intervention, it was considered a form of “hysteria” at the time, a deeply gendered diagnosis that compared traumatized soldiers to “hysterical” middle class women suffering from depression. While the numbers of shell shock cases were so great that they could not be ignored by the medical community at the time, the focus of treatment revolved around trying to force former soldiers to somehow “tough” their way back to normal behavior (something that is now recognized to be impossible). Some progress was made in treating shell shock cases by applying the “talking cure,” an early form of therapy related to the practices of the great early psychologist Sigmund Freud, but most of the medical community held to the assumption that trauma was just a sign of weakness.

Likewise, there was no sympathy in European (or American) culture for psychological problems. To be unable to function because of trauma was to be “weak” or “insane,” with all of the social and cultural stigma those terms invoke. Any soldier diagnosed with a psychological issue, as opposed to a physical one, was automatically disqualified from receiving a disability pension as well. Thus, many of the veterans of World War I were both pitied and looked down on for not being able to re-adjust to civilian life, in circumstances in which the soldiers were suffering massive psychological trauma. The result was a profound sense of betrayal and disillusionment among veterans.

This was the context in which Europeans dubbed the conflict “The War to End All Wars.” It was inconceivable to most that it could happen again; the costs had simply been too great to bear. The European nations were left indebted and depopulated, the maps of Europe and the Middle East were redrawn as new nations emerged from old empires, and there was a profound

uncertainty about what the future held. Most hoped that, at the very least, the bloodshed was over and that the process of rebuilding might begin. Some, however, saw the war's conclusion as deeply unsatisfying and, in a sense, incomplete: there were still scores to be settled. It was from that sense of dissatisfaction and a longing for continued violence that the most destructive political philosophy of the twentieth century emerged: fascism.

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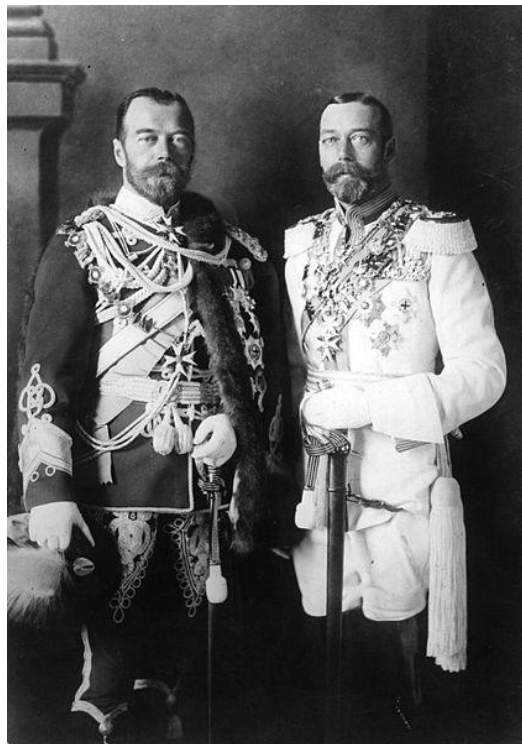
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## Chapter 8: The Early Twentieth Century

### Russian Revolutions

The last Tsar of Russia was Nikolai II (1868 - 1918). At the start of his reign in 1894, at the death of his father Alexander III, Nikolai was among the most powerful monarchs in Europe. Russia may have been technologically and socially backwards compared to 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. Nikolai 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.



*Family resemblance: cousins Tsar Nikolai II (on the left) and King George V of Britain (on the right).*

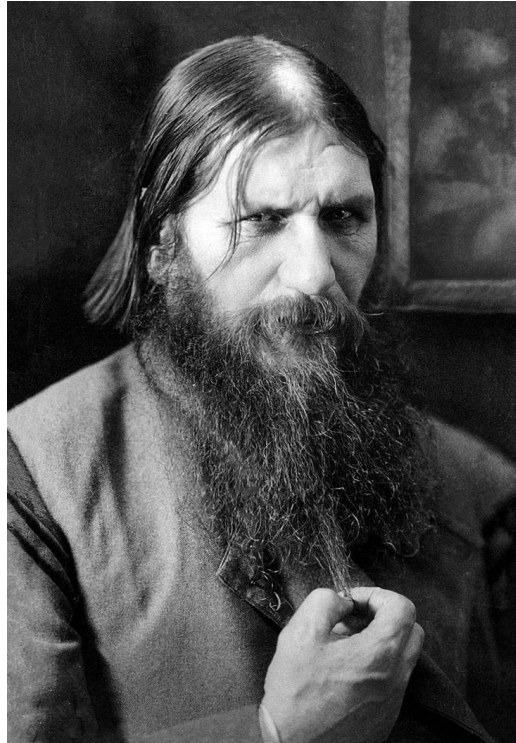
It was, however, during his reign that modernity finally caught up with Russia. The Russian state was able to control the press and punish dissent into the first years of the twentieth century, but then events outside of its immediate control undermined its ability to exercise complete control over Russian society. The immediate cause of the downfall of Nikolai'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. Nikolai 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 parties in the Duma had no experience of actually governing, and quickly fell to infighting and petty squabbles, leaving 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 Nikolai's many concerns was that his only male heir, Prince Alexei, was a hemophiliac (i.e. his blood did not clot properly when he was injured, meaning any minor scrape or cut was potentially lethal). Nikolai's wife, Tsarina Alexandra, called upon the services of a wandering, illiterate monk and faith healer named Grigorii Rasputin. Rasputin, definitely one of the most peculiar characters in modern history, was somehow able (perhaps through a kind of hypnotism) 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.



*Grigori Rasputin in 1916, shortly before his death.*

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, Nikolai 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 pressing towards Russian territory, and tens of thousands of Russian troops were deserting to return to their home villages. 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 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 a major 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.

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 revolutionaries with contacts 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.

On International Women's Day in February of 1917 (using the Eastern Orthodox calendar still in use at the time - it was March in the west), women workers in St. Petersburg demonstrated against the Tsar's government to protest the price of food, which had skyrocketed due to the war. Within days the demands had grown to ending the war entirely and even calling for the ouster of the Tsar himself, and a general strike was called. Comparable demonstrations broke out in the other major cities in short order. The key moment, as had happened in revolutions since 1789, was when the army refused to put down the uprisings and instead joined them. The Duma demanded that the Tsar step aside and hand over control of the military. By early March, just a few weeks after it had begun, the Tsar abdicated, realizing that he had lost the support of almost the entire population.

In the aftermath of this event, power was split. The Duma appointed a provisional government that enacted important legal reforms but did not have the power to relieve the Russian army at the front or to provide food to the hungry protesters. Likewise, the Duma itself represented the interests and beliefs of the educated middle classes, still only a tiny portion of the Russian population as a whole. The members of the Duma hoped to create a democratic republic like those of France, Britain, or the United States, but they had no road map to bring it about. Likewise, the Duma had no way to enforce the new laws it passed, nor could they compel Russian peasants to fight on against the Germans. Most critically, the members of the Duma refused to sue for peace with Germany, believing that Russia still had to honor its commitment to the war despite the carnage being inflicted on Russian soldiers at the front.

Soon, in the industrial centers and in many of the army and naval bases, councils of workers and soldiers (called *soviets*) sprang up and declared that they had the real right to political power. There was a standoff between the provisional government, which had no police force to enforce its will, and the soviets, which could control their own areas but did not have the ability to bring the majority of the population (who wanted, in Lenin's words, "peace, land, and bread") over to their side. Many fled the cities for the countryside, peasants seized land from landowners, and soldiers deserted in droves; by 1917 fully 75% of the soldiers sent to the front against Germany deserted.

Thus, as of the late summer of 1917, there was a power vacuum created by the war and by the incompetence of the Duma. No group had power over the country as a whole, and so the Bolsheviks had their opportunity. In October the Bolsheviks took control of the most powerful soviet, that of Petrograd (former St. Petersburg). Next, the Bolsheviks seized control of the Duma, expelled the members of other political parties, and then stated their intention to pursue the goals that no other major party had been willing to: unconditional peace with Germany and land to the peasants with no compensation for landowners. In early 1918, after consolidating their control in Petrograd and Moscow, the Bolsheviks signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany, granting Germany huge territorial concessions in return for peace (Germany would lose those new territories when it lost the war itself later that year).

Almost immediately, a counter-revolution erupted and civil war broke out. The Bolsheviks proved effective at rallying troops to their cause and leading those troops in war. Their "Red Army" engaged the "White" counter-revolutionaries all over western Russia and Ukraine. For their part, the Whites were an ungainly coalition of former Tsarists, the liberals who had been alienated by the Bolshevik takeover of the Duma, members of ethnic minorities who wanted political independence, an anarchist peasant army in Ukraine, and troops sent by



foreign powers (including the United States), terrified of the prospect of a communist revolution in a nation as large and potentially powerful as Russia. Despite the fact that very few Russians were active supporters of communist ideology, the Red Army still proved both coherent and effective under Bolshevik leadership.



*Lenin making a speech in 1920 in support of the Red Army during the civil war.*

The ensuing war was brutal, ultimately killing close to ten million people (most were civilians who were massacred or starved), and lasting for four years. In the end, however, the Bolsheviks prevailed in Russia itself, Ukraine, and Central Asia. Some Eastern European countries, including Poland, Finland, and the Baltic states, did gain their independence thanks to the war, but everywhere else in the former Russian Empire the Bolsheviks succeeded in creating a new communist empire in its place: the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

## Early Twentieth-Century Cultural Change

The Bolshevik Revolution and the subsequent creation of the USSR represents perhaps the most striking political event of its time, but it occurred during a period of profound political, cultural, and intellectual instability across Europe and much of the world. The first few decades of the twentieth century revolved around World War I in many ways, but even before the war began Western society was riven with cultural and political conflict. It was an incredibly tumultuous time, one in which “Western Civilization” struggled to define itself in the face of scientific progress and social change that seemed to be speeding forward ever faster.

Part of this phenomenon was the fact that the old order of monarchy and nobility was finally, definitively destroyed, a casualty of World War I. Never again would kings and emperors and noblemen share power over European countries. At the same time, the great political project of the nineteenth century, republican democracy, seemed profoundly disappointing to many Europeans, who had watched it degenerate into partisan squabbles that were helpless to prevent the Great War and its terrible aftermath. In that aftermath there was a terrific flowering of cultural and intellectual production even as the continent struggled to recover economically. It is tempting to see these years, especially the interwar period between 1918 and 1939, as nothing more than the staging ground for World War II, but a more accurate picture reveals them as being much more than just a prequel.

## Modernism

Modernism in the arts refers to a specific period starting around 1900 and coming into its own in the 1920s. It expressed a set of common attitudes and assumptions that centered on a rejection of established authority. It was a movement of skepticism directed toward the post-Victorian middle class, an overhaul of the entire legacy of comfort, security, paranoia, rigidity, and hierarchy. It rejected the premise of melodrama, namely clear moral messages in art and literature that were meant to edify and instruct. Socially, it was a reaction against the complacency of the bourgeoisie, of their willingness to start wars over empire and notions of nationalism.

Modernist art and literature sometimes openly attacked the moral values of mainstream society, but sometimes experimented with form itself and simply ignored moral issues. This was the era of *l'art pour l'art* ("art for art's sake"), of creation disinterested from social or intellectual duty. Artists broke with the idea that art should "represent" something noble and beautiful, and instead many indulged in wild experiments and deliberately created disturbing pieces meant to provoke their audience. Sometimes, modernists were distinctly "modern" in glorifying industrialism and technology, while other times they were modern in that they were experimenting with entirely novel approaches to creation.

One of the quintessential modernist movements was Futurism. Starting in Italy before World War I, Futurism was a movement of poets, playwrights, and painters who celebrated speed, technology, violence, and chaos. Their stated goal was to destroy the remnants of past art and replace it with the art of the future, an art that reflected the modern, industrial world. Futurism sought something new and better than what the Victorian bourgeoisie had come up with: something heroic.

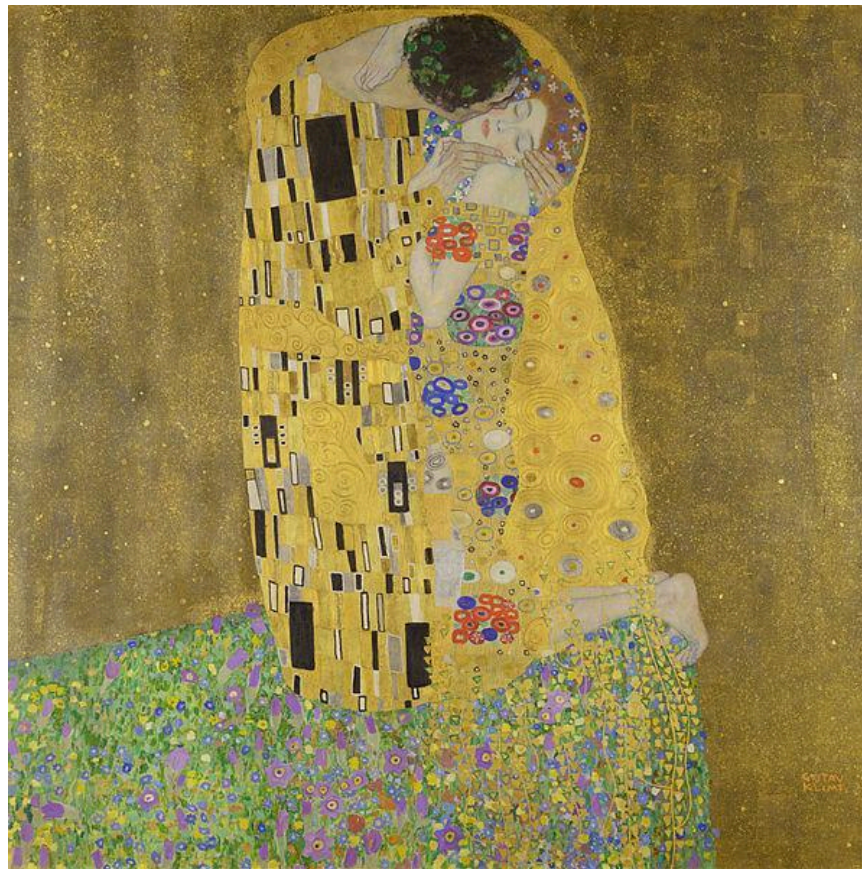
In 1909, F.T. Marinetti, the movement's founder, wrote the *Futurist Manifesto*. In it, he thundered that the Futurists wanted to "sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and rashness," and that "poetry must be a violent assault on the forces of the unknown." The Manifesto went on to proclaim, ominously, that "we want to glorify war - the only cure for the world" and that the Futurists were dedicated to demolishing "museums and libraries" and sought to "fight morality, feminism, and all opportunist and utilitarian cowardice." The Manifesto, in short, was a profound expression of dissatisfaction with the mainstream culture of Europe leading up to World War I, and its proponents were proud partisans of violence, elitism, and misogyny.

Futurist art itself was often bizarre and provocative - one Futurist play consisted of a curtain opening to an empty stage, the sound of a gunshot and a scream offstage, and the closing of the curtain. Futurist paintings often depicted vast clouds of dark smoke with abstract images of trains and radio towers, or sometimes just jumbles of color. While their politics were as murky as some of their art early on, after World War I most of the Futurists embraced fascism, seeing in fascism a political movement that reflected their desire for a politics that was new, virile, and contemptuous of democracy.

The Futurists were just one branch of modernism in the visual arts. Other schools existed across Europe, including Vorticism in England, Expressionism in Austria, and Cubism in France. Pablo Picasso (1881 - 1973), the major cubist painter and sculptor, was one of the quintessential modernist painters in that he portrayed objects, people, even the works of past

masters, but he did so from several different perspectives at once. The English Vorticists, meanwhile, attempted to capture the impression of motion in static paintings, not least by depicting literal explosions in their art.

Among the creators of the most striking, sometimes beautiful, but other times grotesque images associated with modernism were the Austrian expressionists. The major point of expressionism was to put the artist's inner life on display through abstract, often disturbing images. The governing concept was not to depict things "as they are," but instead to reflect the disturbing realities of the artist's mind and spirit. The greatest Austrian expressionist was Gustav Klimt (1862 - 1918), who created beautiful but haunting and often highly eroticized portraits, the most famous of which became one of the quintessential dorm room decorations of collegiate America - *The Kiss*.



*Klimt's The Kiss from 1908.*

In 1901, the University of Vienna commissioned Klimt to create paintings to celebrate the three great branches of traditional academic scholarship: philosophy, medicine, and law. In each case, Klimt created frightening images in which the nominal subject matter was somehow

present, but was overshadowed by the grotesque depiction of either how it was being carried out or how it failed to adequately address its subject. Philosophy, for instance, depicts a column of naked, wretched figures clinging to one another over a starry abyss, with a sinister, translucent face visible in the backdrop. The paintings were all beautiful and skillfully rendered, but also dark and disturbing (the originals were destroyed by the Nazis during their occupation of Austria - Modernism was considered “degenerate art” by the Nazi party).



*Klimt's Philosophy, from 1907.*

One of Klimt's students was Egon Schiele (1890 - 1918), who subverted Klimt's themes (which, although very dark, were also beautiful) and openly celebrated the ugly and threatening. His self-portraits in particular were meant to portray his own perversity and depression; he normally painted himself in the nude looking emaciated, threatening, and grim. Whereas Klimt sought to capture at least some positive or pleasurable aspects of the human spirit and the mind that existed at the unconscious level, Schiele's work almost brutally portrayed the ugliness embedded in his own psyche.



Modernism was not confined to literature and the visual arts, however. Some composers and musicians in the first decades of the twentieth century sought to shatter musical traditions, defying the expectations of their listeners by altering the very scales, notes, and tempos that western audiences were used to hearing. Some of the resulting pieces eventually became classics in their own right, while others tended to become part of the history of music more so than music very many people actually listened to.

One of the most noteworthy modernist composers was Igor Stravinsky (1882 – 1971). A Russian composer, Stravinsky's was best known for his *Rite of Spring*. The *Rite of Spring* was a ballet depicting the fertility rites of the ancient Scythians, the nomadic people native to southern Russia in the ancient past. Staged by classical ballet dancers, the *Rite of Spring* completely scandalized its early audiences; at its first performance in Paris, members of the audience hissed at the dancers, and pelted the orchestra with debris, while the press described it as pornographic and barbaric. The dancers lurched about on stage, sometimes in an overtly sexual manner, and the music changed its tempo and abandoned its central theme. Within a few years, however (and following a change in its wild choreography), the *Rite* became part of ballet's canon of great pieces.

In contrast, the Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg (1874 - 1951) invented a form of orchestral music that remains more of an important influence to avant-garde musicians and composers than something actively listened to by mainstream audiences. Schoenberg's major innovations consisted of experiments with atonality - music without a central, binding key - and a newly-invented twelve-tone scale of his own creation. Schoenberg was among the first to defy the entire tradition of western music in his experiments. Ever since the Renaissance, western musicians had worked in basically the same set of scales. As a result, listeners were "trained" from birth to expect certain sounds and certain rhythms in music. Schoenberg deliberately subverted those expectations, inserting dissonance and unexpected notes in many of his works.

Similar in some ways to the innovations in the visual arts and music, modernist literature created out a new approach to poetry and prose. Authors like Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust, Franz Kafka, and James Joyce (whose places of origins spanned from Dublin to Prague) created a new form of literature in which the nominal plot of a story was less important than the protagonist's inner life and experience of his or her surroundings and interactions. Joyce's (incredible difficult to read) novel *Ulysses* described a single unremarkable day in the life of a man in Dublin, Ireland, focusing on the vast range of thoughts, emotions, and reactions that passed through the man's consciousness rather than on the events of the day itself. Proust and Woolf also wrote works focused on the inner life rather than the outside event, and Woolf was

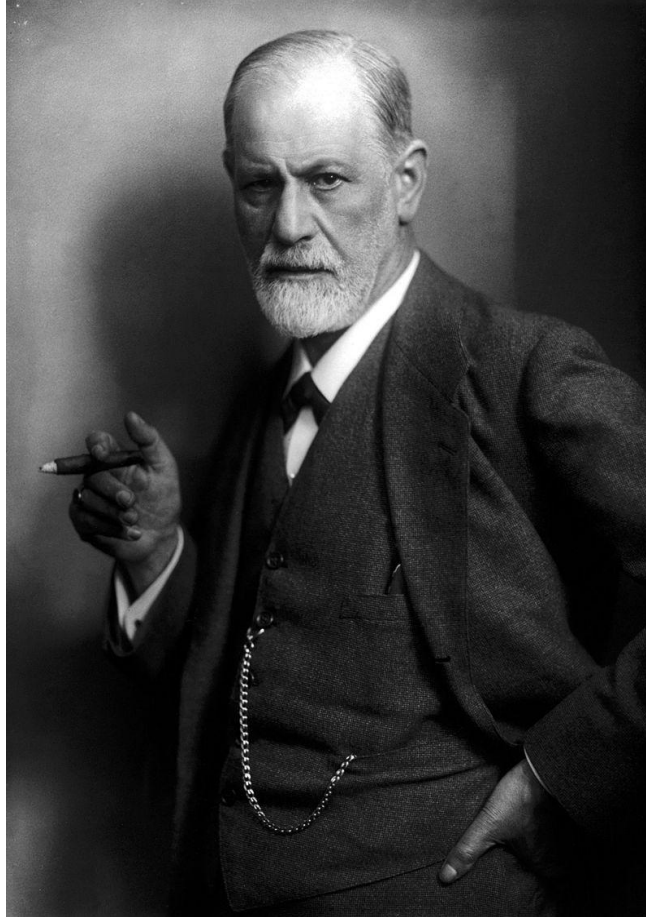
also a seminal feminist writer. Kafka's work brilliantly, and tragically, satirized the experience of being lost in the modern world, hemmed in by impersonal bureaucracies and disconnected from other people - his most famous story, *Metamorphosis*, describes the experience of a young man who awakens one day to discover that he has become a gigantic insect, but whose immediate concern is that he will be unable to make it in to his job.

Ultimately, artistic modernism in the arts, music, and literature questioned the (post-)Victorian obsession with traditional morality, hierarchy, and control. The inner life was not straightforward – it was a complicated mess of conflicting values, urges, and drives, and traditional morality was often a smokescreen over a system of repression and violence. Certain modernist artists attacked the system, while others exposed its vacuity, its emptiness or shallowness, against the darker, more complex reality they thought lay underneath.

## Freud

While not an artist himself, the great thinker of modernism was, in many ways, Sigmund Freud (1856 - 1939). Freud was one of the founders of the medical and scientific discipline of psychology. He was the forefather of the concept of modern therapy itself and his theories, while now largely rejected by psychologists in terms of their empirical accuracy, nevertheless continue to exert tremendous influence. In historical hindsight, Freud's importance derives from his work as a philosopher of the mind more so than as a "scientist" per se, although it was precisely his drive for his work to be respected as a true science that inspired his research and writing.

Freud was born in Moravia (today's Czech Republic) in 1856, and his family eventually moved to Vienna, the capital of the Austrian Empire of which Moravia was part. Freud was Jewish, and his family underwent a generational transformation that was very common among Central European Jews in the latter part of the nineteenth century, following legal emancipation from antisemitic laws: his grandparents were unassimilated and poor, his parents were able to create a successful business in a major city, and Freud himself became a highly educated professional (he received his medical degree in 1881). Many of Freud's theories were influenced by his own experience as a brilliant scholar who happened to be Jewish, living in a society rife with antisemitism - he sought to understand the inner psychological drives that led people to engage in irrational behavior.



*The best-known portrait of Freud, dating from 1921.*

Freud's greatest accomplishment was diagnosing the essential irrationality of the human mind. Influenced by modernist philosophers, by great writers like Shakespeare, and by Darwin's work on evolution, Freud came to believe that the mind itself "evolved" from childhood into adulthood in a fundamentally hostile psychic environment. The mind was forced to conform to social pressure from outside while being enslaved to its own unconscious desires (the "drives") that sought unlimited power and pleasure. Freud wanted to be the "Darwin of the mind," the inventor of a true *science* of psychology that could explain and, he hoped, cure psychological disorders.

Freud became well known because of his work with "hysterical" patients. The word hysteria is related to the Greek *hystera*, meaning womb. Essentially, "hysteria" consisted of physical symptoms of panic, pain, and paralysis in women who had no detectable physical problems. "Hysteria" was a term invented to blame the female anatomy for physical symptoms, in the absence of other discernible causes. Freud, however, believed that hysteria was the



result not of some unknown physical problem among women, but instead a physical result of psychological trauma - in almost all cases, that of what we would now describe as sexual abuse.

Freud built on the work of an earlier psychologist and employed the "talking cure" with his hysterical patients, naming his version of the talking cure "psychoanalysis." The talking cure was the process by which the therapist and the patient recounted memories, dreams, and events, searching for a buried, suppressed idea that is causing physical symptoms. As Freud's theories developed, he identified a series of common causes tied to childhood traumas that seemed remarkably consistent. He extrapolated those into "scientific" truths, most of which had to do with the development of sexual identity. This culminated in his 1905 *Three Essays in the Theory of Sexuality*.

The Freudian "talking cure" was verbal, inferential, and in a way speculative, since it was about the conversation between the therapist and the patient, working toward causes of mental disorder. The analyst played an active role, above and beyond the medical diagnosis of disorder. Freud believed that the human mind was almost always arrested in its progress toward mental health from childhood to adulthood. It was possible to be "healthy," to be mostly unencumbered by mental disorders, but it was also very difficult to arrive at that position. In turn, he hoped that his theories would create "the possibility of happiness."

Ultimately, Freud's most important theories had to do with the nature of the unconscious mind. According to Freud, the thoughts and feelings we experience and can control are just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Most thoughts and feelings are buried in the unconscious. Within the unconscious are stored repressed memories that trigger responses, verbal slips, and dreams, *symptoms* of their existence. It is always terribly difficult to reconcile one's desires and the requirements of socialization (of living in a society with its own rules and laws) and that leads inevitably to inner conflict. Thus, people form defense systems that may protect their emotions in the short term, but return later in life to cause unhappiness and alienation.

According to Freud, there are three basic areas or states that exist simultaneously in the human mind. First, part of the unconscious is the "Id:" the seat of the drives for pleasure (sexual lust, power, security, food, alcohol and other drugs, etc.) and for what might be considered "obsession" - the seemingly irrational desires that have nothing to do with pleasure per se (pyromania, kleptomania, or seemingly self-destructive political activity). Freud called the drive for pleasure "eros," the Pleasure Principle, and the obsessive and self-destructive drive "*thanatos*," the Death Drive.

Next, Freud identified another area of the unconscious as the “Superego:” the social pressure to conform, the confrontation with outside authority, and the overwhelming sense of shame and inadequacy that can, and usually does, result from facing all of the pressures of living in human society. In the context of his own, deeply Victorian bourgeois society, Freud identified the Superego’s demands as having to do primarily with the suppression of the desires that arose from the Id.

Finally, the only aspect of the human psyche the mind is directly aware of is the “Ego:” the embattled conscious mind, forced to reconcile the drives of the Id and Superego with the “reality principle,” the knowledge that to give in to one’s urges completely would be to risk injury or death. In Freud’s theory, the reason most people have so many psychological problems is that the Ego is perpetually beset by these powerful forces it is not consciously aware of. The Id bombards the Ego with an endless hunger for indulgence, while the Superego demands social conformity.

In short, Freud described the mind itself as defying control: despite the illusion of free will and autonomy, no one is capable of complete self-control. Freudian theory suggested that the life of the mind was complicated and opaque, not rational and straightforward. The great dream of the optimistic theorists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had been that proper education and rational politics could create a perfect society. Freud, however, cautioned that no one is completely rational, and that politics could easily follow the path of the Death Drive and plunge whole nations, even whole civilizations, into self-destruction. He lived to see at least part of his worst fears come to pass at the end of the life as he fled from the Nazi takeover of Austria in 1938.

One other major theme present in Freud’s theories had to do with sexuality, which he believed to be of central importance to psychology. His theories largely revolved around sexual instincts and their repression, and he invented various specific concepts like the “Oedipus complex,” the idea that young boys sexually desire their mothers and fear the authority of their fathers, and “penis envy,” the claim that girls are psychologically wounded by not having male genitalia, that he claimed were fundamental to the human psyche. For all his insight, and all his clinical work with women patients, however, Freud remained convinced that women were in a sense less “evolved” than men and were biologically destined for a secondary role. He also admitted that he could not really figure out women’s motivations; he famously asserted that the question that psychology could not answer was “what does a woman want?” In the end, the irony of Freud’s take on gender and sexuality is that it simply reproduced age-old sexual stereotypes and double standards, however important his other theories were in exploring the

unconscious. Despite the genuine changes occurring to gender in the society around him, Freud remained embedded in the assumption that a male and female physiology dictated separate and unequal destinies for men and women.

## Gender Roles

Those destinies, however, were slowly changing. As noted in the discussion of World War I in the previous chapter, gender roles had been transformed both economically and culturally during (and because of) the war. Some of those changes were durable. The range of jobs available to women was certainly larger than it had been before the war. Women continued to wear more comfortable and practical clothing after the war than before it, the restrictive ankle-length dress replaced by the looser, calf-length dress or skirt. Some women continued to cut their hair short, and of course women's suffrage was finally realized (albeit with various restrictions) in most European countries and the United States over the course of the 1920s.

No sooner had the war ended, however, that men generally did everything in their power to reverse many of the changes to gender roles it had caused. Through a combination of legal restrictions and quasi-legal practices, women were forced from traditional male jobs, prevented from enrolling in universities and medical schools, and paid significantly less than men for the same work. Fascist parties (described in a following chapter) were explicitly devoted to enforcing traditional gender roles, and when some countries were overtaken by fascist rule women were often forced out of the workplace. Everywhere, most men (and many women) continued to insist that women were inherently biologically inferior to men and that it was the "natural" role of men to serve as head of the household and head of the nation-state in equal measure.

The exemplar of both the greater freedom enjoyed by women and male resentment of that freedom was the "New Woman." A stock figure in the media of the time, the New Woman was independent, working at her own job full time and living by herself, and able to enjoy a social life that included drinking, dancing, and even the possibility of casual sex. The famous "flappers" of the 1920s, young women in the latest fashion who danced to cutting-edge American jazz and wore scandalously short, knee-length dresses, were the ultimate expression of the New Woman. While the image of the New Woman was greatly exaggerated, both in advertising and by male misogynists, there was at least a kernel of truth to the archetype. Far more women *were* independent by the 1920s than in the past, fashions really *had* changed, and thanks to halting advances in contraception, casual sexual relationships were easier to have

without fear of pregnancy. It would take at least another half-century, however, for laws against sexual discrimination to come into being in most countries, and of course the struggle for cultural equality remains unfulfilled to this day.



*The American actor Alice Joyce in 1926 in an extravagant “flapper” dress. Film stars of the day were the most visible examples of the “New Woman” most people encountered outside of advertising.*

## The Great Depression

Modernism in the arts and modernist theory came of age before, during, and after World War I; some of the most interesting writing and art of the modernist movement occurred during the 1920s. The political order of Europe (Russia, as usual, was an exception) and the United States during the 1920s was beset by struggle and conflict, but while the economies of the west struggled to recover from World War I, there was at least some economic growth. That growth came crashing to a halt in 1929 with the advent of the Great Depression.

The Great Depression has the dubious distinction of being the worst economic disaster in the modern era. It constituted an almost total failure of governments, businesses, and banks to anticipate or prevent economic disaster or to effectively deal with it. The Depression explains in large part the appeal of extremist politics like Nazism, in that the average person was profoundly frightened by what had happened to their world; instead of progress resulting in better standards of living, all of a sudden the hard-won gains of the recent past were completely ruined.

The background to the Depression was the financial mess left by World War I. The victorious alliance of Britain and France imposed massive reparations on Germany - 132 billion gold marks. In addition, the former members of the Triple Entente themselves owed enormous sums to the United States for the loans they had received during the war, amounting to approximately \$10 billion. Over the course of the 1920s, as the German economy struggled to recover (at one point the value of German currency collapsed completely in the process), the US government oversaw enormous loans to Germany. In the end, a "triangle" of debt and repayment locked together the economies of the United States and Europe: US loans underwrote German reparation payments to Britain and France, with Britain and France then trying to pay off their debts to the US. None of the debts were anywhere near settled by the end of the 1920s, not least because more loans were still flooding into the market.

The Depression started in the United States with a massive stock market crash on October 24, 1929. The ill-conceived cycle of debt described above had worked well enough for most of the 1920s while the American economy was stable and American banks were willing to underwrite new loans. When the stock market crashed, however, American banks demanded repayment of the European loans, from Germany and its former enemies alike. The capital to repay those loans simply did not exist. Businesses shut down, governments defaulted on the American loans, and unemployment soared. In one year, Germany's industrial output dropped by almost 50% and millions were out of work. In turn, inspired by liberal economic theories, governments embraced policies of austerity, cutting back the already limited social programs that existed, balancing state budgets, and slashing spending. The result was that even less capital was available in the private sector. In the United States and Western Europe, the Depression would drag on for a decade (1929 - 1939), at which point World War II overshadowed economic hardship as the great crisis of the century.

## Summing Up

What do Modernist art, Freudian psychology, shifts in gender, and the Great Depression have in common besides chronological coincidence? They were all, in different ways, symptoms of disruption and (often) a profound sense of unease that pervaded Western culture after World War I. European civilization was powerful and self-confident before the war, master of over 80% of the globe, and at the forefront of science and technology. That civilization emerged from four years of bloodshed economically shattered, politically disunited, and in many ways skeptical of the possibility of further progress. It was in this uncertain context that the most destructive political philosophy in modern history emerged: fascism, and its even more horrific offshoot, Nazism.

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## Chapter 9: Fascism

In many ways, World War I was what truly ended the nineteenth century. It undermined the faith in progress that had grown, despite all of its setbacks, throughout the nineteenth century among many, perhaps most, Europeans. The major political movements of the nineteenth century, namely nationalism, liberalism, and socialism seemed to have succeeded: everywhere in Europe nations replaced empires, and Europe controlled more of the world in 1920 than it ever had or ever would again. In the aftermath of the war, almost every government in Europe, even Germany, was a republican democracy based on the rule of law. Even socialists had cause to celebrate: there was a nominally Marxist state in Russia and socialist parties were powerful and militant all across Europe. The old order of monarchs and nobles was rendered all but obsolete, with noble titles holding on as nothing more than archaic holdovers from the past in nearly every country. In addition, of course, technology continued to advance apace.

Despite the success of all of those movements, however, with all of the hopes and aspirations of their supporters over the last century, Europe had degenerated into a horrendous and costly war. The war had *not* purified and invigorated the great powers; they were all left reeling, weakened, and at a loss for how to prevent a future war. Science had advanced, but it seemed as if its most noteworthy accomplishment was the production of more effective weapons. The global empires remained, but the seeds of their dissolution were already present.

The results were bitterness and reprisals. The Treaty of Versailles that ended the war imposed harsh penalties on Germany, returning Alsace and Lorraine to France and imposing a massive indemnity on the defeated country. The Treaty also required Germany to accept the "war guilt clause," in which it assumed full responsibility for the war having started in the first place. Simultaneously, the Austrian Empire collapsed, with Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the new Balkan nation of Yugoslavia all becoming independent countries and Austria a short-lived republic. Almost no one would have believed that another "Great War" would occur in twenty years.

In other words, World War I did not resolve any of the problems or international tensions that had started it. Instead, it made them worse because it proved how powerful and devastating modern weapons were, and it also demonstrated that no single power was likely to

be able to assert its dominance. France and Britain went out of their way in blaming Germany for the conflict, while in Germany itself, those on the right believed in the conspiracy theory in which communists and Jews had conspired to sabotage the German war effort - this was later called the "Stab in the Back" myth. Thus, many Germans felt they had been wronged twice: they had not "really" lost the war, yet they were forced to pay outrageous indemnities to the "victors."

It was in this context of anger and disappointment that fascism and its racially-obsessed offshoot Nazism arose. World War I provided the trauma, the bloodshed, and the skepticism toward liberalism and socialism that underwrote the rise of fascism. Fascism was a modern conservatism, a conservatism that clung to its mania for order and hierarchy, but which did not seek a return to the days of feudalism and monarchy. It was a populist movement, a movement of the people by the people, but instead of petty democratic bickering, it glorified the (imagined) nation, a nation united by a movement and an ethos.

## Fascism

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 *fascis*: 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 the *fascis* as a badge of 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. One place of particular note in the early history of fascism was France. There, a right-wing monarchist group called *Action Française* had existed since the Dreyfus Affair, but it transformed itself into a French fascist group despite still clinging to monarchist and traditional Catholic ideologies. When Germany defeated France in World War II, the Nazis found a large contingent of right-wing Frenchmen who were all too happy to create a home-grown French fascist state (a fact that many in France tried their best to forget after the war). Likewise, when the Nazis seized power in various places in Eastern Europe, they often found it expedient to simply work with or appoint the already-existing local fascist groups to power.



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 confusing jumble of what defined a nation in the first place often took on explicitly racial, and racist, terms among fascist groups. Now, Germans were not just people who spoke German in Central Europe; they were the German (or “Aryan,” the term itself nothing more than a pseudo-scholarly jumble of linguistic history and racist nonsense) “race.” French fascists talked about the bloodlines of the ancient Gauls that supposedly survived despite the “pollution” of the Roman invasions in the ancient past. Likewise, 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 communists – Benito Mussolini, the leader of the Italian Fascist Party, had been a prominent member of the Italian Communist Party before World War I. What fascism and communism had in common was 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 race and movement.

## Italian Fascism

As noted above, the very term “fascist” is a product of the first fascist group to seize control of a powerful country: the Italian Fascist Party. Italian Fascism was 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.

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 of thugs 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 tacitly 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 thugs terrorized the opposition.

In 1922, the weak-willed King of Italy, Vittorio Emanuele 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 (in the center) and Fascist Blackshirts during the March on Rome in 1922.*

Mussolini immediately understood the importance of appearances. The 1920s was the early age of mass media, especially 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 to mention 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 Russian gulags that would exemplify a different but related totalitarian 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 Weimar Republic

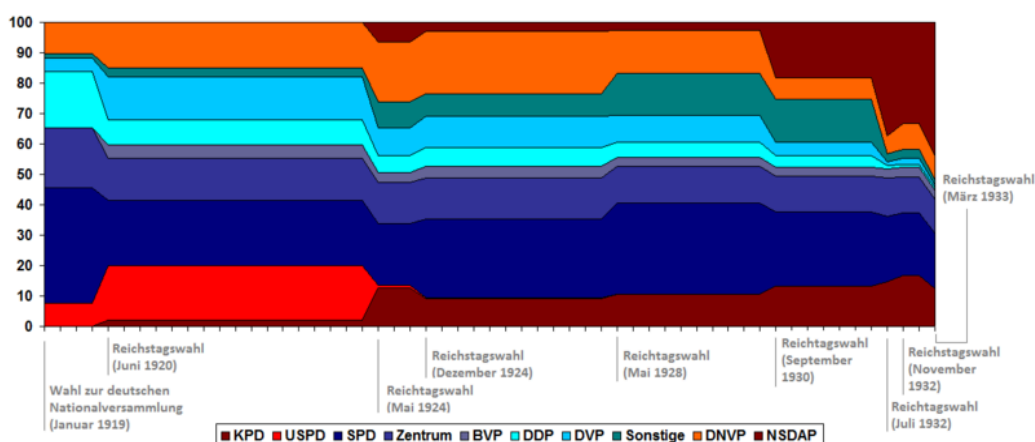
One place in Europe during the interwar period stands out as a microcosm of the political and cultural struggles occurring elsewhere: Weimar Germany. Named after the resort town in which its constitution was written in early 1919, the Weimar Republic represented a triumphant culmination of liberalism. 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.

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. 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 Russia.

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. The most powerful parties were those of the far left, the communists, and the far right, initially monarchists and conservative Catholics, with the Nazis rising to prominence at the end of the 1920s. 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.



*Diagram of electoral results over the course of the Weimar Republic. Note the lack of a governing party, as well as the rise of the Nazis (the NSDAP, marked in dark maroon at the top of the diagram) to prominence in the last years of the Republic.*

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.

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 forced shopkeepers to raise prices by the afternoon.



*Million-mark notes used as scratch paper during hyperinflation.*

In the course of a year, Germans who had spent their lives carefully building up savings saw those savings rendered worthless. This inspired anger and resentment among common people who might otherwise not be attracted to extremist solutions. The situation stabilized in 1924 after emergency negotiations overseen by American banks resulted in a new stabilized currency, but for many people in Germany their experience of democracy thus far had been disastrous. It was in this context of economic instability and political dysfunction that an extreme right-wing fringe group from the southern German state of Bavaria, the National Socialist German Workers Party, began to attract attention.

## The Nazis

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. Hitler was also one of the three "greatest" murderers of the twentieth century, along with Josef Stalin of the Soviet Union and Mao Tse-Tung of China. His obsession with a racialized, murderous vision of German power translated directly into both the Holocaust of the European Jews and World War II itself.

Nothing about Hitler's biography would seem to suggest his rise to power, however. Hitler was born in Austria in 1889, a citizen of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He dreamed of being an artist as a young man, but was rejected by the Academy of Fine Arts in the Austrian capital of Vienna – many of his works survive, depicting boring, uninspired, and moderately well-executed Austrian landscapes. Listless and lazy, but convinced from adolescence of his own greatness, Hitler invented the idea that the rejection was due not to his own lack of talent, but because of a shadowy conspiracy that sought to undermine his rise to prominence.

For several years before the outbreak of World War I, Hitler lived in Vienna in flophouses, cheap hotels for homeless men, and there he discovered right-wing politics and cultivated a growing hatred for Austria's ethnic and linguistic diversity. Hitler spent his days drifting around Vienna, absorbing the rampant antisemitism of Austrian society and developing his own theories about Jews and other "foreign" influences. Likewise, he read popular works of racist pseudo-scholarship that glorified a fabricated version of German history. It was in Vienna

that he discovered his own talent for public speaking, as well. The first groups he held enraptured by his improvised speeches about German greatness and the Jewish (and Slavic) peril were his fellow flophouse residents.

Hitler regarded the fact that Germany and Austria were separate countries as a terrible historical error. He hated the weak Austrian government and fled to Germany rather than serve his required military service in Austria. Much to his delight, World War I broke out when he was already in Germany; he enthusiastically volunteered for the German army and served at the western front, surviving both a poison gas attack and shrapnel from an exploding shell. Unlike most veterans of the war, Hitler experienced combat and service in the trenches as exhilarating and fulfilling, and he was completely without compassion - he would later shock his own generals during World War II by his callousness in spending German lives to achieve symbolic military objectives.



*Hitler, on the far right, and some of his fellow soldiers in his infantry regiment early in WWI. He trimmed his mustache to its (in)famous length during the war in order to be able to securely wear a gas mask.*

After the war, he was sent by the army to the southern German city of Munich, which was full of angry, disenchanted army veterans like himself. His assignment was to investigate a small right-wing group, the German Workers Party. His "investigation" immediately transformed



into enthusiasm, finding like-minded conservatives who loathed the Weimar Republic and blamed “international Jewry” for the defeat of Germany in the war. He swiftly rose in the ranks of the Nazis, becoming the Führer (“Leader”) of the party in 1921 thanks to his outstanding command of oratory and his ability to browbeat would-be political opponents - he unceremoniously ejected the party’s founder in the process.

Under Hitler’s leadership, the party was renamed the National Socialist German Workers Party (“Nazi” is derived from the German word for “national”), and it adopted the swastika, long a favorite of racist pseudo-historians looking for the ancient roots of the fabricated “Aryan” race, as its symbol. While the words “socialist” and “workers” would remain in the official name of the party, under Hitler’s leadership the Nazis abandoned any allegiance to actual socialist ideology over time, seeing what they called “Judeo-Bolshevism” (the supposed Jewish conspiracy that had created and ruled over the Soviet Union) as the greatest threat to German power and prosperity. In the end, Nazism was the German branch of European fascism, one that resulted in the greatest bloodshed and suffering caused by any fascist movement.

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 invented this crude scheme 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.

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 Nazi leadership on trial - note the degree to which the photo looks like a publicity stunt rather than a criminal proceeding. Hitler is joined by Erich Ludendorff, in the center, one of the top German commanders during WWI. Ludendorff flirted with Nazism early on, but abandoned the party after the Beer Hall Putsch.*

When he was released in nine months (including time served and recognition of his good behavior), Hitler was a minor national celebrity on the right. The Nazis were still a fringe group, but they were now a fringe group that people had heard of. Nazi Stormtroopers harassed leftist groups and engaged in brawls with communist militants. The party created youth organizations,

workers' and farmers' wings, and women's groups. They held rallies constantly, creating early versions of "interest groups" to gauge the issues that attracted the largest popular audience. Even so, they did not have mass support in the 1920s - they only won 2.6% of the national vote in 1928.

The Great Depression, however, threw the Weimar government and German society into such turmoil that extremists like the Nazis suddenly gained considerable mass appeal. Promising the complete repudiation of the Versailles Treaty, the build-up of the German military, an end to economic problems, and a restoration of German pride and power, the Nazis steadily grew in popularity: an electoral breakthrough in 1930 saw them win 18% of the seats in the Reichstag. In 1932 they won 37% of the national vote, the most they ever won in a free, legal election.

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, 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 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 49% in the next election. 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.

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 Führer": 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 Führer, who was supposed to embody Nazism itself.

Nazism was not just a governing philosophy, however. Hitler was obsessed with winning over "ordinary Germans" to the party's outlook, and to that end the state both bombarded the population with propaganda and sought to alleviate the dismal economic situation of the early 1930s. The Nazi state poured money into a debt-based recovery from the Depression (the economics of the recovery were totally unsustainable, but the Nazi leadership gambled that war would come before the inevitable economic collapse). Employment recovered somewhat as the state funded huge public works and, after he publicly broke with the terms of the Versailles Treaty in 1935, rearmament. Even though there were still food and consumable shortages, many Germans felt that things were better than they had been. The Nazis refused to continue war reparations and soon the rapidly-rebuilding military was staging enormous public rallies.

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 German dominance. 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.

The Nazis targeted almost every conceivable social group with a specific propaganda campaign and encouraged (or required) German citizens to join a specific Nazi league: workers were encouraged to work hard for the good of the state, women were encouraged to produce as

many healthy children as possible (and to stay out of the workplace), boys were enrolled in a paramilitary scouting organization, the Hitler Youth, and girls in the League of German Girls, trained as future mothers and domestics. All vocations and genders were united in the glorification of the military and, of course, of the Führer himself ("Heil Hitler" was the official greeting used by millions of German citizens, whether or not they ever joined the Nazi party itself). The purpose of the campaigns was to win the loyalty of the population to the regime and to Hitler personally, and nearly the entire population at least paid lip service to the new norms.



*Hitler Youth and League of German Girls members at a rally in 1933.*

The dark side of both the propaganda and the legal framework of the Third Reich was the suspension of civil rights and the concomitant campaigns against the so-called "enemies" of the German people. The Nazis vilified Jews, as well as other groups like people with disabilities and the Romani (better known as "Gypsies," although the term itself is something of an ethnic slur). Starting in 1933, the state began a campaign of involuntary sterilizations of disabled and mixed-race peoples. Jewish businesses were targeted for vandalism and Jewish people were attacked. In 1935 the Nazis passed the so-called "Nuremberg Laws" which outlawed Jews from

working in various professions, stripped Jews of citizenship, and made sex between Jews and non-Jews a serious crime.

Even as Germans were encouraged to identify with the Nazi state, and joining the Nazi Party itself soon became an excellent way to advance one's career, the Nazis also held out the threat of imprisonment or death for those who dared defy them. The first concentration camp was opened within weeks of Hitler's appointment as chancellor in 1933, and a vast web of police forces soon monitored the German population. The most important organization in Nazi Germany was the SS (*Schutzstaffel*, meaning "protection squadron"), an enormous force of dedicated Nazis with almost unlimited police powers. The SS had the right to hold anyone indefinitely, without trial, in "protective custody" in a concentration camp, and the Nazi secret police, the Gestapo, were merely one part of the SS. This combination of incentives (e.g. propaganda, programs, incentives) and threats (e.g. the SS, concentration camps) helps explain why there was no significant resistance to the Nazi regime from within Germany.

## The Spanish Civil War

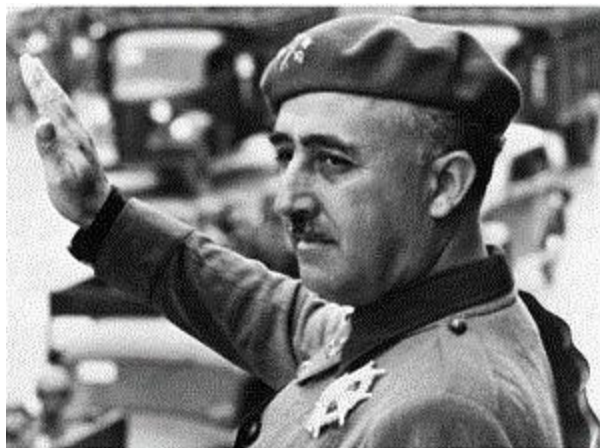
The first real war launched by fascist forces was not in Italy or Germany, however, but in Spain. The greatest of the European powers in the sixteenth century, Spain had long since sunk into obscurity, commercial weakness, and backwardness. Its society in 1920 was very much like it had been a century earlier: most of the country was populated by poor rural farmers and laborers, and an alliance of the army, Catholic church, and old noble families still controlled the government in Madrid. The king, Alfonso XIII, still held real power, despite his own personal ineptitude. In many ways, Spain was the last place in Europe that clung to the old order of the nineteenth century.

Socialists and liberals were increasingly militant by the early 1920s, and Catalan and Basque nationalists likewise agitated for independence from Spain. From 1923 to 1930, a general named Primo de Rivera acted as a virtual dictator (with the support of the king) trying to drag Spain into the twentieth century by building dams, roads, and sewers. He weakened what representation there was in the state by making government ministers independent of the parliament (the Cortes) and he even managed to lose support in the army by interfering in the promotion of officers.

In 1931, the king abdicated after an anti-monarchist majority took the Cortes. The result was a republic, whose parliament was dominated by liberals and moderate socialists. The parliament pushed through laws that formally separated church and state (for the first time in

Spanish history) and redistributed land to the poor, seized from the enormous estates of the richest nobles. Peasants in the countryside went further, attacking churches, convents, and the estates of the nobility. Meanwhile, Spanish communists sought a Russian-style communist revolution and, even further to the left, a substantial anarchist coalition aimed at the complete abolition of government. Thus, the left-center coalition was increasingly beleaguered, as the far left gravitated away and the nobility and clergy joined with the army in an anti-parliamentarian right. Two years of anarchy resulted, from 1933 – 1935.

In 1935, as the forces of the right rallied around a general named Francisco Franco, the socialists, liberals, anarchists, and communists formed a Popular Front to fight it. More chaos ensued, with Franco's forces growing in power and the Popular Front suffering from infighting (i.e. the anarchists, communists, liberals, and nationalist minorities did not work well together). Franco's traditional conservative forces joined with Spanish fascists, the Falange, soon openly supported by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. In 1936, Franco's forces seized several key regions in Spain.



*Francisco Franco*

The war began in earnest in that year. It was hugely bloody; probably about 600,000 people died, of which 200,000 were “loyalists” (the blanket term for the pro-republican, or at least anti-monarchical, forces) summarily executed after being captured by the “nationalists” under Franco. Meanwhile, the loyalists carried out atrocities of their own, targeting especially members of the church. One of the iconic moments in the war was the arrival of over 20,000 foreign volunteers on the side of the loyalists, including the Abraham Lincoln Brigade from the United States. Both the American writer Ernest Hemingway and the English writer George Orwell fought in defense of the republic.

While, officially, there was an international non-interventionist agreement among the governments of Europe and the US with regards to Spain, Germany and Italy blatantly violated it and provided both troops and equipment to the nationalist forces. The most effective support provided by Italy or Germany came from the German air force, the *Luftwaffe*, which used Spain as a training ground with real targets. The loyalists had no means to fight against planes, so they suffered consistent defeats and setbacks from German bombing raids. Overall, the Spanish Civil War allowed Italy and Germany to "try out" their new armies before committing to a larger war in Europe (Italy, however, did launch a brutal invasion of Ethiopia in 1934 as well).

The nationalists triumphed in early 1939, having cut off the pockets of loyalists off from one another. They were recognized as the legitimate government of Spain internationally, and despite their promises to the contrary, they immediately began carrying out reprisals against the now-defeated loyalists. Franco adopted the title of *Caudillo*, or leader, in the same manner as Mussolini and Hitler. Where Spain differed from the other fascist powers was that Franco was well aware of its relative weakness and deliberately avoided an expansionist foreign policy; Hitler once spent a fruitless day trying to convince him to join the war once World War II was underway.

Franco's regime, which united the old nobles, the army, and the Catholic church, controlled the country until Franco's death in 1975. Just as Spain was one of the last countries still tied to the old political order of kings and nobles after World War I, it was among the last fascistic countries long after Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy had fallen.

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## Chapter 10: World War II

World War II was the defining disaster of the twentieth century for millions of people across the globe. It was the culmination of the vision of total war the world had first encountered in World War I, but it was generalized to vast stretches of the planet, not just parts of Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. The promise of technology was realized in its most perverse form as the energy of advanced industrialism was unleashed in weapons of mass slaughter. World War II was also the setting for the Holocaust, the first and only incidence of industrialized mass murder in world history.

The war resulted in approximately 55 - 60 million deaths, of which 25 - 27 million were Soviets and 6 million were the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. While nationalist rivalries and international tensions certainly led to the war in some ways, as they had in World War I, the primary cause of WWII was unquestionably Adolf Hitler's personal obsession with creating a vastly expanded German empire. Europe had, in some ways, stumbled into World War I. World War II was instead a war of aggression launched by a single belligerent, Germany, supported by its allies. (Note: Germany, Italy, Japan, and their allies are referred to as "The Axis" in World War II. Britain, the US, the USSR, and their allies are referred to as "The Allies" in World War II.)

### Leading up to War

The years leading up to the start of World War II (which began in September of 1939) saw a series of bold moves by Nazi leadership. Over the course of the 1930s, the Nazi government steadily broke with the provisions of the Versailles Treaty. While the (pre-Nazi) German state had already suspended reparation payments, once the Nazis were in control they simply refused to negotiate the possibility of the payments ever resuming. By 1934, in secret, Germany began the process of re-arming, and then in 1935 it openly moved toward building a military that would dwarf even its World War I equivalent.

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 antisemitic 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 minority, prompted an international crisis. The British and French governments hastily convened a conference in Munich to stave off war, and there, instead of defending Czech sovereignty (which the Czechs were demanding),

the French and British agreed that Germany should annex the Sudetenland to “protect” its German population. Then, in early 1939, German troops simply occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia. The Czech lands were divided between Germany and a newly-created protectorate, while Slovakia became a puppet state under an antisemitic Catholic priest, Jozef Tiso.



*Hitler greeting the British prime minister Neville Chamberlain at the Munich Peace Conference that agreed to the German annexation of the Sudetenland.*

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 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 Hitler had absolutely no intention of honoring the pact in the long term, the Soviet Premier Josef Stalin *did*, believing both that Germany was not strong enough to

threaten Soviet territory and that the future war (which he accepted as inevitable) would be a squabble among the capitalist nations that did not involve his own resolutely communist state. To sweeten the deal for the Soviets, the pact secretly included provisions to divide Poland between Germany and the USSR in the immediate future.

## The Early War

It finally came to war in September of 1939. The Nazis claimed that Poles had been abusing and mistreating ethnic Germans in Poland, and Nazi propagandists fabricated a number of supposed atrocities that had been perpetrated against Germans. Using this excuse, the German army invaded in September. France and Britain finally had to face the hard truth that there was no appeasing Hitler, and they declared war on Germany. As part of the pre-war agreement with Germany, the Soviet Union invaded Poland from the east as German forces invaded from the west, with the Soviets occupying eastern Poland in the name of both territorial expansion for its own sake and to provide a buffer from Germany and the west.

The most important lesson German strategists had learned from World War I was how to overcome trench warfare. After years of stalemate, Germany had managed to break through the French and British lines on the western front right at the end of the war, before they were pushed back by the flood of American troops. Military technology advanced rapidly between the wars, equipping each of the major nations with fast-moving, heavily armored tanks and heavy bombers supported by fighter planes. It would be possible to strike much more quickly and much harder than had the ragged lines of charging soldiers “going over the top” twenty years earlier.

Likewise, as American intervention had proved in World War I, all of the combatants in the Second World War recognized the key role of industrial production itself. The winner in war would be not only the side that struck first and hardest, but the side that could continue to churn out weapons and equipment at the highest rates for the longest time. In that sense, industrial capacity was as important as fighting ability. German strategists had learned all of these lessons, and the German army - the *Wehrmacht* - struck with overwhelming force, backed by an industrial base designed to support a lengthy war.

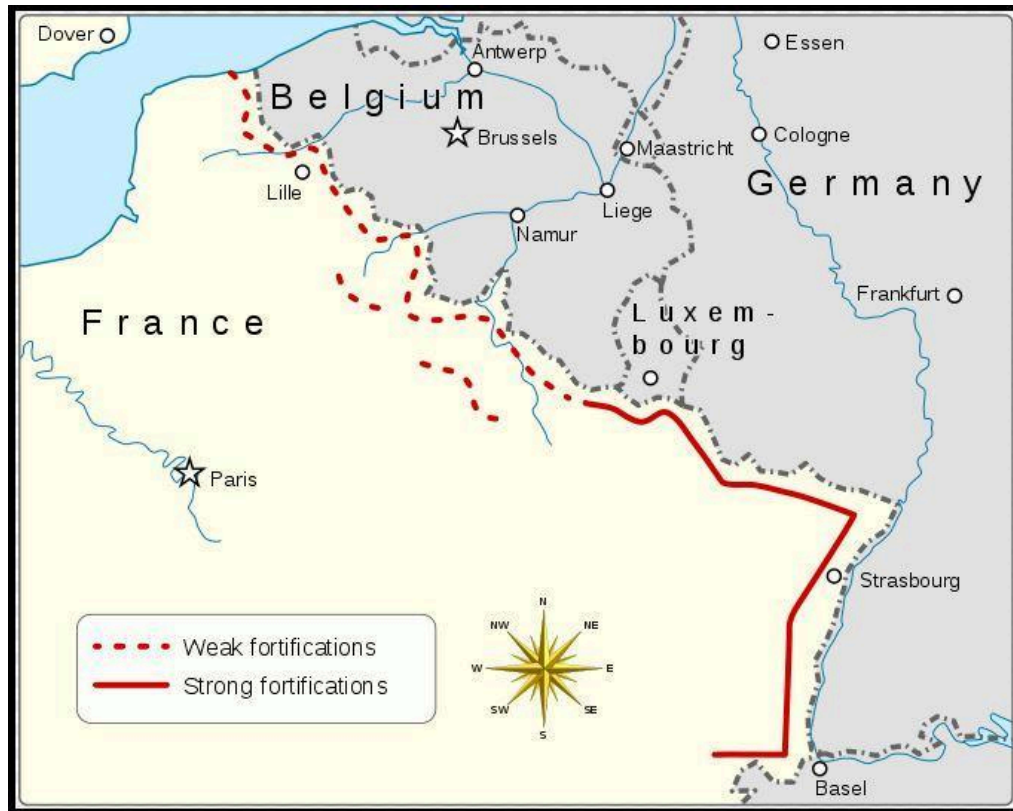
When Germany finally attacked Poland in September of 1939, the *Wehrmacht* unleashed (what the Allies called) *Blitzkrieg*, lightning war, which consisted of fast-moving armored divisions supported by overwhelming air support. Behind those armored divisions the main body of German infantry neutralized remaining resistance and, typically, succeeded in

taking thousands (sometimes hundreds of thousands) of prisoners of war. Blitzkrieg had originally been conceived by a French officer, Charles de Gaulle, in a military tactical plan regarding mobile warfare. It was rejected by the French General Staff but was acquired by the Germans and implemented by the *Wehrmacht*. (The irony is that De Gaulle would go on to become the leader of the anti-Nazi Free French forces in the war after France itself surrendered).

The first stage of the war resulted in complete German victory. The Polish army put up a valiant defense but was swiftly crushed. Over 1,300 planes attacked Poland at once in the early stage of the invasion, and Poland capitulated in October, with its government fleeing to exile in London. While the smaller nations in the region warily watched their own borders, most global attention shifted to the border with France, the obvious next stage in the plans for German conquest.

While France had declared war on Germany immediately in September of 1939, it did not actually attack. French plans for a future war with Germany had revolved around defense, meaning awaiting a German attack, since the end of World War I. After WWI, the French built a huge series of bunkers and fortresses along the French - German border known as the Maginot Line. There, from September of 1939 until May of 1940, the French military essentially waited for Germany to invade - this was a period the French came to refer to as the "*drôle de guerre*," or "joke war" (the British called it the "phony war," the Germans *Sitzkrieg* or "sitting war"). The assumption had been that Germany would be held back by the heavy fortifications and could be pushed back, and the French army simply did not have any plans, or intentions, to attack Germany in the meantime.

Instead, the Germans had the (in hindsight, not entirely surprising) idea to go around the Maginot Line. In April, German forces invaded and swiftly defeated Denmark and Norway, despite a valiant resistance by the Norwegians. Then, on the 10th of May, they attacked the Netherlands, Belgium, and France, sending the bulk of their forces through a forest on the French - Belgian border that the French had, wrongly, thought was impassable to an army. The Germans proved far more effective than the French or British at using tanks and artillery, and they immediately began driving the French and British forces back. The Maginot Line, meanwhile, went unused, with the German invasion simply bypassing it completely with the Belgian invasion.



*German forces invaded France through southern Belgium, bypassing the Maginot Line's "strong fortifications" entirely.*

An infamous incident occurred in late May, when over 300,000 British and French soldiers retreating from the Germans were pinned down on the coast of the English Channel near the French town of Dunkirk. There, a flotilla of navy and fishing vessels managed to evacuate them back to England while the British Royal Air Force held off the opposing German *Luftwaffe* (air force). This retreat was counted as a success by the standards of the Allies at the time, although the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill reminded his countrymen that successful retreats were not how wars were won.

The defeat of France and its allied British Expeditionary Force is, in hindsight, all the more disappointing in that the combined Allied forces were more numerous than their German enemies and could have, conceivably, put up a stiff fight. Instead, the French sent their armored forces toward Holland while the Germans smashed into France itself, the British and French proved inept at working together, and Allied morale collapsed completely. The French in particular did not realize the potential of tank warfare: they treated tanks more as mobile artillery

platforms than as weapons in their own right, and they had no armored divisions, just tanks interspersed with infantry divisions.

In the end, France surrendered to Germany on June 22. Germany occupied the central and northern parts of France but allowed a group of right-wing French politicians and generals to create a Nazi-allied puppet state in the south. That state became known as the Vichy Regime, named after the spa town of Vichy that served as its capital. There, the Vichy government rapidly set up a distinctly French fascist state, complete with concentration camps, antisemitic laws, and a state of war with Britain.

Thus, as of June of 1940, no major powers remained to oppose Germany but Britain (the United States, while far more favorable to Britain than Germany, remained neutral). Hitler had initially hoped that the British would agree to surrender the continent and negotiate while he consolidated his victory (and turned against the USSR). Instead, Britain refused to back down and handed over power to an emergency government headed by the new prime minister, Winston Churchill. Starting in July of 1940, the Luftwaffe began a campaign to utterly destroy the Royal Air Force (RAF) of Britain and to terrify the British into surrendering. German plans revolved around a naval invasion of the British Isles across the English Channel, but German strategists conceded that they would have to cripple the RAF for the invasion to be possible. The resulting months of combat in the skies came to be known as The Battle of Britain. It was the “greatest” series of air battles ever fought, lasting from July through September of 1940, with thousands of planes battling in the skies every day and night.

The British were quite well prepared. They had the newly-created technology of radar, which allowed them to anticipate German attacks. In addition to the RAF, the British had numerous batteries of anti-aircraft guns that inflicted significant losses on the Luftwaffe. Many British pilots survived crashes and were rescued, whereas German pilots who were shot down either died or were captured. Most importantly, British factories churned out twice as many new planes as did German ones over the course of the war. Thus, the RAF was able to counter German attacks with new, effective fighters and increasingly seasoned pilots. By the end of September, much to Hitler’s fury, Germany had to abandon the immediate goal of invading Britain.

In the meantime, a series of events shifted the focus of the war to North Africa, Greece, and the Balkans. Mussolini had ordered the Italian army to invade British territories in Africa (most importantly Egypt) and to attack Yugoslavia and Greece in 1940. The Italians were largely ineffective, however, and all their attack did was inspire a spirited British counter-offensive and a strong anti-Italian resistance movement in the Balkans. The Germans,

however, needed supplies from the Balkans and southeastern Europe, including both foodstuffs and natural resources like oil. It would be literally unable to continue the war if the Allies managed to take over these regions.

Thus, Germany sent forces to the Balkans and Africa to support their Italian allies. By the spring of 1941 the Germans held all of southeastern Europe and had pushed the British back in Africa – yet more important victories for the Nazis but also a delay in their plans. Another setback was that Hitler’s attempt to get the Spanish to join the war fell flat, when the Spanish dictator Franco indicated that Spain was simply too poor and weak, especially after its civil war, to join the Axis, despite the obvious political affinity between fascist Spain and Nazi Germany (Hitler said that he would rather have teeth extracted than endure another meeting like the one he suffered through with Franco).

## The Japanese Empire and the United States

In its first two years, the United States stayed out of the war – “isolationism” was still a very popular stance among many Americans. In part because of the heroism of the British defense, however, the American Congress passed the Lend-Lease Act in March of 1941 which authorized unlimited support for Britain, mostly taking the form of food and military supplies provided on credit, “short of war.” Britain relied both on American supplies and complete governmental control of its own economy to survive in the coming years. With German blockades preventing the importation of anywhere near the pre-war amounts of food, every aspect of the British economy (especially agriculture and other forms of food production) was directed by emergency wartime ministries to keep the British population from starving.

The specific decision by Hitler and the Nazi leadership that resulted in the United States joining the Allies was the alliance between Germany and Japan. In September of 1941, Germany, Italy, and Japan signed the Tripartite Pact. The Pact stipulated that any of the three powers would declare war on a neutral country that declared war on one of the others. Practically speaking, Germany hoped that the Pact would make American politicians think twice about joining Britain in the war effort. Instead, it soon backfired, thanks to the fateful decision of the Japanese leadership to provoke war with the United States.

That decision was based on decades of Japanese expansionism in Asia before World War II and the resulting tensions with the United States. Ever since the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan had focused its growing military and industrial might on expanding its power across East Asia, starting with Korea in the late nineteenth century (culminating in its formal annexation



in 1910). Following the annexation of Korea, Imperial Japan expanded its power into Manchuria in northeastern China, creating a puppet kingdom there in 1931. That prompted the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War that would rage until the end of World War II itself and which created the context for the rise of the Chinese Communist Party to power. Over 300,000 Japanese citizens migrated to Manchuria during this period, and the Japanese leadership envisioned the true colonization of the entire region over time. Despite the astonishing ambition of the conquest of so much Chinese territory, however, further expansion was already in the works.

In 1938, the Japanese government announced the creation of the “New Order in East Asia” and the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere,” linked concepts that asserted that the Japanese were the pre-eminent “race” of Asia owing to their supposed racial purity and Japan’s ancient political lineage. Because of that purity and strength, Japan would “liberate” Asia from European and American imperialism, joining the nations of Asia together under Japanese leadership. In fact, just as Europeans had used the idea of the “civilizing mission” during their imperialistic ventures to justify what was really just a series of brutal conquests and massive economic exploitation, Japan’s empire would follow suit: in Korea, Manchuria, and in the nations of the Pacific that would fall under Japanese domination in the years that followed, Japan was responsible for enormous bloodshed and suffering.

Thus, years before World War II began, the Japanese Empire had already spent years acquiring territory from its neighbors at a terrible cost in life. That much was clear already in China, with the Sino-Japanese War extending beyond Manchuria into China itself. In December of 1937, Japanese forces brutally sacked Nanjing in the “Rape of Nanjing,” carrying out a nearly genocidal takeover of the city and its region and resulting in as many as 300,000 deaths. A colossal series of battles in 1937 - 1938 between the forces of Japan and those of the Guomindang (the closest thing to a legitimate government in China at the time) resulted in the deaths of 800,000 combatants and civilian bystanders. Millions of Chinese were forced to flee their homes, resulting in over 6 million refugees. Japanese soldiers were notoriously cruel, forcing as many as 200,000 women into sexual slavery as “comfort women,” murdering prisoners of war, and killing civilians without hesitation. There, again, the parallels between the conduct of the Japanese Empire and that of the fascist countries of Europe - most obviously Nazi Germany - are obvious.

Standing in the way of further expansion, however, was the United States. The US had made it clear that it did not accept the legitimacy of Japanese expansion, and it certainly would not tolerate the conquest of the island nations of the Pacific, not least because the US had controlled the Philippines since the Spanish-American War of 1898. US disapproval was born of

both an understandable wariness of Japanese dominance across the Pacific and straightforward anti-Asian racism; few in the US had complained of European imperialism during its heyday, after all, yet there was almost universal hostility in white-dominated American society to the notion that Japan's conquests were justified.

With France in disarray after its fall to Nazi Germany a year earlier, Japan occupied the former French territory of Indochina (much of Southeast Asia) in the summer of 1941, and Japanese forces were poised to threaten the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) as well. American and Japanese diplomats alike claimed to want to preserve peace in the Pacific, but the Japanese leadership was well aware that further conquest would be almost impossible in the face of US opposition. Thus, the fateful decision was made to attack the US directly, with the goal of damaging US forces badly enough that the US would lose the will to try to contain Japanese expansion. On December 7, 1941, a massive surprise attack was launched by Japan against the US Navy base at Pearl Harbor in Honolulu, Hawaii, sinking several important vessels and partly crippling the Pacific fleet itself. In the aftermath, the US declared war on Japan, and (against the warnings of his advisers), Hitler insisted that Germany declare war on the US. All of the major powers of World War II were thus fully committed to the war effort.



*The sinking of the battleship USS Arizona during the attack on Pearl Harbor.*

Just as the German invasion of the USSR had been a stunning success in its early period, Imperial Japanese forces enjoyed a spectacular series of victories in the first six months of the Pacific War. Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, and various smaller islands in the Pacific all fell to Japan by May of 1942, and it took months for the US to retool its industrial base

to produce military equipment to fight back. In the long run, however, the US economy and population vastly outstripped the Japanese equivalents, and despite the losses at Pearl Harbor and Japanese victories in 1942, the US was well positioned to engage its forces against Japan in the Pacific Theater of the war while simultaneously supporting the British and Soviet effort against Germany in Europe.

In the end, Japanese occupation of its territories resulted in countless atrocities; current scholarship indicates that over 3 million civilians across Asia were killed by Japanese forces, directly or through starvation or abuse. In fact, the only major contrast between German conduct in Eastern Europe and Japanese conduct in its new imperial possessions is that Imperial Japan did not carry out a single full-scale genocide like the Holocaust of the European Jews perpetrated by the Nazis. While Imperial Japan claimed that racial supremacy justified their empire's existence, Japanese racism did not include a scapegoat comparable to Nazi racism's obsessive focus on the Jews. Needless to say, the absence of a similarly racially motivated genocide was cold comfort for the millions who suffered under Japanese occupation.

## The War in the East

Back in Europe, World War II seemed like it was over in a little more than a year: Germany controlled Poland, Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark, France, and Belgium, all within nine months of the initial attack on Poland. As noted above, its forces were soon making headway in the Balkans and North Africa as well. Hitler had first conceived of the war against the USSR as something to be accomplished after defeating the rest of Europe, and thus the planned invasion of Britain was to be the final step before the Soviet invasion. The fact that Britain was not only holding out, but holding on, however, led to a change in German plans: the Soviet invasion would have to occur before Britain was defeated.

In the overall context of the war, by far the largest and most important target for Germany was the Soviet Union. The non-aggression pact signed just before the beginning of the war between the USSR and Germany had given the Nazis the time to concentrate on subduing the rest of Europe. By the spring of 1941, Hitler felt confident that an all-out attack on the USSR was certain to succeed, now that German military resources could be concentrated mostly in the east. He was spurred on by the fact that, according to his own racial ideology, the Slavs of Eastern Europe (most obviously the Russians) were so inferior to the "Aryan" Germans that they would be unable to mount an effective resistance. Thus, Hitler anticipated the conquest of the Soviet Union taking about ten weeks.

For his part, Stalin did not think Hitler would be foolish enough to try to invade the Soviet Union, especially before Germany had truly “won” in the west. In 1939, Stalin reported to his advisers that “The war will be fought between two groups of capitalist states...we have nothing against it if they batter and weaken each other. It would be no bad thing if Germany were to knock the richest capitalist countries (particularly England) off their feet.” Furthermore, every European school child learned about Napoleon’s disastrous attempted invasion of Russia in 1812, and thus the sheer size of Soviet territory seemed like a logical impediment to invasion (in fact, the German invasion was deliberately timed to coincide with the 129th anniversary of Napoleon’s invasion - in the minds of the Nazis, where the French had failed, Germany would succeed). Stalin dismissed intelligence reports of the massive military buildup that preceded the invasion, remaining convinced that, at the very least, Germany would not attack while Britain remained unconquered.

While we now know that he was completely wrong about Hitler’s intentions, Stalin had good reason for not thinking that Germany would dare attack - the USSR had one-sixth of the land surface of the earth, with a population of about 170,000,000. Its standing army as of 1941 was 5.5 million strong, with 12 million in reserve. It also had a vast superiority in quantity (albeit not quality) of equipment at the start of the war. Indeed, by the end of the war, the Soviets had mobilized 30.6 million soldiers (of whom 800,000 were women: the USSR was the only nation to rely on women in front-line combat roles, at which they equaled their male countrymen in effectiveness). Given that vast strength, Stalin was astonished when the Germans attacked, reportedly spending hours in a daze before ordering an armed response.

On June 22 of 1941, Germany invaded the USSR with over 3 million troops. This invasion was codenamed Operation Barbarossa, after a medieval German king who warred with the Slavs. The first few months were a horrendous disaster for the Soviets. The Soviet air force was utterly destroyed, as were most of its armored divisions. Hundreds of thousands of Soviet soldiers were taken prisoner. Stalin had spent the late 1930s “purging” various groups within the Soviet state and the army, and his purges had already killed almost all of the experienced commanders, leaving inexperienced and sometimes inept replacements in their wake. In many areas, the locals actually welcomed the Germans as a better controlling force than the Bolsheviks had been, putting up no resistance at all. Even though Hitler himself was frustrated to discover that his ten-week estimate of conquest was inaccurate, the first months of the invasion still amounted to an astonishing success for German forces.

Despite its early success, however, the German advance halted by winter. The initial welcome German soldiers received vanished when it was revealed that the German army and

the Nazi SS were at least as bad as had been the communists, pressing people into work gangs, murdering resisters, and most importantly, shipping everything that could possibly be useful for the German war effort back to Germany, including both equipment and foodstuffs. Thus, groups of “partisans” (i.e. insurgents) mounted successful resistance movements that cost the Germans men and resources. Likewise, German forces had advanced so quickly that they were often bogged down in transit, with German supply lines stretched to the breaking point. Thus, just as had happened during Napoleon's retreat over a hundred years earlier, guerrilla fighters were able to strand and kill the foreign invaders.



*The German advance between June and December 1941 opened a front stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea, representing a terrible loss of territory and life to the Soviets.*

Just as it had thwarted Napoleon as well, the Russian winter played a key role in freezing the German invasion in its tracks. Mud initially slowed the German advance in autumn, then the bitter cold of winter set in. The Germans were not equipped for winter conditions, having set out in their summer uniforms. Despite the Wehrmacht's mechanization, German forces still used horses extensively for the transportation of supplies, with many of the horses

dying from the cold. Even machines could not stand up to the conditions; it got so cold that engines broke down and tanks and armored cars were rendered immobile. Thus, the German army, while still huge and powerful, was largely frozen in place in the winter of 1941 - 1942.

Incredibly, the Soviets were able to use this breathing room to literally dismantle their factories and transport them to the east, outside of the range of the German bombers. Whole factories, particularly in the Ukraine, were stripped of motors, turbines, and any other useful equipment that could be moved, and sent hundreds of miles away from the front lines. There, they were rebuilt and put back to work. By 1943, a year and a half after the initial invasion, the Soviets were producing more military hardware than were the Germans. Likewise, despite the relative success of the German invasion, Germany lost over 1.4 million men as casualties in the first year.

## The Home Front

World War II was unprecedented in its effects on civilian populations. Many prior wars of the modern era had largely spared civilians, with most casualties limited to the men who fought or logistically supported the fighting. The range of bombers in World War II, however, ensured that civilians were at risk even when they lived hundreds of miles from the front lines. From the Battle of Britain onward, while military targets were given priority, civilian targets were also deliberately sought out by German bombers, and when the war began to turn against Germany the Allies eagerly returned the favor by raining bombs on German cities. What Nazi strategists called the “War of Annihilation” launched by Germany against the Soviet Union was specifically aimed at destroying the Soviet population, not just its government, as is so horribly illustrated by the death tolls: some 25 million Soviets died, including approximately 17 million civilians. Likewise, the Holocaust of the European Jews (described in detail in the next chapter) murdered some 6 million Jewish civilians deliberately and systematically.

Thus, the experience of the war by civilians in the countries in or near the fighting often revolved around terror and hardship. Everyone, including those spared by the bombings or foreign occupation, had to contend with shortages of food and supplies that grew worse over time. As an example, British civilians experienced rationing immediately at the outbreak of war that grew ever more stringent as the war went on: the weekly 8 oz. (about two sticks) ration of butter per person at the start of the war was down to 2 oz. (about half a stick) by 1945. Rationing ensured that only civilian populations in actual war zones were likely to face outright famine, but hunger was widespread everywhere. British farmers were considered so important

to the war effort that they were excluded from conscription and were hailed as heroes in government propaganda.

In a familiar pattern from World War I, women played an enormous role on the home front during World War II. Millions of women worked in war production in all of the Allies countries, with women almost completely replacing men in Soviet agriculture by the war's end. Both Britain and the USSR conscripted women to work in various ways and war industries were completely dependent on women's labor for most of the war. Propaganda hailed women's participation in the war as a patriotic necessity, with iconic characters like the American "Rosie the Riveter" created to inspire women to contribute as much as possible to the war effort. Despite this acknowledgment, women were still paid as little as half of men's wages for the same work almost everywhere (Winston Churchill even personally defeated an effort led by women teachers, and supported by parliament, for equal pay).



*Rosie the Riveter.*

In comparison to World War I, there was a major difference in how the Second World War was perceived by most civilians on the homefront: it was an existential battle for democracy and freedom for most Americans, but for most of the European nations it was a war for survival itself. One of the major factors that contributed to the loyalty of German civilians to the Nazi regime until the bitter end was the simple, pragmatic understanding that if

Germany lost it would be at the mercy of the Soviet Union, a country that the German military had set out to utterly obliterate. For the Soviets, of course, only a fanatical resistance to German aggression could save their nation and their lives. Even in countries that Germany had not set out to destroy, most civilians dreaded the prospect of a German victory as being nearly equivalent. Everywhere in occupied countries civilians desperately sought out scraps of information that might indicate that the war was finally turning against the Third Reich.

For its part, Nazi Germany persisted in the war effort by relying on a simple, ancient institution: slavery. Prisoners in concentration camps (Jews and non-Jews alike) were all, by definition, slaves of the regime, put to work in factories, quarries, forests, and workshops and “paid” in meager rations. Millions of civilians from occupied countries were either conscripted to work on behalf of Germany in their own countries or were captured and sent into the Reich as slaves, with some 8 million slaves toiling within the German borders by the end of 1944. Even when German factories were crippled by Allied bombs the war machine held together thanks to its massive reliance on slavery. In short, it was not mere “slave labor” (a phrase that weakens the horror of the institution) that powered the Third Reich, it was slavery enforced through lethal violence.

## The Turn of the Tide

Despite the power of Britain, the US, and the USSR, the Axis war effort continued with amazing success well into 1942. A German army under the general Erwin Rommel (“the Desert Fox”) in North Africa pushed to within a few hundred miles of the Suez Canal in Egypt, threatening to cut the Allies off from much of their oil supply. Once the winter of 1941 - 1942 was over, the Germans continued to advance into Soviet territory, endangering the rebuilt factories and Soviet oil fields in the Caucasus. Japan, meanwhile, took advantage of the success of the Pearl Harbor attack and occupied dozens of islands across the Pacific. A series of Allied victories in 1942 and 1943, however, turned the tide of the war.

Two major naval engagements in the Pacific spelled disaster for Japan. In May of 1942, at the Battle of the Coral Sea, American forces defeated a Japanese invasion force targeting Australia and drove the Japanese fleet back. In June of 1942, at the Battle of Midway, American forces sank four Japanese aircraft carriers. The importance of Midway was not the loss itself, which was less severe than the losses the American navy had already sustained. Instead, it was the fact that the Americans had the industrial capacity to rebuild, whereas there was no



way that Japan could do so. From that point on, American forces slowly but steadily "island hopped" across the Pacific, driving Japanese forces from the islands they had occupied.

In Egypt, meanwhile, British forces managed to decisively defeat and push back the Germans in October of 1942. An American army soon landed to help them, and the Allies forced the Germans to retreat by November. By July of 1943, the Allies were poised to bring the fight to Italy itself. Vichy French territories in North Africa had fallen after an ineffectual resistance earlier, in November 1942, which led Hitler to order the complete occupation of France the same month; the fascist puppet state of the Vichy Regime thus only lasted from June of 1940 to November of 1942.

The "real" turn of the tide occurred in the Soviet Union, however. In late 1942, a huge German army was dispatched against the city of Stalingrad near the Black Sea. For months, Soviet soldiers fought the Germans in brutal street battles, losing far more soldiers than did the Germans but grinding the German advance to a halt. The Germans were held at bay until the main Soviet army was assembled, attacking German supply lines and trapping the German forces in and around the city. By November, the Germans were being beaten, and the German general in charge directly disobeyed Hitler and surrendered in February of 1943. Here, the Germans were not in their element – urban warfare was not the same as Blitzkrieg, and the fanatical resistance of the Soviets (who paid with over 1.1 million casualties) stopped them.

Later that year an enormous Soviet army led by 9,000 tanks defeated a German army near the city of Kursk, 500 miles south of Moscow. Kursk is often considered to be the "real" turning point in the Soviet war, since the Germans were consistently on the retreat after it. The Soviet forces prevailed simply through overwhelming numbers - even though the Soviets lost up to six tanks to every German tank destroyed, German supplies and reinforcements were long since depleted, while the Soviets continued to commit fresh divisions to the battle for as long as it took to win. From that point on, at a horrendous cost in human lives, German operations on the Eastern Front amounted to a years-long retreat until the final defeat in the spring of 1945.

As an aside to the narrative of the war, it is worthwhile to consider the role of the Soviet Union in World War II. In its aftermath, Americans often looked on World War II as "the good war," the war that was fought for the right reasons against countries whose leadership were truly villainous. There is a lot of truth to that idea: American troops fought as bravely as any, and US involvement was crucial in the ultimate victory of the Allies. It is important, however, to recognize that it was really the USSR that broke the back of the Nazi war machine. At the cost of at least 25,000,000 lives (some estimates are as high as thirty million), the Soviets first stopped, then pushed back, then ultimately destroyed the large majority of German military

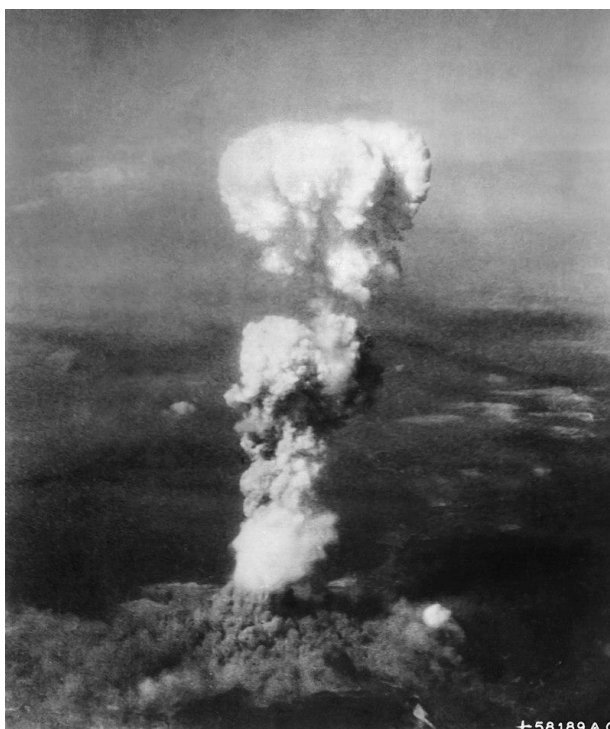
forces. By way of comparison between the war in the west and the war in the east, the Battle of Alamein in Egypt that turned the tide against German forces there involved about 300,000 troops, while Stalingrad saw over 2 million troops and hundreds of thousands of Soviet civilian combatants. Over two-thirds of German forces were committed to the eastern front after the invasion of the USSR in June of 1941, and without the incredible sacrifice of the Soviet people, the US and Britain would have been forced to take on the full strength not just of Germany and Italy, but of the various German puppet states and allies (e.g. Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria) within the Axis. In the end, more people died in the war in the east than in all of the other theaters of the war *combined*.

Back in the west, with Italian forces in shambles and the Fascist government in disarray, the Italian king dismissed Mussolini in July of 1943. The new Italian government quickly made peace with the Allies, prompting a swift invasion of northern Italy by Germany as the Allies seized the south. For over a year, the Allies pushed north against the German forces occupying central and northern Italy. The fighting was brutal, but Allied forces eventually made headway in driving German forces back toward the Reich itself.

By 1944, Germany was clearly on the defensive. British and American forces pushed north through Italy as the Soviets closed from the east. On June 6, 1944, known as D-Day, British, American, and Canadian forces launched a surprise invasion across the English Channel with hundreds of thousands of troops (over 150,000 on the first day alone). After securing the coastline, the Allies steadily pushed against the Germans, suffering serious casualties in the process as the Germans refused to give up ground without brutal fighting. By April of 1945, the Allies were within striking distance of Berlin. The western Allies agreed to let the Soviets carry out the actual invasion of Berlin, a conquest that took eleven days of hard fighting. On May 7, Germany surrendered, a week after Hitler had committed suicide in his bunker, and the following day was “V-E Day” – Victory in Europe.

Meanwhile, the fighting in the Pacific continued for months. By March of 1945, American planes could bomb Japan itself, and civilian as well as military targets were destroyed, often with incendiary bombs. One attack destroyed 40% of Tokyo in three hours; the death toll was immense. Nevertheless, Japanese forces resisted every inch taken by the Americans. It took about two months for American forces to take the island of Okinawa, resulting in about 100,000 Japanese and 65,000 American casualties. The prospect of the invasion of Japan itself was therefore extremely daunting. It seemed clear that America would ultimately prevail, but at a horrendous loss of life. This ultimately led to the deployment of the most terrible weapons ever invented by the human species: nuclear arms.

The Manhattan Project, a secret military operation housed in a former boarding school in Los Alamos, New Mexico, succeeded in creating and then detonating an atomic bomb on July 16. President Truman of the US warned Japan that it faced “prompt and utter destruction” if it did not surrender; when it did not, he authorized the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima (August 6) and Nagasaki (August 8). Hundreds of thousands, the large majority civilians, died either in the initial blasts or from radiation poisoning in the months that followed. At the behest of the Japanese emperor, negotiations began a few days later, with Japanese representatives signing an unconditional surrender on September 2.



*A photograph of the infamous “mushroom cloud” following the atomic blast that destroyed Hiroshima.*

## The Aftermath

The death toll of the war was unprecedented, and most of the dead were civilians. Millions more were left homeless and displaced, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. As a whole, Europe was in shambles, with whole cities destroyed, and even the victorious Allied nations were economically crippled. In addition, much to the world's growing horror, the true costs of Nazi rule were revealed in the closing months of the war and in the months to follow, as

the details of what became known as the Holocaust were discovered. Simultaneously, the world was forced to grapple with the fact that human beings now had the ability to extinguish *all* life on earth through atomic weapons. These two traumas - the Holocaust and The Bomb - forced "Western Civilization" as a whole to rethink its own identity in the aftermath.

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## Chapter 11: 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 gay men 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 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, and must be, 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.

## Before the Holocaust

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 antisemitic 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.



*The aftermath of Kristallnacht in Munich: the gutted remains of the Ohel-Jakob Synagogue.*

Simultaneously, high-ranking Nazi officials in the SS were exploring permanent options for ridding the Reich of Jews. Serious thought and research went into plans to create Jewish “reservations” in Poland as well as a plan to ship all of the Jews in German-held territory to the African island of Madagascar. Even after large-scale murder campaigns in Eastern Europe began in 1941, many Nazis were still looking for some way to transport and dump the Jews of Europe somewhere far from Germany. The stated goal of these schemes was to render the entire face of Europe, and possibly the world, *Judenrein*: “Jew-Free.” In the end, the “final solution to the Jewish question” - the Nazi’s euphemism for the Holocaust - was decided to consist not of deportation, but of systematic murder, but that decision does not appear to have been reached until 1941.

The irony of considering the case of German (and, as of 1938, Austrian) Jews in detail is that the large majority of the victims of the Holocaust were not from Germany. The bulk of the Jewish population of Europe was in the east, concentrated in Poland, Russia, and Ukraine. Poland alone had a Jewish population of approximately 3,000,000, 10% of the population of Poland as a whole. Unlike the Jews of Central and Western Europe, most of the Jews of Eastern Europe were largely unassimilated, living in separate communities, speaking Yiddish as their vernacular language instead of Polish or Russian, and often facing harsh antisemitism from

their non-Jewish neighbors (which was somewhat muted in the nominally unprejudiced Soviet Union). Thus, the Jews of the east had almost nowhere to run and few who would help them once the German war machine arrived.

When the war began, even Polish Jews were not systematically murdered right away: they were beaten, humiliated, and sometimes murdered outright, but there was not yet a campaign of focused, organized murder against them. Instead, the initial task of Nazi murder squads was the elimination of the Polish “leadership class,” which came to mean intellectuals, politicians, communists, and Catholic priests. At least 50,000 Polish social, political, and intellectual elites were murdered by SS death squads or regular German soldiers in a campaign codenamed “Operation Tannenberg.”

On encountering the enormous numbers of Jews in Poland, the Nazis opted to drive them into hastily-constructed ghettos in towns and cities. Ghettos were neighborhoods of a town or city that were usually fenced-off, surrounded with barbed wire, and then filled with the Jews of the surrounding areas. The ghettos were built almost immediately, from late 1939 to early 1940, and ended up housing millions of people in areas that were meant to hold perhaps a few hundred thousand at most. The largest were in the large Polish cities of Warsaw and Lodz; the Warsaw Ghetto alone housed over 400,000 Jews at its height in late 1941. Conditions were atrocious: the official food ration “paid” to Jewish workers who worked as slave laborers for the Nazi war effort consisted of about 600 - 800 calories a day (an adult should consume about 2,000 a day to remain healthy). Potato peels were “as precious as diamonds” to ghetto inhabitants. The ghettos alone ended up costing the lives of approximately 500,000 people from starvation and disease.



*Corpses being transported from the Warsaw Ghetto.*



## The Holocaust Begins

The Holocaust itself began with the invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941. As German armies advanced into Soviet territory, they were followed by four teams of *Einsatzgruppen* - mobile killing squads - charged with killing "Jews, Gypsies, 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 one 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.



*Members of the Einsatzgruppen about to murder the Jewish woman and child, with Jewish men digging their own graves to the right.*

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 Chelmno 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 Russian POWs.

## The Peak Killing Period

Based on the experiments with gas vans and temporary gas chambers at Auschwitz, SS leaders concluded that stationary killing centers would be the most efficient and (for the killers) psychologically viable form of mass murder. Thus, as of early 1942, the Nazis embarked on the most notorious project of the Holocaust: the creation of the extermination camps. Extermination camps were not the same thing as concentration camps. Concentration camps were prison camps, some of which created during the first weeks of Nazi rule in 1933. There were literally thousands of concentration camps of various kinds scattered across the entire breadth of German-controlled territory. Extermination camps, however, were designed for one purpose: to kill people. There were only six of them in total, and most were very small - often about a quarter of a square mile in size. All were located in occupied Poland, near rail lines and hidden in forests away from major population centers. They were not meant to house prisoners for slave labor; new arrivals to an extermination camp were typically dead within two hours. They were, in short, "death factories," production facilities of murder that ran on industrial timetables.

The height of the Holocaust was thus shockingly short. It lasted from early 1942, when the extermination facilities were put into operation, until the late summer of 1943, a period of just over a year that saw 50% of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust itself murdered. The major reason for that incredible speed is that the ghettos of Poland were emptied into the extermination camps. The extermination camp Treblinka alone killed at least 800,000 people, most of whom were sent from the enormous ghetto of Warsaw. The millions of Jews who had been in Poland and the Russian territories of the west were murdered at a stunning, completely unprecedented rate.

The most infamous of the camps is unquestionably Auschwitz. Auschwitz was a great exception among the extermination camps in that it did house Jewish prisoners who were not immediately killed. Instead, about 80% of new arrivals to Auschwitz were sent immediately to their deaths in the gas chambers, while the other 20% were temporarily enslaved. More is known about day-to-day life inside of a death camp from Auschwitz because a relatively large number of its victims survived the war, although "relative" in this case still means "far less than 1%." Likewise, the infamous tattoos issued to Jewish prisoners were only performed at Auschwitz, not the other extermination camps; there was no point in tattooing victims who were to be killed within hours, after all.

Within Auschwitz, not just Jews but regular criminals, enemies of the Nazi regime, Romani, and various other groups were housed in grossly overcrowded barracks. These prisoners were treated differently by German and auxiliary guards based on who they were and where they were from, and they were actively encouraged to treat each other differently based on those distinctions as well. Non-Jewish German criminals were given important positions as *kapos*, team leaders, who oversaw Jewish slaves in the construction of new buildings in the vast, sprawling Auschwitz camp complex (it was over 20 kilometers across, including numerous sub-camps) or working in factories designed to support the German war effort. Of the approximately 200,000 Jews who were spared immediate murder on arrival, the large majority were either worked to death or murdered in the gas chambers after becoming too weak to work.



*Three of the survivors of Buchenwald concentration camp, likely transferred from Auschwitz in the “death marches” that began in January 1945.*

The five death camps besides Auschwitz operated from early 1942 until the fall or winter of 1943 (one, Madjanek, was operational until the summer of 1944). They were used primarily to murder the Jews of Poland and their total death toll was close to 2 million victims. In turn, they were never meant to be permanent: there were no large-scale slave labor facilities and only a handful of Jews were kept alive on arrival to work as slaves for the guards and to burn the bodies of their fellow victims after they were gassed (the survival rate from the three major camps besides Auschwitz was one one-thousandth of 1%, or .0001 to 1, representing the 150 people who survived and the 1.5 million who did not). Slave revolts occurred at two camps in August and October of 1943, which explains the fact that *anyone* survived these camps, but by then the camps had already succeeded: almost the entire Polish Jewish population was dead, starved in the ghettos or gassed in the camps. Afterwards, the SS destroyed the remains of the camps to hide the evidence of what had happened there.

Auschwitz, however, had been built to be permanent. Its gas chambers were large and made of concrete and steel (unlike the wood sheds used to murder in the other extermination camps). It was intended to be the final destination for every Jew captured by the Nazis in the years to come, and thus most Jews from the western European countries occupied by Germany were sent to die in Auschwitz. The Nazis continued to prioritize the "final solution" even as the war turned against them, shipping hundreds of thousands to Auschwitz as the Allies steadily pressed against them in the east and south.

One of the most bizarre and chilling episodes of the Holocaust was the Nazi takeover of Hungary in mid-1944. There, in what had been a staunch German ally, over 700,000 Jews had survived the war, "protected" in the sense that the Hungarian government had resisted the demands of the Germans to turn over its Jews for murder. When the Germans learned that the Hungarians were negotiating with the Soviets to switch allegiances, now that the German defeat was all but assured by early 1944, they supported a coup by Hungarian fascists under the direction of the Nazi state. That summer, at an astonishing rate, SS specialists overseeing Hungarian fascist police deported over 500,000 Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz. The vast majority were killed on arrival; in the Fall of 1944 Auschwitz was operated at its maximum capacity of killing up to 12,000 people a day. It bears emphasizing that the Holocaust was regarded by the top Nazi leadership as being a priority that was at least as high as actually fighting the war. Even after the war was evidently lost, tremendous efforts were made to kill every Jew then in German hands.

In early 1945, as the Soviet army closed from the east and the western Allies from the west, the Nazis initiated a series of death marches from the camps in Poland. Jewish prisoners that had survived up to that point, against incredible odds, were forced to march up to twenty miles through the Polish winter, then loaded into cattle cars and shipped into Germany. The western Allies - mostly Britain and the US - discovered the first evidence of the Holocaust when they liberated these German camps, discovering tens of thousands of corpses and thousands of horribly malnourished survivors. Likewise, the Soviet army liberated Auschwitz itself, discovering the gas chambers and the smattering of survivors who had been left behind when the Germans fled. Ultimately, the Holocaust ended because the war ended. The Nazis had been intent on "winning the Holocaust" even after it was self-evident that they could not win the war.

## The Aftermath

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 camps, 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.



*Bodies at the Gusen Concentration Camp being transported for burial by German civilians pressed into the work by Allied soldiers, in an attempt to force the Germans to confront the results of their actions.*

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 most non-Jews were completely ignorant of the breadth, scope, and organized nature of the genocide.

The first systematic study of the Holocaust was carried out by an American Jewish historian, Raul Hilberg, who published his *The Destruction of the European Jews* in 1961, containing the first highly detailed study of the number of victims, the methods used by the Nazis, and the breadth of the genocide itself. While it took years to mature, the field of Holocaust scholarship began in earnest with Hilberg’s work, eventually burgeoning into a major subfield of history, political science, and sociology. Today, while the scholarship is always turning up new facts and presenting new interpretations, the essential narrative of the Holocaust is well established, based on mountains of hard evidence and meticulous research.

The event that brought the Holocaust to world attention was not scholarship, however, but the capture of the Nazi SS leader Adolf Eichmann in Argentina in 1960 by agents of the Israeli secret service, the Mossad. Eichmann was taken to Jerusalem and tried for his work in overseeing the logistics of the Holocaust. His major job during the war had been to make sure the trains carrying victims ran on time and efficiently delivered them to their deaths. Eichmann was the quintessential “desktop murderer,” a man who (apparently) never personally harmed anyone, but was still responsible for the deaths of millions through his actions. The trial was highly publicized and it began the process of transforming the Holocaust from being only a dark memory of its survivors, largely unknown or overlooked by historians and the general public, to being perhaps the most infamous event of the twentieth century.

In the 1970s and 1980s, a series of films and television programs brought the history of the Holocaust to audiences around the western world, and survivors of the Holocaust began speaking publicly about their experiences in large numbers. Part of the impetus behind the organizations of survivors was the emergence of Holocaust Denial in the 1970s: the hateful, disingenuous, and utterly false claim that the Holocaust never happened (Eichmann himself was irritated when asked by early deniers in Argentina to corroborate their claims - he was perversely proud of his role in running an efficient system of mass murder).

Holocaust memorialization had existed in Israel since the 1940s, but it became much more widespread by the 1980s. One of the most significant memorials to the victims of the Holocaust is the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC, conceived of by a commission brought together by President Jimmy Carter in 1978 and ultimately dedicated by President Bill Clinton in 1993. Certainly, by the 1990s, the Holocaust was an integral part of history taught in schools and universities almost everywhere; while it is possible not to know many of the details, even people with only a cursory understanding of modern history are usually aware that the Nazis carried out the genocide of the Jews of Europe during World War II.

## Conclusion

The Holocaust was one of the great traumas associated with World War II. It forced the Western World to confront the fact that a highly advanced, "civilized" nation at the heart of Europe - Germany - had been responsible not just for initiating a horrendously bloody war, but for carrying out the systematic murder of millions of completely innocent people. The conceit that "Western Civilization" was the most just and desirable matrix of law, politics, and culture was permanently undermined in the process. Since the ancient Greeks, the proud distinction between civilization and barbarism had been upheld in the minds of the social and political elites of the "West," and yet it was some of those very elites who perpetrated the ultimate act of barbarism in the twentieth century.

### *Image Citations:*

[Kristallnacht](#) - German Federal Archives

[Warsaw Ghetto](#) - Public Domain

[Einsatzgruppen](#) - Public Domain

[Buchenwald Survivors](#) - Public Domain

[Bodies at Gusen](#) - Public Domain



## Chapter 12: The Soviet Union and the Cold War

At the height of Soviet power in the late 1960s, one-third of the world's population lived in communist countries. The great communist powers of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the People's Republic of China loomed over a vast swath of Eurasia, while smaller countries occasionally erupted in revolution. Non-aligned countries like India were often as sympathetic to the "Soviet Bloc" (i.e. countries allied with or under the control of the USSR) as they were to the United States and the other major capitalist countries. Even in the capitalist countries of the West, intellectuals, students, and workers often sympathized with communism as well, despite the apparent mismatch between the Utopian promise of Marxism and the reality of a police state in the USSR.

This global split between communist and capitalist was only possible because of the vast might of the USSR. The threat of world war terrified every sane person on the planet, but beyond that, the threat of conventional military intervention by the Soviets was almost as threatening. The USSR controlled the governments of every Eastern European country, with the strange exception of Yugoslavia, and it had considerable influence almost everywhere in the globe. Its factories churned out military hardware at an enormous rate, even as its scientists proved themselves the equal of anything the west could produce and its athletes often defeated all challengers at the Olympics every four years.

Behind the façade of strength and power, however, the USSR was one of the strangest historical paradoxes of all time. It was a country whose official political ideology, Marxism-Leninism, proclaimed an end to class warfare and the stated goal of achieving true communism, a worker's state in which everyone enjoyed the fruits of science and industrialism and no one was left behind. In reality, the nation was in a perpetual state of economic stagnation, with its citizens enjoying dramatically lower standards of living than their contemporaries in the west and workers toiling harder and for fewer benefits than did many in the west. Marxism-Leninism was officially hostile to imperialism, and yet the USSR controlled the governments of most of its "allied" nations after World War II. Of all forms of government, communism was supposed to be the most genuinely democratic, responding to the will of the people instead of false representatives bought with the money of the rich, and yet decision-making rested in the hands of high-level member of the communist party, the so-called

*apparatchiks*, or arch-bureaucrats. Finally, Marxism-Leninism was officially a political program of peace, yet nothing received so much attention or priority in the USSR as did military power.

## Stalinism

The Bolshevik party rose to power against the backdrop of the anarchy surrounding Russia's disastrous military position in the latter part of World War I. Once the Bolsheviks were firmly in power by 1922, they embarked on a fascinating and almost unprecedented series of political and social experiments. After all, no country in the history of the planet to that point had undergone a successful communist revolution, so there was no precedent for how a socialist society was supposed to be organized. Facing a terrible economic crisis from the years of war, the Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin launched the New Economic Policy, which allowed limited market exchange of goods and foodstuffs, even as the state supported a renaissance in the arts and literature. For a few years, not only did standards of living rise, but there was a flowering of innovative creative energy as artists and intellectuals explored what it might mean to live in the country of the future.

Lenin had driven the revolution forward, and he oversaw the social and economic experiments that followed the war. He died in 1924, however, inaugurating a struggle within the Bolshevik leadership to succeed him. In 1927, Joseph Stalin politically defeated his enemies (most importantly the Bolshevik leaders Trotsky and Zinoviev, two of Lenin's closest allies before his death) and consolidated total control of the state. Officially, Stalin was the "Premier" of the communist party - "the first" - overseeing its central decision-making committee, the Politburo. Unofficially, Stalin's control of the top level of the party translated into pure autocracy, not hugely dissimilar in nature to the power of the Tsar before the revolution.

Before his rise to power, Stalin's position in the Russian Communist Party had been relatively innocuous; he was its secretary, a position of little direct power but enormous potential influence. In order to achieve an appointment to a given position within the party, other members of the party had to go through Stalin. He shrewdly used this fact to cement political relationships and influence, so that by Lenin's death he was well-positioned to make a power grab himself. Lenin suffered a series of strokes in the early 1920s, giving Stalin the opportunity to build up his power base without opposition, even though Lenin himself was worried about Stalin's dictatorial tendencies.

Stalin is a much more enigmatic figure than Hitler, to whom he is often compared thanks to their respective legacies of mass murder. Stalin did not write manifestos about his beliefs,

nor did he leave behind many documents or letters that might help historians reconstruct his motivations. Biographers have had to rely on the accounts of people who knew Stalin rather than having access to troves of personal records. He also changed his mind frequently and did not stick to consistent patterns of behavior or decision-making, making it difficult to pin down his essential beliefs or goals. His only overarching personality trait was tremendous paranoia: he almost always felt himself surrounded by potential traitors and enemies. He once informed his underlings that “every communist is a possible hidden enemy. And because it is not easy to recognize the enemy, the goal is achieved even if only five percent of those killed are truly enemies.”



*Stalin*

Stalin's paranoia was reflected in his ruthless policies. Starting at the end of the 1920s, Stalin forced through massive change to the Soviet economy and society while periodically killing off anyone he could imagine being a threat or enemy. Communism was “supposed” to spread around the world after an initial revolutionary outburst, but instead it was stuck in one place, “socialism in one country,” in Stalin's words, which he believed necessitated a massive industrial buildup. The only thing that benefited from Stalin's oversight was the military, which

grew dramatically and, for the first time since the Napoleonic Wars, achieved a level of parity with the west.

Of his many destructive policies, Stalin is perhaps best remembered for the purges. "Purging" consisted of rounding up and executing members of the communist party, the army, or even the police forces themselves. Normally, Stalin's agents would use torture to force the hapless victims to confess to outlandish charges like conspiring with Germany or (later) the United States to bring down the Soviet Union from within. His secret police force, the NKVD (its Russian acronym - it was later changed to KGB) often following direct orders from Stalin himself, eliminated uncounted thousands more. Thus, even at the highest levels of power in the USSR, no one was safe from Stalin's paranoia.

Stalin relied on the NKVD to carry out the purges, targeting better-off peasants known as kulaks, then the Old Bolsheviks (who had taken part in the revolution itself), army officers, middle-ranking communist party members, and finally, tens of thousands of regular citizens caught in the grotesque machinery of accusation and punishment that plagued the country in the second half of the 1930s. Every purge was designed to, at least in part, purge the past purgers, blaming them for "excesses" that had killed innocent people - this of course simply led to the murder of more innocents. So many people disappeared that most Soviets came to believe that the NKVD was everywhere, that everyone was an informer, and that everything was bugged. In addition to outright murder, thousands more were imprisoned in labor camps known as gulags, almost all of which were located in the frigid northern regions of Siberia. The total number of victims is estimated conservatively at 700,000, which does not count the hundreds of thousands deported to the gulags.

While emblematic of Stalin's tyranny, the purges did not result in nearly as many deaths as did his other policies. Beginning in 1928, Stalin ordered a definitive break with the limited market exchange of the New Economic Policy, announcing a "Great Turn" towards industrialization, state-controlled economics, and agricultural reorganization. Starting in 1929, the Soviet state imposed the collectivization of agriculture, forcing millions of peasants to abandon their farms and villages and move to gigantic new collective farms. Collectivization required peasants to meet state-imposed quotas, which were immediately set at unachievable levels. In the winter of 1932 – 1933 in particular, peasants across the USSR (and especially in Ukraine, which Stalin deliberately targeted in a starvation campaign remembered as the *Holodomor*) starved to death – probably around 3 million people died of starvation, and the collectivization process resulted in another 6 - 10 million deaths including those who were executed for resisting. Thus, the total deaths were probably over 10 million. Despite falling

abysmally short of its production goals, where collectivization “succeeded” was in destroying the age-old bonds between the peasants and the land. In the future, Soviet peasants would be a resentful and inefficient class of farm workers rather than peasants rooted in the land who identified with traditional values.

Acknowledging the vast gap between the Soviet Union's industrial capacity and that of the west, Stalin also introduced the Five-Year Plans, in which sky-high production quotas were set for heavy industry. While those quotas were never actually met and thousands died in the frenzy of industrial buildup, the Five-Year Plans (three of which took place before World War II began) were successful as a whole in achieving near parity with the western powers in terms of industrial capacity. One of the only aspects of communist ideology that was reflected in reality in the USSR was that industrial workers, while obliged to toil in conditions far from a “worker’s paradise,” were at least spared the worst depredations of the purges and did not face outright starvation.



*Soviet propaganda consistently mythologized the supposed fervor of industrial workers. The text reads “2+2 plus the enthusiasm of the workers = 5.”*

Stalin's overriding goals were twofold: secure allies abroad against the growing power of Germany (and, to an extent, Japan), and drag the USSR into the industrial age. Despite the turmoil of his murderous campaigns, he succeeded on both counts. While remaining deeply hostile to the western powers, the Soviet state under Stalin did end the Soviet Union's pariah status, receiving official diplomatic recognition from the US and France in 1933. The Five-Year Plans were part of the USSR's new "command economy," one in which every conceivable commodity was produced based on quotas imposed within the vast party bureaucracy in Moscow. That approach to economic planning was disastrous in the long run, but in the short run it did succeed in industrializing the USSR. On the eve of World War II, the USSR had become the third-largest industrial power in the world after the United States and Germany, and was counted among the major political powers of not just Europe, but the world.

## World War II and its Aftermath

Thus, at a terrible human cost, Stalin's policies did transform the USSR into a semblance of a modern state by the eve of World War II - "just in time" as it turned out. During the war the USSR bore the brunt of German military power. More than 25 million Soviets died on the eastern front, soldiers and civilians alike, and it was through the incredible sacrifice of the Soviet people that the German army was finally broken and driven back. In the aftermath of World War II, Stalin's power was unshakable. During the war, he had played the role of the powerful, protective "uncle" of the Soviet people, and after victory was achieved he enjoyed a period of genuine popularity, especially as returning Soviet soldiers were given good positions in the bureaucracy.

During the war, the one thing that tied Britain, the US, and the USSR together in alliance was their shared enemy, Germany, not shared perspectives on a desirable postwar outcome besides German defeat. The war required them to work together, however, and that included making compromises that would in some cases haunt the postwar period. In 1943, after the tide of the war had shifted against Germany but well before the end was in sight, the "Big Three" leaders of Britain, the US, and the USSR met in Tehran to discuss the war and what would be done afterwards. There, Stalin insisted that the territory seized from Poland by the USSR in 1939 would remain in Soviet hands: Poland would thus shrink enormously. Roosevelt and Churchill, well aware of the critical role then being played by Soviet troops, were not in a position to insist otherwise.



*The Tehran Conference in 1943 represented the first in-person meeting of the “Big Three.”  
From left: Josef Stalin, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Winston Churchill.*

In 1944, a team of politicians and economists from several Allied nations met in New Hampshire and devised the basis of the postwar economic order, the Bretton Woods Agreement. That agreement fixed the dollar as the monetary reserve of the western world, created the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to stabilize the international economy, and fixed currency exchange rates. This plan initially included the Soviets, who would thus be eligible for financial support in addressing the devastation wrought by Germany (as noted below, however, the USSR pulled out in 1948, thereby driving home an economic as well as political divide between east and west).

In January of 1945, when the end was finally in sight and Soviet forces already occupied most of Eastern Europe, Stalin stipulated that the postwar governments in Eastern Europe would need to be “friendly” to the Soviet Union, an ambiguous term whose practical meaning suggested dominance by communist parties. Churchill and Roosevelt agreed on the condition that Stalin promised to support free elections, something Stalin never intended to allow. The leaders also agreed to divide Germany into different zones until such time as they could determine how to allow the Germans, purged of Nazism they hoped, to have self-government again.

In part, Britain and the US gave in to Soviet demands because of the incredible sacrifice of the Soviet people in the war; 90% of the casualties on the Allied side up to 1944 were Soviets (mostly Russians, but including millions of Ukrainians and Central Asians as well). Until 1945, Roosevelt assumed the United States would need Soviet help in bringing about the final defeat of Japan as well. Each side tried to avoid antagonizing the other, especially while the war continued, even though they privately recognized that there were incompatible visions of postwar European reorganization at stake.

Despite those incompatible ideas, many political leaders (and regular citizens) across the globe hoped that the postwar order would be fundamentally different than its prewar analog. Fundamental to that vision was the creation of an official international body whose purpose was the prevention of armed conflict and the pursuit of peaceful and productive policies around the world: the United Nations, the second attempt at an international coordinating organization after the pitiful failure of the League of Nations in the 1920s and 1930s. The UN was founded in 1945 as a body of arbitration and, when necessary, enforcement of internationally-agreed upon policies, seeing its first major role in the Nuremberg Trials of the surviving Nazi leaders. Its Security Council was authorized to deploy military force when necessary, but its very reason to be was to prevent war from being used as a tool of political aggrandizement. The Soviet Union joined the western powers as a founding member of the UN, and there were at least some hopes that it would oversee a just and equitable postwar political order.

## The Cold War

Despite the foundation of the UN, and the fact that both the US and USSR were permanent members of the Security Council, the divide between them undermined the possibility of global unity. Instead, by the late 1940s, the world was increasingly split into the two rival “camps” of the Cold War. The term itself refers to the decades-long rivalry between the two postwar “superpowers,” the United States and the Soviet Union. This was a conflict that, fortunately for the human species, never became a “hot” war. Both sides had enormous nuclear arsenals by the 1960s that would have ensured that a “hot” war would almost certainly see truly unprecedented destruction, up to and including the actual possibility of the extinction of the human species (the American government invented a memorable phrase for this known as M.A.D.: Mutually Assured Destruction). Instead, both nations had enough of a collective self-preservation instinct that the conflict worked itself out in the form of technological and



scientific rivalry, an enormous and ongoing arms race, and "proxy wars" fought elsewhere that did not directly draw both sides into a larger conflict.

The open declaration of the Cold War, as it were, consisted of doctrines and plans. In 1947 the US issued the Truman Doctrine, which pledged to help people resist communism wherever it appeared – the rhetoric of the doctrine was about the defense of free people who were threatened by foreign agents, but as became very clear over the next few decades, it was more important that people were not communists than they were “free” from dictatorships. The Truman Doctrine was born out of the idea of “containment,” of keeping communism limited to the countries in which communist takeovers had already occurred. The immediate impetus for the doctrine was a conflict raging in Greece after WWII, in which the communist resistance movement that had fought the Nazis during the war sought to overthrow the right-wing, royalist government of Greece in the aftermath. Importantly, while both the British and then the US supported the Greek government, the USSR did not lend any aid to the communist rebels, rightly fearing that doing so could lead to a much larger war. Furious at what he regarded as another instance of western capitalist imperialism, however, Stalin pulled the USSR out of the Bretton Woods economic agreement in early 1948.

The Truman Doctrine was closely tied to the fear of what American policy-makers called the “Domino Theory”: if one nation “fell” to communism, it was feared, communism would spread to the surrounding countries. Thus, preventing a communist takeover anywhere, even in a comparatively small and militarily insignificant country, was essential from the perspective of American foreign policy during the entire period of the Cold War. That theory was central to American policy from the 1950s through the 1980s, deciding the course of politics, conflicts, and wars from Latin America to Southeast Asia.

Along with the Truman Doctrine, the United States introduced the Marshall Plan in 1948, named for the American secretary of state at the time. The Marshall Plan consisted of enormous American loans to European countries trying to rebuild from the war. European states also founded an intra-European economic body called the Organization of European Economic Cooperation that any country accepting loans was obliged to join. Stalin regarded the OEEC as a puppet of the US, so he banned all countries under Soviet influence from joining, and hence from accepting loans. Simultaneously, the Soviets were busy extracting wealth and materials from their new puppets in Eastern Europe to help recover from their own war losses. The legacy of the Marshall Plan, the OEEC, and Soviet policy was to create a stark economic division: while western Europe rapidly recovered from the war, the east remained poor and comparatively backwards.

Already by 1946, in the words of Winston Churchill, the “iron curtain” had truly fallen across Eastern Europe. Everywhere, local communist parties at first ruled along with other parties, following free elections. Then, with the aid of Soviet “advisers,” communists from Poland to Romania pushed other parties out through terror tactics and legal bans on non-communist political organizations. Soon, each of the Eastern European states was officially pledged to cooperate with the USSR. Practically speaking, this meant that every Eastern European country was controlled by a communist party that took its orders directly from Moscow - there was no independent political decision-making allowed.

The major exception was Yugoslavia. Ironically, the one state that had already been taken over by a genuine communist revolution was the one that was not a puppet of the USSR. During the war, an effective anti-German resistance was led by Yugoslav communists, and in the aftermath they succeeded in seizing power over the entire country. Tito, the communist leader of Yugoslavia, had great misgivings about the Soviet takeover of the rest of Eastern Europe, and he and Stalin angrily broke with one another after the war. Thus, Yugoslavia was a communist country, but not one controlled by the USSR.

In turn, it was Stalin's anger that Yugoslavia was outside of his grasp that inspired the Soviets to carry out a series of purges against the communist leadership of the Eastern European countries now under Soviet domination. Soviet agents sought “Titoists” who were supposedly undermining the strength of commitment to communism. Between 1948 and 1953 more communists were killed by other communists than had died at the hands of the Nazis during the war (i.e. in terms of direct Nazi persecution of communists, not including casualties of World War II itself). Communist leaders were put on show trials, both in their own countries and sometimes after being hauled off to Moscow, where they were first tortured into confessing various made-up crimes (collaborating with western powers to overthrow communism was a popular one), then executed. It is worth noting that this period, especially the first few years of the 1950s, saw antisemitism become a staple of show trials and purges as well, as latent antisemitic sentiments came to the surface and Jewish communist leaders suffered a disproportionate number of arrests and executions, often accused of being “Zionists” secretly in league with the west.

Simultaneously, the world was dividing into the two “camps” of the Cold War. The zones of occupation of Germany controlled by the US, France, and Britain became the new nation of the Federal Republic of Germany, known as West Germany, while the Soviet-controlled zone became the German Democratic Republic, or East Germany. Nine western European countries joined the US in forming the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, whose stated purpose

was the defense of each of the member states from invasion – understood to be the invasion of Western Europe by the USSR. The USSR tested its first atomic bomb in August of 1949, thereby establishing the stakes of the conflict: the total destruction of human life. And, finally, by 1955 the Soviets had formalized their own military system with the Warsaw Pact, which bound together the Soviet Bloc in a web of military alliances comparable to NATO.

In hindsight, it is somewhat surprising that the USSR was not more aggressive in the early years of the Cold War, making no overt attempts to sponsor communist takeovers outside of Eastern Europe. The one direct confrontation between the two camps took place between May of 1948 and June of 1949, when the Soviets blockaded West Berlin. The city of Berlin was in East Germany, but its western “zones” remained in the hands of the US, Britain, and France, the phenomenon a strange relic of the immediate aftermath of the war. As Cold War tensions mounted, Stalin ordered the blockade of all supplies going to the western zones. The US led a massive ongoing airlift of food and supplies for nearly a year while both sides studiously avoided armed confrontation. In the end, the Soviets abandoned the blockade, and West Berlin became a unique pocket of the western camp in the midst of communist East Germany.



*A US Air Force transport plane dropping candy (part of a morale-boosting campaign) to children during the Berlin Airlift.*

It is worth considering the fact that Europe had been, scant years earlier, the most powerful region on Earth, ruling the majority of the surface of the globe. Now, it was either under the heel of one superpower or dominated by the other, unable to make large-scale international political decisions without implicating itself in the larger conflict. The rivalries that

had divided the former “great powers” in the past seemed insignificant compared to the threat of a single overwhelming war initiated by foreign powers that could result in the end of history.

## The USSR During the Cold War

Stalin died in 1954, leaving behind a country that was still comparatively poor, but enormously powerful. In addition, Stalin left a legacy of death and imprisonment that touched nearly every family in the USSR, with millions still trapped in the gulags of Siberia. After a power struggle between the top members of the communist party, Stalin’s successor emerged: Nikita Khrushchev, a former coal miner and engineer who rose in the ranks of the party to become its leader. Khrushchev was a “true believer” in the Soviet system, genuinely believing that the USSR would overtake the west economically and that its citizens would in turn eventually enjoy much better standards of living than those experienced in the west.

Khrushchev broke with Stalinism soon after securing power. In 1956, he gave a speech to the leaders of the communist party later dubbed the “secret speech” - it was not broadcast to the general public, but Khrushchev allowed it to leak to the state-controlled press. In it, Khrushchev blamed Stalin for bringing about a “cult of personality” that was at variance with true communist principles, and for “excesses,” a thinly veiled acknowledgement of the Siberian prison camps and summary executions. Shortly after the speech, Khrushchev had four million prisoners released from the gulags as a practical gesture demonstrating his sincerity. This period is called “The Thaw” in Soviet history. For a brief period, there was another flowering of literary and artistic experimentation comparable to that of the early 1920s. The ubiquitous censorship was relaxed, with a few accurate accounts of the gulags making it into mainstream publication. In turn, among many, there were genuine hopes for larger political reforms of the system.

This hope of a new beginning was not limited to the Soviet Union itself. In October of 1956, a reformist faction of the Hungarian communist party inspired a mass uprising calling for not just a reformed, more humanistic communism, but the expulsion of Soviet forces and “advisers” completely. That led to a full-scale invasion by the Soviet army that killed several thousand protesters in violent clashes (primarily in the capital city of Budapest), followed by the arrests of over half a million people in the aftermath. It was clear that Khrushchev might not want to follow directly in Stalin’s footsteps, but he had no intention of allowing genuine independence in the Soviet Bloc countries of Eastern Europe.

Angered both by the events in Hungary and by the growth of outright dissent with the Soviet system in the USSR itself, Khrushchev reasserted control. A few noteworthy works of art that hinted at dissent were allowed to trickle out (until Khrushchev was ousted by hardliners in 1964, at any rate), but larger-scale change was out of the question. The state instead concentrated on wildly ambitious - sometimes astonishingly impractical - economic projects. Soviet engineers and planners drained whole river systems to irrigate fields, Soviet factories churned out thousands of tons of products and materials no one wanted, and whole regions were polluted to the point of becoming nearly uninhabitable. Over time, cynicism replaced terror as the default outlook of Soviet citizens. It was no longer as dangerous to be alive as it had been under Stalin, but people recognized that the system was not "really" about the pursuit of communism. Instead, for most, the only hope of achieving a decent standard of living and relative personal stability was forming the right connections within the enormous party bureaucracy. The USSR went from a murderous police state under Stalin to a bloated, corrupt police state under Khrushchev and the leaders who followed him.

It was also under Khrushchev that the Cold War reached its most frenzied pitch. Khrushchev himself was an explosive personality who sincerely believed in the possibility of the USSR "winning" the Cold War by outstripping the western world economically and winning over the nations of the Third World to communism politically. To that end, he continued the Stalinist focus on building up heavy industry and, especially, military hardware, but he also devoted huge energies toward science and engineering.

During Khrushchev's tenure as premier the "space race" joined the arms race as a major centerpiece of Cold War policy. Despite the limited practical consequences of some aspects of the space race, it was symbolically important to both sides – it was a very visible demonstration of scientific superiority, and the first superpower to reach a given breakthrough in the space race had thus "won" a major symbolic victory in the eyes of the world. In addition, since the space race was based on the mastery of rocket technology, the military implications were obvious. In 1957, the Soviets launched *Sputnik*, the first satellite to orbit the earth, an event which was perceived as a major Soviet triumph in the Cold War. Khrushchev claimed that the USSR had also developed missiles that could strike targets on the other side of the world, and thus the west feared that the Soviets could as easily detonate a nuclear weapon in the US as in Europe.



*A commemorative Soviet postage stamp depicting Sputnik's orbit.*

The resulting fear and resentment between the two sides saw even greater emphasis on both the space race and the buildup of nuclear arms going into the 1960s. The American President John F Kennedy was a hard-line anti-communist, a “cold warrior,” and he believed it was important to stand up to the Soviets symbolically and, if necessary, militarily. In 1959, Cuban revolutionaries overthrew the right-wing dictator Fulgencio Batista (who had been an American ally), and fearing American intervention, eventually aligned themselves with the USSR. Thus, as Kennedy took office in 1960, he faced not only the growing technological and military power of the USSR itself, but what he regarded as a Soviet puppet on the very doorstep of US territory.

In 1962, the US Central Intelligence Agency staged an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow the Cuban communist leader Fidel Castro, an event known as the Bay of Pigs Invasion. In the aftermath, Castro and Khrushchev agreed to install missile batteries in Cuba

both as a deterrent against a potential invasion by the US in the future and to redress the superiority of American missile deployments. Khrushchev was eager to establish a military presence in the western hemisphere, especially since the US had already installed missile batteries in its allied nations of Italy and Turkey within striking distance of the USSR. American spy planes, however, detected the construction of the missile site in Cuba and the shipments of missiles en route to Cuba, leading to the point in history when the human race stood closest to complete extinction: the Cuban Missile Crisis.

When the US government learned of the Soviet missiles, there was serious consideration of launching a full-scale assault on Cuba, something that could have led directly to nuclear war. Many American military leaders believed at the time in the possibility of a “limited nuclear war” in which missile sites would be destroyed quickly enough to prevent the Soviets from launching counter-strikes. Instead, however, Kennedy and Khrushchev carefully engaged in behind-the-scenes diplomacy, both of them realizing the stakes of the conflict and, thankfully for world history, not wanting to destroy the world in the name of national pride. The American and Soviet navies faced off in the Atlantic while frenzied diplomacy sought an end to the crisis. After thirteen panicked days, both sides agreed to withdraw their missiles, but not before an incident in which a Soviet submarine very nearly launched nuclear torpedoes at an American ship. A single Soviet officer - Vasili Arkhipov - called off the strike that could have led directly to nuclear war.

In the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the US and USSR agreed to create a “hotline” to ensure rapid communication in the event of future crises. The United States dropped the very idea of “limited” nuclear war from its tactical repertoire and instead recognized that any nuclear strike was the equivalent of “M.A.D.” (Mutually Assured Destruction). While the arms race between the superpowers continued, spiking again during the 1980s, both sides did enter into various treaties that limited the pace of nuclear arms production as well.

In 1964, having lost the confidence of key members of the Politburo, Khrushchev was forced out of office. He was replaced by Leonid Brezhnev, a lifelong communist bureaucrat. Brezhnev would hold power until 1982, overseeing a long period of what is usually characterized as stagnation by historians: the Soviet system, including its nominal adherence to Marxism-Leninism, would remain in place, but even elites abandoned the idea that “real” communism was achievable. Instead, life in the USSR was about trying to find a place in the system, rather than pursuing the more far-reaching goals of communist theory. The state and the economy - deeply wedded in any case - were rife with corruption and nepotism, and a deep-seated, bitter cynicism became the outlook of most Soviet citizens toward their

government and their lot in life. Arguably, this pattern had already emerged under Khrushchev, but it truly came of age under Brezhnev.

During Brezhnev's tenure as the Soviet premier, another eastern bloc nation tried unsuccessfully to break away from Soviet domination: Czechoslovakia. In the Spring of 1968, the Slovak communist leader Alexander Dubcek (who had fought against the Nazis in the war and had been a staunch ally and trusted underling of the Soviets up to that point) received permission from Moscow to experiment with limited reforms. He called for "socialism with a human face," meaning a kind of communist government that allowed freedom of speech, a liberalized outlook on human expression, and a diversified economy that could address sectors besides heavy industry. Dubcek relaxed censorship and allowed workers to organize into Soviets (councils) as they had in the early years of communist revolution in Russia. These reforms were eagerly embraced by the Czechs and Slovaks.

Predictably, the reforms proved too radical for Moscow. Brezhnev sent in the Soviet military, and all of the other Warsaw Pact countries (except Romania) also sent in troops. This reaction was regarded around the world as especially crude and disproportionate, given that the Czechs and Slovaks did not rise up in any kind of violent way (as the Hungarians had done, at least briefly, twelve years earlier). Instead, the message was clear: no meaningful reform would be possible in the East unless the leadership in Moscow somehow underwent a fundamental change of outlook. That change did eventually come, but not until the 1980s under Mikhail Gorbachev.

## Conclusion: What Went Wrong with the USSR

In historical hindsight, the paradox of a "communist" country that so profoundly failed to realize its stated goals of freedom, equality, and justice, has led many people (not just historians) to speculate about what was inherently flawed with the Soviet system. There are many theories, three of which are considered below.

One idea is that the Soviet state was trapped in impossible circumstances. It was largely cut off from the aid of the rest of the world until after World War II, and the Bolsheviks inherited control of a backwards, economically-underdeveloped nation. They did their best, however brutal their methods, to catch up with the nations of the west and to create at least the possibility of a better life for future Soviet citizens. This thesis is supported by the success of the Red Army: if Stalin had not industrialized Russia and Ukraine by force, the theory goes, the results of World War II would have been even more awful.



Another take is that communism is somehow contrary to human nature and thus doomed to failure, no matter what the circumstances or context. Here, scholars note the incredible prevalence of corruption at every level of Soviet society: the huge black market and the nepotism and infighting present in everything from getting a job to getting an apartment in one of the major cities. Greed proved an implacable foe to communist social organization, with the party apparatchiks reaping the benefits of their positions - better food, better housing, vacations - that were never available to rank-and-file citizens.

A more subtle and sympathetic interpretation is that some kind of communism might be possible (social democracies have thrived in Europe for decades, after all), but the Soviet system went mad with trying to control everything. The Soviet economy was the ultimate expression of the idea of a command economy, with every product produced according to arcane quotas set by huge bureaucracies within the Soviet state, and every industry was beholden to equally unrealistic quotas. The most elementary laws of supply and demand in economics were ignored in favor of irrational, and indeed arbitrary, systems of production. The results were chronic shortages of goods and services people actually needed (or wanted) and equally vast surpluses of useless, shoddy junk, from ill-fitting shoes to unreliable machinery. To cite a single example (noted by the historian Tony Judt), party leaders in the Soviet republic of Kyrgyzstan told farmers to buy up grain supplies from stores in order to meet their yearly quotas; those quotas were utterly impossible to meet through actual farming.

All of these ideas have something to them. It should also be considered that there had never been anything like a democratic or liberal society in Russia. There was no tradition of what the British called the “loyal opposition” of political parties who may disagree on particulars but who are still accepted as legitimate expressions of the will and opinion of parts of the citizenry. There were no “checks and balances” to hold back corruption either, and by the Brezhnev era political connections were far more important than was any kind of heartfelt devotion to Marxist theory. Thus, the kinds of decisions made by the Soviet leadership were inspired by a pure, ruthless will to see results against a backdrop of staggering inefficiency and corruption.

In the end, perhaps the biggest problem with the Soviet system was the fact that it was more important to fit into the system than to speak the truth. The essential threat of violence and imprisonment during the Stalinist period cast a long shadow on the rest of Soviet history. Conformity, ideological dogmatism, and indifference to any notion of fairness were all synonymous with “success” in Soviet society. Before long, competence and honesty were *threats* to too many people already in power to be allowed to exist - as an example, famous

Russian scientists lived under house arrest for decades because they could not be disposed of, but neither could they be allowed to state their views openly.

It also bears consideration that not everything about Soviet society was, actually, a failure. After the “thaw” in the early 1950s, almost no one was executed for simply disagreeing with the state, and prison terms were much shorter. Standards of living were mediocre, but medical care, housing, and food was either free or cheap because of state subsidies. The kind of “leveling-out” associated with communist theory did happen, in a sense, because most people lived at a similar standard of living, the perks allowed to senior members of the communist party notwithstanding. In the end, the Soviet Union represented one of the most profound, albeit often blood-soaked and inhumane, political experiments in world history.

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[Five Year Plan Propaganda](#) - Public Domain

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[Sputnik Stamp](#) - Public Domain

## Chapter 13: Postwar Conflict

One of the definitive transformations in global politics after World War II was the shift in the locus of power from Europe to the United States and the Soviet Union. It was American aid or Soviet power that guided the reconstruction of Europe after the war, and both superpowers proved themselves more than capable of making policy decisions for the countries within their respective spheres of influence. The Soviets directly controlled Eastern Europe and had an enormous amount of influence in the other communist countries, while the United States exercised considerable influence on the member nations of NATO.

Thus, many Europeans struggled to make sense of their own identity, with the height of European power still being a living memory. One issue of tremendous importance to most Europeans was the status of their colonies, most of which were still intact in the immediate postwar period. Many Europeans felt that, with all their flaws, colonies still somehow proved the relevance and importance of the mother countries – as an example, the former British prime minister Winston Churchill was dismayed by the prospect of Indian independence from the British commonwealth even when most Britons accepted it as inevitable. Many in France and Britain in particular thought that their colonies could somehow keep them on the same level as the superpowers in terms of global power and, in a sense, relevance.

There were a host of problems with imperialism by 1945, however, that were all too evident. Colonial troops had played vital roles in the war, with millions of Africans and Asians serving in the allied armies (well over two million troops from India alone served as part of the British military). Colonial troops fought in the name of defending democracy from fascism and tyranny, yet back in their home countries they did not have access to democratic rights. Many independence movements, such as India's, refused to aid in the war effort as a result. Once the war was over, troops returned home to societies that were still governed not only as political dependencies, but were divided along racial lines. The contrast between the ostensible goals of the war and the obvious injustice in the colonies could not have been more evident.

Simultaneously, the Cold War became the overarching framework of conflict around the world, sometimes playing a primary role in domestic conflicts in countries hundreds or even thousands of miles from either of the superpowers themselves. At its worst, the Cold War led to “proxy wars” between American-led or at least American-supplied anti-communists and communist insurgents inspired by, and occasionally supported by the Soviet Union or

communist (as of 1949) China. There was thus a complex matrix of conflict around the world that combined independence struggles within colonies on the one hand and proxy conflicts and wars between factions caught in the web of the Cold War on the other. Sometimes, independence movements like those of India and Ghana managed to avoid being ensnared in the Cold War. Other times, however, countries like Vietnam became battlegrounds on which the conflict between capitalism and communism erupted in enormous bloodshed.

The newly-founded United Nations generally failed to prevent the outbreak of war despite its nominal goal of arbitrating peaceful solutions for international problems. It was hamstrung by the fact that the two superpowers were among those with permanent seats on the UN Security Council, the body that was charged with authorizing the use of force when necessary. Likewise, the two “camps” of the Cold War generally remained loyal to their respective superpower leaders, ensuring that there could be no unified decision making when it came to Cold War conflicts.

In addition, while some independence movements that avoided becoming embroiled in the Cold War were able to secure national independence peacefully, others did not. In many cases, European imperial powers reacted violently to their colonial subjects’ demands for independent governance, leading both the bloodshed and grotesque violations of human rights. Here, again, the United Nations was generally unable to prevent violence, although it did at times at least provide an ethical framework by which the actions of the imperialist powers might be judged historically.

## Major Cold War Conflicts

Fortunately for the human species, the Cold War never turned into a “hot” war between the two superpowers, despite close calls like that of the Cuban Missile Crisis. It did, however, lead to wars around the world that were part of the Cold War setting but also involved conflicts between colonizers and the colonized. In other words, many conflicts in the postwar era represented a combination of battles for independence from European empires and proxy wars between the two camps of the Cold War.

The first such war was in Korea. Korea had been occupied by Japan since 1910, one of the first countries to be conquered during Japan’s bid to create an East Asian and Pacific empire that culminated in the Pacific theater of World War II. After the defeat of Japan, Korea was occupied by Soviet troops in the north and US troops in the south. In the midst of the confusion in the immediate postwar era, the two superpowers ignored Korean demands for

independence and instead divided the country in two. In 1950, North Korean troops supported with Soviet arms and allied Chinese troops invaded the south in the name of reuniting the country under communist rule. This was a case in which both the Soviets and the Chinese directly supported an invasion in the name of spreading communism, something that would become far less common in subsequent conflicts. A United Nations force consisting mostly of American soldiers, sailors, and pilots fought alongside South Korean troops against the North Korean and Chinese forces.



*Refugees fleeing south after the invasion by North Korean forces.*

Meanwhile, in 1945 Vietnamese insurgents declared Vietnam's independence from France, and French forces (such as they were following the German occupation) hastily invaded in an attempt to hold on to the French colony of Indochina. When the Korean War exploded a few years later, the United States intervened to support France, convinced by the events in Korea that communism was spreading like a virus across Asia. As American involvement grew, orders for munitions and equipment from the US to Japan revitalized the Japanese economy and, ironically given the carnage of the Pacific theater of World War II, began to forge a strong political alliance between the two former enemies.

After three years of bloody fighting, including the invasion of a full-scale Chinese army in support of the northern forces, the Korean War ended in a stalemate. A demilitarized zone was established between North and South Korea in 1953, and both sides agreed to a cease fire. Technically, however, the war has never officially ended - both sides have simply remained in a tense state of truce since 1953. The war itself tore apart the country, with three million

casualties (including 140,000 American casualties), and a stark ideological and economic divide between north and south that only grew stronger in the ensuing decades. As South Korea evolved to become a modern, technologically advanced and politically democratic society, the north devolved into a nominally “communist” tyranny in which poverty and even outright famine were tragic realities of life.

The Korean War energized the American obsession with preventing the spread of communism. President Truman of the US insisted, against the bitter protests of the British and French, that West Germany be allowed to rearm in order to help bolster the anti-Soviet alliance. As French forces suffered growing defeats in Indochina, the US ramped up its commitment in order to prevent another Asian nation from becoming a communist state. The American theory of the “domino effect” of the spread of communism from country to country seemed entirely plausible at the time, and across the American political spectrum there was a strong consensus that communism could only be held in check by the application of military force.

That obsession led directly to the Vietnam War (known in Vietnam as the American War). The Vietnam War is among the most infamous in modern American history (for Americans) because America lost it. In turn, American commitment to the war only makes sense if it is placed in its historical context, that of a Cold War conflict that appeared to American policymakers as a test of resolve in the face of the spread of communism. The conflict was, in fact, as much about colonialism and imperialism as it was communism: the essential motivation of the North Vietnamese forces was the desire to seize genuine independence from foreign powers. The war itself was an outgrowth of the conflict between the Vietnamese and their French colonial masters, one that eventually dragged in the United States.

The war “really” began with the end of World War II. During the war, the Japanese seized Vietnam from the French, but with the Japanese defeat the French tried to reassert control, putting a puppet emperor on the throne and moving their forces back into the country. Vietnamese independence leaders, principally the former Parisian college student (and former dishwasher - he worked at restaurants in Paris while a student) Ho Chi Minh, led the communist North Vietnamese forces (the Viet Minh) in a vicious guerrilla war against the beleaguered French. In a prescient moment with a French official, Ho Chi Minh once prophesied that “you will kill ten of our men, but we will kill one of yours and you will end up by wearing yourselves out.” The Soviet Union and China both provided weapons and aid to the North Vietnamese, while the US anticipated its own (later) invasion by supporting the South.



*Ho Chi Minh in 1946.*

The French period of the conflict reached its culminating point in 1954 when the French were soundly defeated at Dien Bien Phu, a French fortress that was overwhelmed by the Viet Minh. The French retreated, leaving Vietnam torn between the communists in the north and a corrupt but anti-communist force in the south supported by the United States. Refusing to allow the national elections that had been planned for 1956, the US instead propped up an unpopular president, Ngo Dinh Diem, who claimed authority over the entire country. An insurgency, labeled the Viet Cong (“Vietnamese communists”) by the Diem government, supported by the north erupted in 1958, leading the US to provision hundreds of millions of dollars in aid and, soon, an increasing number of military advisers to the south.

In 1964, pressured by both Soviet and Chinese advisers and with the US stepping up pressure on the Viet Cong, the Viet Minh leadership launched a full-scale invasion in the name of Vietnamese unification. American involvement skyrocketed as the South Vietnamese proved unable to contain the Viet Minh and the Viet Cong insurgents. Over time, thousands of American military “advisers,” mostly made up of what would become known as special forces, were joined by hundreds of thousands of American troops. In 1964, citing a fabricated attack on an American ship in the Gulf of Tonkin, President Lyndon Johnson called for a full-scale armed

response, which opened the floodgates for a true commitment to the war (technically, war was never declared, however, with the entire conflict constituting a “police action” from the American policy perspective).

Ultimately, Ho Chi Minh was proven right in his predictions about the war. American and South Vietnamese forces were fought to a standstill by the Viet Minh and Viet Cong, with neither side winning a definitive victory. All the while, however, the war was becoming more and more unpopular in America itself and in its allied countries. As the years went by, journalists cataloged much of the horrific carnage unleashed by American forces, with jungles leveled by chemical agents and napalm and, notoriously, civilians massacred. The United States resorted to a lottery system tied to conscription - “the draft” - in 1969, which led to tens of thousands of American soldiers sent against their will to fight in jungles thousands of miles from home. Despite the vast military commitment, US and South Korean forces started to lose ground by 1970.

The entire youth movement of the 1960s and 1970s was deeply embedded in the anti-war stance caused by the mendacious press campaigns about the war carried on by the US government, by atrocities committed against Vietnamese civilians, and by the deep unpopularity of the draft. In 1973, with American approval for the war hovering at 30%, President Richard Nixon oversaw the withdrawal of American troops and the end of support for the South Vietnamese. The Viet Minh finally seized the capital of Saigon and ended the war in 1975. The human cost was immense: over a million Vietnamese died, along with some 60,000 American troops.





*A Pulitzer-Prize winning photo from 1972 depicting the aftermath of a napalm attack on a South Vietnamese village suspected of harboring Viet Cong forces. The girl, Phan Thi Kim Phuc, is naked after stripping off her burning clothes. She survived and ultimately became a peace activist as an adult. Images like the above helped to inspire fervent anti-war sentiments in the United States and Europe.*

In historical hindsight, one of the striking aspects of the Vietnam War was the relative restraint of the Soviet Union. The USSR provided both military supplies and financial aid to North Vietnamese forces, but it fell far short of any kind of sustained intervention along the American model in the south. Likewise, the People's Republic of China supported the Viet Minh, but it did so in direct competition with the USSR (following a historic break between the two countries in 1956). Nevertheless, whereas the US regarded Vietnam as a crucial bulwark against the spread of communism, and subsequently engaged in a full-scale war as a result, the USSR remained circumspect, focusing on maintaining power and control in the eastern bloc and avoiding direct military commitment in Vietnam.

That being noted, not all Cold War conflicts were so lopsided in terms of superpower involvement. As described in the last chapter, Cuba was caught at the center of the single most dangerous nuclear standoff in history in part because the USSR was willing to confront American interests directly. Something comparable occurred across the world in Egypt even earlier, representing another case of an independence movement that became embedded in Cold War politics. There, unlike in Vietnam, both superpowers played a major role in

determining the future of a nation emerging from imperial control, although (fortunately) neither committed itself to a war in doing so.

Egypt had been part of the British empire since 1882 when it was seized during the Scramble for Africa. It achieved a degree of independence after World War I, but remained squarely under British control in terms of its foreign policy. Likewise, the Suez Canal - the crucially important link between the Mediterranean and Red Sea completed in 1869 - was under the direct control of a Canal Company dominated by the British and French. In 1952 the Egyptian general Gamal Abdel Nasser overthrew the British-supported regime and asserted complete Egyptian independence. The United States initially sought to bring him into the American camp by offering funds for a massive new dam on the Nile, but then Nasser made an arms deal with (communist) Czechoslovakia. The funds were denied, and Nasser announced that he would instead seize the Suez Canal (which flowed directly through Egyptian territory) to pay for the dam instead.

Thus, in the summer of 1956 Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal. Henceforth, all of the traffic going through the vitally important canal would be regulated by Egypt directly. Stung by the nationalization, Britain and France plotted to reassert control. The British and French were joined by Israeli politicians who saw Nasser's bold move as a direct threat to Israeli security (sharing as they did an important border). A few months of frenzied behind-the-scenes diplomacy and planning ensued, and in October Israeli, British, and French forces invaded Egypt.

Despite being a legacy of imperialism, the "Suez Crisis" swiftly became a Cold War conflict as well. Concerned both at the imperial posturing of Britain and France and at the prospect of the invasion sparking Soviet involvement, US President Dwight Eisenhower forcefully demanded that the Israelis, French, and British withdraw, threatening economic boycotts (all while attempting to reduce the volatility with the Soviets). Days later Khrushchev threatened nuclear strikes if the French, Israeli, and British forces did not pull back. Cowed, the Israeli, French, and British forces retreated. The Suez Crisis demonstrated that the US dominated the policy decisions of its allies almost as completely as did the Soviets theirs. The US might not run its allied governments as puppet states, but it could directly shape their foreign policy.

In the aftermath of the Suez Crisis, Egypt's control of the canal was assured. While generally closer to the USSR than the US in its foreign policy, it also tried to initiate a genuine "third way" between the two superpowers, and Egyptian leaders called for Arab nationalism and unity in the Middle East as a way to stay independent of the Cold War. Despite that intention,

however, the Suez Crisis saw both superpowers take a more active interest in maintaining client, or at least friendly, states in the region, regardless of the ideological commitments of those states. This led to the strange spectacle of the United States, nominal champion of democracy, forming a close alliance with the autocratic monarchy of Saudi Arabia and other states resolutely uncommitted to representative government or even basic human rights.

## Independence Movements and Decolonization

Despite the enormous pressure exerted by the superpowers, some independence movements did manage to avoid becoming a proxy conflict within the Cold War. For the most part, the simplest way in which an independence movement might avoid superpower involvement was to steer clear of communist rhetoric or nationalized industries. From Asia to Latin America, independence movements and rebel groups that adopted communist ideology were targeted by the US, whereas those that avoided it rarely drew the ire of either superpower. The exceptions were countries like Iran that tried to nationalize domestic industries - the US sponsored a coup to overthrow the prime minister Mohammed Mosadeq in 1953 for trying to assert Iranian ownership of its own oil fields, replacing him with a corrupt king, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who was beholden to American interests. Still, in general it was possible for a country to fight for its independence and still stay in the good graces of the USSR (as with Egypt) without openly embracing communism, whereas it was impossible for a country to embrace socialism and stay out of the crosshairs of the US thanks to the Truman Doctrine, which committed the United States to armed intervention in the case of a communist-backed uprising.

Thus, while there were only a handful of true proxy wars over the course of the Cold War, there were dozens of successful movements of independence. As quickly as European empires had grown in the second half of the nineteenth century, they collapsed in the decades following World War II in a phenomenon known as decolonization. In the inverse of the Scramble for Africa, nearly the entire continent of Africa remained colonized by European powers as of World War II but nearly all of it was independent by the end of the 1960s. Likewise, European possessions in Asia all but vanished in the postwar era.

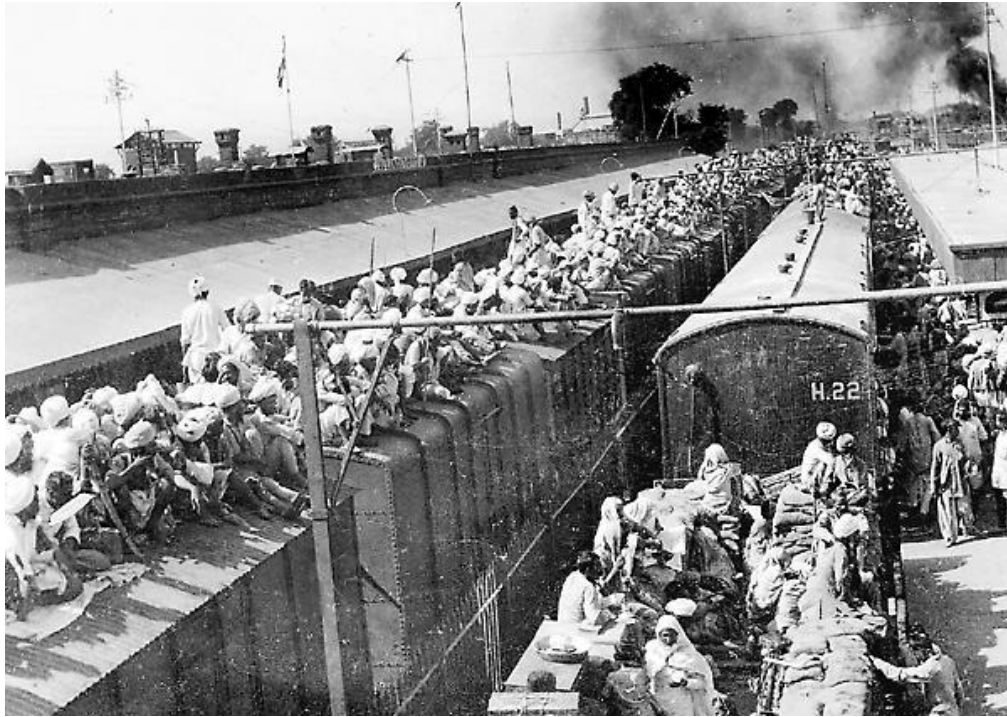
Given the rapidity with which the empires collapsed it is tempting to imagine that the European states simply acknowledged the moral bankruptcy of imperialism after World War II and peacefully relinquished their possessions. Instead, however, decolonization was often as bloody and inhumane as had been the establishment of empire in the first place. In some

cases, such as Dutch control of Indonesia and French sovereignty in Indochina, European powers clung desperately to colonies in the name of retaining their geopolitical relevance. In others, such as the British in Kenya and the French in Algeria, large numbers of white settlers refused to be “abandoned” by the European metropole, leading to sometimes staggering levels of violence. That being noted, there were also major (soon to be former) colonies that achieved independence without the need for violent insurrection against their imperial masters. (Note: given the very large number of countries that achieved independence during the period of decolonization, this chapter concentrates on some of the particularly consequential cases in terms of their geopolitical impact at the time and since).

The case of India is iconic in that regard. Long the “jewel in the crown of the British empire,” India was both an economic powerhouse and a massive symbol of British prestige. By World War II, however, the Indian National Congress had agitated for independence for almost sixty years. An astonishing 2.5 million Indian troops served the British Empire during World War II despite the growth in nationalist sentiment, but returned after victory in Europe was achieved to find a social and political system still designed to keep Indians from positions of importance in the Indian administration. Peaceful protests before the war grew in intensity during it, and in the aftermath (in part because of the financial devastation of the war), a critical mass of British politicians finally conceded that India would have to be granted independence in the near future. The British state established the date of independence as July 18, 1947.

The British government, however, made it clear that the actual logistics of independence and of organizing a new government were to be left to the Indians. A conflict exploded between the Indian Muslim League and the Hindu-dominated Congress Party, with the former demanding an independent Muslim state. The British came to support the idea and finally the Congress Party conceded to it despite the vociferous resistance of the independence leader Mohandes Gandhi. When independence became a reality, India was divided between a non-contiguous Muslim state, Pakistan, and a majority-Hindu state, India.

This event is referred to as “The Partition.” Millions of Muslims were driven from India and millions of Hindus and Sikhs were driven from Pakistan, leading to countless acts of violence during the expulsion of both Muslims and Hindus from what had been their homes. Hundreds of thousands, and possibly more than a million people died, and the states of Pakistan and India remain at loggerheads to the present. Gandhi himself, who bitterly opposed the Partition, was murdered by a Hindu extremist in 1948.



*Refugees during the Partition.*

Religious (and ethnic) divides within former colonies were not unique to India. Many countries that sought independence were products of imperialism in the first place - the “national” borders of states like Iraq, Ghana, and Rwanda had been arbitrarily created by the imperial powers decades earlier with complete disregard for the religious and ethnic differences of the people who lived within the borders. In the Iraqi example, both Sunni and Shia Muslims, a Christian minority known as Assyrians, different Arab ethnicities, and Kurds all lived side-by-side. Its very existence was due to a hairbrained scheme by Winston Churchill, at the time the foreign secretary of the British government after World War I, to lump together different oil-producing regions in one convenient state under British domination. Iraq’s ethnic and religious diversity did not guarantee violent conflict, of course, but when circumstances arose that inspired conflict, violence could, and often did, result.

The current ongoing crisis of Israel and Palestine is both a result of arbitrary borders drawn up by former imperial powers as well as a unique case of a nationalist movement achieving its goals for a ethnic-religious homeland. The British had held the “mandate” (political governorship) of the territory of Palestine before WWII, having seized it after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Thousands of European Jews had been immigrating to Palestine since

around the turn of the century, fleeing antisemitism in Europe and hoping to create a Jewish state as part of the Zionist movement founded during the Dreyfus Affair in France.

During World War I, the British had both promised to support the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine while also assuring various Arab leaders that Britain would aid them in creating independent states in the aftermath of the Ottoman Empire's expected demise. Even the official British declaration that offered support for a Jewish homeland – the Balfour Declaration of 1917 – specifically included language that promised the Arabs of Palestine (both Muslim and Christian) support in ensuring their own “civil and religious rights.” In other words, the dominant European power in the area at the time, and the one that was to directly rule it from 1920 – 1947, tried to appease both sides with vague assurances.

After World War I, however, the British established control over a large swath of territory that included the future state of Israel, frustrating Arab hopes for their own independence. Countries like Iraq, Transjordan, and the Nadj (forerunner to today's Saudi Arabia) were simply invented by British politicians, often with compliant Arab leaders dropped onto newly-invented thrones in the process. Meanwhile, between 1918 and 1939, the Jewish population of Palestine went from roughly 60,000 to 650,000 as Jews attracted to Zionism moved to the area. The entire period was replete with riots and growing hostility between the Arab and Jewish populations, with the British trying (and generally failing) to keep the peace. As war loomed in 1939 the British even tried to restrict Jewish immigration to avoid alienating the region's Arab majority.

After World War II, the British proved unable and unwilling to try to manage the volatile region, turning the territory over to the newly-created United Nations in April of 1947. The UN's plan to divide the territory into two states – one for Arabs and one for Jews – was rejected by all of the countries in the region, and Israel's creation as a formal state in May of 1948 saw nine months of war between the Jews of the newly-created state of Israel and a coalition of the surrounding Arab states: Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, along with small numbers of volunteers from other Arab countries. Israel consistently fielded larger, better-trained and better-equipped armies in the ensuing war, as the Arab states were in their infancy as well, and Jewish settlers in Palestine had spent years organizing their own militias. When the dust settled, there were nearly a million Palestinian refugees and a state that promised to be the center of conflict in the region for decades to come.

Since the creation of Israel, there have been three more full-scale regional wars: the 1956 Suez War (noted above in the discussion of Egypt), which had no lasting consequences besides adding fuel to future conflicts, the Six-Day War of 1967, that resulted in great territorial

gains for Israel, and the Yom Kippur War of 1973 that undid some of those gains. In addition to the actual wars, there have been ongoing explosions of violence between Palestinians and Israelis that continue to the present, most recently with the Hamas attack of 2023 and the subsequent Israeli invasion of Gaza.

## Africa

While the cases of India and Israel were, and are, of tremendous geopolitical significance, the most striking case of decolonization at the time was the wave of independence movements across Africa in the 1950s and 1960s. Africa had been the main target of the European imperialism of the late nineteenth century. The Scramble for Africa was both astonishingly quick (lasting from the 1880s until about 1900) and amazingly complete, with all of Africa but Liberia and Ethiopia taken over by one European state or another. In the postwar era, almost every African country secured independence just as quickly; the whole edifice of European empire in Africa collapsed as rapidly as it had arisen a bit over a half century earlier. In turn, in some places this process was peaceful, but in many it was extremely violent.

In West Africa, the former colony of the Gold Coast became well known for its charismatic independence leader Kwame Nkrumah. Nkrumah not only successfully led Ghana to independence in 1957 after a peaceful independence movement and negotiations with the British, but founded a movement called Pan-Africanism in which, he hoped, the nations of Africa might join together in a “United States of Africa” that would achieve parity with the other great powers of the world to the betterment of Africans everywhere. His vision was of a united African league, possibly even a single nation, whose collective power, wealth, and influence would ensure that outside powers would never again dominate Africans. While that vision did not come to pass, the concept of pan-Africanism was still vitally important as an inspiration for other African independence movements at the time.

In Kenya, in contrast, hundreds of thousands of white colonists were not interested in independence from Britain. By 1952, a complex web of nationalist rebels, impoverished villagers and farmers, and counter-insurgent fighters plunged the country into a civil war. The British and native white Kenyans reacted to the uprising by creating concentration camps, imprisoning rebels and slowly starving them to death in the hills. The rebels, disparagingly referred to as “Mau Maus” (meaning something like “hill savages”), in turn, attacked white civilians, in many cases murdering them outright. Finally, after 11 years of war, Kenya was granted its independence and elected a former insurgent leader as its first president. Ironically,

while British forces were in a dominant position militarily, the British state was financially over-extended. Thus, Britain granted Kenyan independence in 1963.

While most former colonies adopted official policies of racial equality, and for the first time since the Scramble black Africans achieved political power almost everywhere, there was one striking exception: South Africa. South Africa had always been an unusual British colony. 21% of the South African population was white, divided between the descendents of British settlers and the older Dutch colony of Afrikaners who had been conquered and then incorporated by the British at the end of the nineteenth century. The Afrikaners in particular were virulently racist and intransigent, unwilling to share power with the black majority. As early as 1950 white South Africans (British and Afrikaner alike) emphatically insisted on the continuation of a policy known as *Apartheid*: the legal separation of whites and blacks and the complete subordination of the latter to the former.

South Africa became independent from Britain in 1961, but Apartheid remained as the backbone of the South African legal system, systematically repressing and oppressing the majority black population. Even as overtly racist laws were repealed elsewhere - not least in the United States as a result of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s - Apartheid remained resolutely intact. That system would remain in place until 1991, when the system finally collapsed and the long-imprisoned anti-Apartheid activist leader Nelson Mandela was released, soon becoming South Africa's first black president.

British colonies were not alone in struggling to achieve independence, nor in the legacy of racial division that remained from the period of colonization. One of the most violent struggles for independence of the period of decolonization in Africa occurred in the French territory of Algeria. The struggles surrounding Algerian independence, which began in 1952, were among the bloodiest wars of decolonization. Hundreds of thousands of Algerians died, along with tens of thousands of French and *pieds-noires* ("black feet," the pejorative term invented by the French for the white residents of Algeria). The heart of the conflict had to do with a concept of French identity: particularly on the political right, many French citizens felt that France's remaining colonies were vital to its status as an important geopolitical power. Likewise, many in France were ashamed of the French defeat and occupation in World War II and refused to simply give up France's empire without a struggle. This sentiment was felt particularly acutely by the French officer corps, with many French officers having only ever been on the losing side of wars (World War II and Indochina). They were thus determined to hold on to Algeria at all costs.



On the other hand, many French citizens realized all too well that the values the Fourth French Republic supposedly stood for – liberty, equality, and fraternity - were precisely what had been denied the native people of Algeria since it was first conquered by France during the restored monarchy under the Bourbons in the early nineteenth century. In fact, “native” Algerians were divided legally along racial and religious lines: Muslim Arab and Berber Algerians were denied access to political power and usually worked in lower-paying jobs, while white, Catholic Algerians (descendents of both French and Italian settlers) were fully enfranchised French citizens. In 1954, a National Liberation Front (FLN) composed of Arab and Berber Algerians demanded independence from France and launched a campaign of attacks on both French officials and, soon, *pieds-noires* civilians.

The French response was brutal. French troops, many fresh from the defeat in Indochina, responded to the National Liberation Front with complete disregard for human rights, the legal conduct of soldiers in relation to civilians, or concern for the guilt or innocence of those suspected of supporting the rebellion. Infamously, the army resorted almost immediately to a systematic campaign of torture against captured rebels and those suspected of having information that could aid the French. Algerian civilians were often caught in the middle of the fighting, with the French army targeting the civilian populace when it saw fit. While the torture campaign was kept out of the press, rumors of its prevalence soon spread to continental France, inspiring an enormous debate as to the necessity and value of holding on to Algeria. The war grew in Algeria even as France itself was increasingly torn apart by the conflict.



*French soldiers next to the bodies of Algerian insurgents.*

Within a few years, as the anti-war protest campaign grew in France itself, many soldiers both in Algeria and in other parts of France and French territories grew disgusted with what they regarded as the weak-kneed vacillation on the part of republican politicians. Those soldiers created ultra-rightist terrorist groups, launching attacks on prominent intellectuals who spoke out against the war (the most prominent French philosopher at the time, Jean-Paul Sartre, had his apartment in Paris destroyed in a bomb attack). Troops launched an attempted coup in Algeria in 1958 and briefly succeeded in seizing control of the French-held island of Corsica as well.

It was in this context of near-civil war, with the government of the Fourth Republic paralyzed and the prospect of a new right-wing military dictatorship all too real, that the leader of the Free French forces in World War II, Charles de Gaulle, volunteered to “rescue” France from its predicament, with the support of the army. He placated the army temporarily, but when it became clear he intended to pull France out of Algeria, a paramilitary terrorist group twice tried to assassinate him. De Gaulle narrowly survived the assassination attempts and forced through a new constitution that vested considerable new powers in the office of the president. De Gaulle opened negotiations with the FLN in 1960, leading to the ratification of Algerian independence in 1962 by a large majority of French voters. Despite being an ardent believer in the French need for “greatness,” De Gaulle was perceptive enough to know that the battle for Algeria was lost before it had begun.

In the aftermath of the Algerian War, millions of white Algerians moved to France, many of them feeling betrayed and embittered. They became the core of a new French political far-right, openly racist and opposed to immigration from France's former colonies. Many members of that resurgent right wing coalesced in the first openly fascist party in France since the end of World War II: the *Front National*. Racist, antisemitic, and obsessed with a notion of French identity embedded in the culture of the Vichy Regime (i.e. the French fascist puppet state under Nazi occupation), the National Front remains a powerful force in French politics to this day.

## The Non-Aligned Movement and Immigration

In the context of the Cold War, many struggles over decolonization were tied closely to the attitudes and involvement of the US and USSR. Vietnam provides perhaps the most iconic example. What was “really” a struggle for independence became a global conflict because of the socialist ideology espoused by the Viet Minh nationalists. Many leaders of

formerly-colonized countries, however, rejected the idea that they had to choose sides in the Cold War and instead sought a truly independent course. The dream of many political elites in countries in the process of emerging from colonial domination was that former colonies around the world, but especially those in Africa and Asia, might create a new “superpower” through their alliance. The result was the birth of the Nonaligned Movement.

The beginning of the Nonaligned Movement was the Bandung Conference of 1955. In the Indonesian city of Bandung, leaders from countries in Africa, Asia, and South America met to discuss the possibility of forming a coalition that might push back against superpower dominance. This was the high point of the Pan-Africanism championed by Kwame Nkrumah described above, and in turn non-aligned countries earnestly hoped that their collective strength could compensate for their individual weakness vis-à-vis the superpowers. A French journalist at the conference created the term “third world” to describe the bloc of nations: neither the first world of the US and western Europe, nor the second world of the USSR and its satellites, but the allied bloc of former colonies.

While the somewhat utopian goal of a truly united third world proved as elusive as a United States of Africa, the real, meaningful effect of the conference (and the continued meetings of the nonaligned movement) was at the United Nations. The Nonaligned Movement ended up with over 100 member nations, wielding considerable power in the General Assembly of the UN and successfully directing policies and aid money to poorer nations. During the crucial decades of decolonization itself, the Nonaligned Movement also served as inspiration for millions around the world who sought not only independence for its own sake, but in the name of creating a more peaceful and prosperous world for all.

The irony of decolonization is that even as former European colonies were achieving formal political independence, millions of former colonized peoples were flocking to Europe for work. A postwar economic boom in Europe (described in the next chapter) created a huge market for labor, especially in fields of unskilled labor. Thus, Africans, Caribbeans, Asians, and people from the Middle East from former colonies all came in droves to work at jobs Europeans did not want, because those jobs still paid more than even skilled work did in the former colonies.

Initially, most immigrant laborers were single men, “guest workers” in the parlance of the time, who were expected to work for a time, send money home, then return to their places of origin. By the mid-1960s, however, families followed, demographically transforming the formerly almost all-white Europe into a genuinely multi-ethnic society. For the first time, many European

societies grew ethnically and racially diverse, and within a few decades, a whole generation of non-white people were native-born citizens of European countries.

The result was an ongoing struggle over national and cultural identity. Particularly in places like Britain, France, and postwar West Germany, the official stance of governments and most people alike was that European culture was colorblind, and that anyone who culturally assimilated could be a productive part of society. The problem was that it was far easier to maintain that attitude before many people not born in Europe made their homes there; as soon as significant minority populations became residents of European countries, there was an explosion of anti-immigrant racism among whites. In addition, in cases like France, former colonists who had fled to the metropole were often hardened racists who openly called for exclusionary practices and laws. Europeans were forced to grapple with the idea of cultural and racial diversity in a way that was entirely new to them (in contrast to countries like the United States, which has *always* been highly racially diverse following the European invasions of the early modern period).

One group of British Marxist scholars, many of whom were immigrants or the children of immigrants, described this phenomenon as “the empire strikes back”: having seized most of the world’s territory by force, Europeans were now left with a legacy of racial and cultural diversity that many of them did not want. In turn, the universalist aspirations of “Western Civilization” were challenged as never before.

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## Chapter 14: Postwar Society

Once the Cold War began in 1947, Europe was just one of the stages on which it was played out around the world. Cold War divisions were perhaps stronger in Europe than anywhere else, however, because the European subcontinent was geographically divided along the lines of the Cold War: in the west the prevailing political and economic pattern was a combination of democracy and a regulated market capitalism, while in the east it was of Soviet-dominated communist rule and command economies. The contrast was all the more striking in that both sides of the Cold War divide began in similar circumstances - devastated by World War II - yet within a decade the west was in the midst of an unprecedented economic boom while the east remained in relative economic stagnation.

### Social Democracy

In the aftermath of the war, the most important and noticeable political change in the west was the nearly universal triumph of democratic forms of government. Whereas the democratic experiments of the interwar period had all too often ended in the disaster of fascism, stable democratic governments emerged in the postwar era that are still present today, albeit in modified forms in some cases like that of France. All of the governments of Western Europe except Spain and Portugal granted the right to vote to all adult citizens after the war. And, for the first time, this included women almost everywhere. (Although one bizarre holdout was Switzerland, where women did not get the vote until 1971.)

There was a concomitant embrace of a specific form of democratic politics and market economics: "social democracy," the commitment on the part of government to ensure not just the legal rights of its citizens, but a base minimum standard of living and access to employment opportunities as well. Social democracy was born of the experience of the war. The people of Europe had simply fought too hard in World War II to return to the conditions of the Great Depression or the bitter class struggles of the prewar period. Thus, one of the plans anticipated by wartime governments in the west was recompense for the people who had endured and suffered through the war - this phenomenon is sometimes referred to as the "postwar

compromise” between governments and elites on the one hand and working people on the other.

It was within the commitment to social democracy that the modern welfare state came into being. The principle behind the welfare state is that it is impossible to be happy and productive without certain basic needs being met. Among the most important of those needs are adequate healthcare and education, both priorities that the governments of postwar Western Europe embraced. By the end of the 1950s, 37% of the income of Western European families was indirect, subsidies “paid” to them by their governments in the form of housing subsidies, food subsidies, health care, and education. European governments devoted four times more income to social services in 1957 than they had in 1930.

The results of state investment in citizen welfare were striking. By the end of the 1960s, most Western European states provided free high-quality medical care, free education from primary school through university, and various subsidies and pensions. In part because of the strength of postwar leftist (both communist and socialist) parties, trade unions won considerable rights as well, with workers entitled to pensions, time off, and regulated working conditions. Thus, as the economies of the Western European states expanded after the end of the war, their citizens enjoyed standards of living higher than any generation before them, in large part because wealth was distributed much more evenly than it had ever been.

The welfare state was paid for by progressive taxation schemes and a very large reduction in military spending; one of the benefits of western Europe’s alliance with the US, and European commitment to the UN, was that it was politically feasible to greatly reduce the size of each country’s military, with the understanding that it was the US that would lead the way in keeping the threat of a Soviet invasion in check. For instance, even as military spending skyrocketed for the US and the Soviet Union, it dropped to less than 10% of the GDP of the UK by the early 1960s and steadily declined from there in the following years. Likewise, with the long-term trend of decolonization, there was no longer a need for large imperial armies to control colonies. Instead, “control” shifted to a model of economic relationships between the former colonial masters and their former colonial possessions.

Also in stark contrast to the political situation of the interwar years was the power of the political center. Simply put, the far right had been completely compromised by the disastrous triumph of fascism. Just about all major far-right parties had either been fascistic themselves or allied with fascism before the war, and in the war’s aftermath far-right politicians were forced into political silence by the shameful debacle that had resulted in their prewar success. Fascistic

parties did not re-emerge in earnest until the 1960s, and even then they remained fringe groups until the 1990s.

In turn, the far left, namely communists, were inextricably tied to the Soviet Union. This was a blessing for communist parties in the immediate aftermath of the war, but became a burden when the injustices of Soviet society became increasingly well known in the west. The problem for western communists was that communist parties were forced to publicly support the policies of the Soviet Union. In the immediate postwar period that was not a problem, since the USSR was widely admired for having defeated the Nazis on the eastern front at tremendous cost to its people. In the postwar period, however, the USSR quickly came to represent nothing more than the threat of tyranny to most people in the west, especially as it came to dominate the countries of the eastern bloc. The existence of Soviet gulags became increasingly well known, although the details were often unclear, and thus western communist parties struggled to appeal to anyone beyond their base in the working class. Around 30% of the electorate in France and Italy voted communist in the immediate aftermath of the war, but that percentage shrank steadily in the following decades.

Thus, with the right compromised by fascism and the left by communism, the parties in power were variations on the center-left and center-right, usually parties that fell under the categories of “Socialists” (or, in Britain, Labour) and “Christian Democrats.” In turn, at least for the thirty years following the war, neither side deviated significantly from support for social democracy and the welfare state. The ideological divisions between these two major party categories had to do with social and cultural issues, of support or opposition to women’s issues and feminism, of the stance toward decolonization, of the proper content of the state-run universities, and so on, rather than the desirability of the welfare state.

The “socialists” in this case were only socialistic in their firm commitment to fair treatment of workers. In some cases, socialist parties held onto the traditional Marxist rhetoric of revolution as late as the early 1970s, but it was increasingly obvious to observers that revolution was not in fact a practical goal that the parties were pursuing. Instead, socialists tended to champion a more diffuse, and prosaic, set of goals: workers’ rights and protections, support for the independence of former colonies, and eventually, sympathy and support for cultural issues surrounding feminism and sexuality.

In turn, Christian Democracy was an amalgam of social conservatism with a now-anachronistic willingness to provide welfare state provisions. Christian Democrats (or, in the case of Britain, the Conservative “Tory” Party) tended to oppose the dissolution of empire, at least until decolonization was in full swing by the 1960s. While willing to support the welfare

state in general, Christian Democrats were staunchly opposed to the more far-reaching demands of labor unions. Against the cultural tumult of the 1960s, Christian Democrats also emphasized what they identified as traditional cultural and social values. Arguably, the most important political innovation associated with Christian Democracy was that the European political right wing accepted liberal democracy as a legitimate political system for the first time. There were no further mainstream political parties or movements that attempted to create authoritarian forms of government; fascism and the war had simply been too traumatic.

## The Postwar Boom and Cultural Change

With the governments of Western Europe sharing these fundamental characteristics, they sought to ease trade across their borders, forming federalist bodies meant to make economic cooperation easier. In 1957, the governments of central continental Europe came together and founded the European Economic Community (EEC), also known as the Common Market. They created a free trade zone and coordinated economic policies in such a manner that trade between them increased fivefold in the years that followed. Britain opted not to join, and tellingly its growth rates lagged significantly.

Regardless, Britain joined the other western European countries in achieving unprecedented affluence by the mid-1950s. While the memory of immediate postwar rationing and penury was still fresh, fueled by coordinated government action and Marshall Plan loans the Western European countries were able to vault to higher and higher levels of wealth and productivity less than a decade after the end of the war. Real Wages grew in England by 80% from 1950 to 1970, French industrial output doubled between 1938 and 1959, and West Germany's exports grew by 600% in one decade: the 1950s. The years between 1945 and 1975 were described by a French economist as the *trente glorieuses*: the thirty glorious years. It was a time in which regular working people experienced an enormous, ongoing growth in their buying power and standard of living.

With the welfare state in place, many people were willing to spend on non-essentials, buying on credit and indulging in the host of new consumer items like cars, appliances, and fashion. In short, the postwar boom represented the birth of the modern consumer society in Europe, the parallel of that of the United States at the same time. Increasingly, only the very poor were *not* able to buy consumer goods that they did not need for survival. Most people were able to buy clothes that followed fashion trends, middle-class families could afford creature



comforts like electric appliances and televisions, and increasingly working families could even afford a car, something that would have been unheard of before World War II.

Part of this phenomenon was the baby boom. While not as extreme in Europe as in the US, the generation of children born in the first ten years after WWII was very large, pushing Europe's population from 264 million in 1940 to 320 million by the early 1970s.. A child born in 1946 was a teenager by the early 1960s, in turn fueling the massive explosion of popular music that resulted in the most iconic musical expression of youth culture: rock n' roll. The "boomers" were eager consumers as well, fueling the demand for fashion, music, and leisure activities.

Meanwhile, the sciences saw breakthroughs of comparable importance to those of the second half of the nineteenth century. Scientists identified the basic structure of DNA in 1953. Terrible diseases were treated with vaccines for the first time, including measles and polio. Organ transplants became a reality in the 1950s. Thus, life itself could be extended in ways hitherto unimaginable. Along with the growth of consumer society, postwar Europeans and Americans alike had cause to believe in the possibility of indefinite, ongoing progress and improvement.

One stark contrast between American and European culture at this time was the dramatic differences in church attendance. American religious culture was not significantly impacted by consumerism, while consumerism (in a way) replaced religiosity in Europe. The postwar period saw church attendance decline across the board in Europe, hovering around 5% by the 1970s. In an effort to combat this decline, Pope John XXIII called a council in 1958 that stretched on for five years. Known as "Vatican II," this council revolutionized Catholic practices in an effort to modernize the church and appeal to more people. One of the noteworthy changes that came out of Vatican II was that the Mass was conducted in vernacular languages instead of in Latin - over four centuries after that practice had first emerged during the Protestant Reformation.

## Philosophy and Art

Ironically, some of the major intellectual movements of the postwar period focused not on the promise of a better future, but on the premise that life was and probably would remain alienating and unjust. Despite the real, tangible improvements in the quality of life for most people in Western Europe between 1945 - 1975, there was a marked insecurity and pessimism that was reflected in postwar art and philosophy. Major factors behind this pessimism were the devastation of the war itself, the threat of nuclear war between the superpowers, and the declining power of Europe on the world stage. New cultural struggles emerged against the

backdrop not of economic uncertainty and conventional warfare, but of economic prosperity and the threat of nuclear war.

The postwar era began in the shadow of the war and the fascist nightmare that had preceded it; the British writer George Orwell noted that “since about 1930, the world had given no reason for optimism whatsoever. Nothing in sight except a welter of lies, cruelty, hatred, and ignorance.” Some of the most important changes in art and philosophy in the postwar era emerged from the moral exhaustion that was the result of the war, something that lingered over Europe for years and grew with the discovery of the extent of the Holocaust. There was also the simple fact that the world itself could not survive another world war; once the Cold War began in earnest in the late 1940s, the world was just a few decisions away from devastation, if not outright destruction.

The quintessential postwar philosophy was existentialism. The great figures of existentialism were the French writers and philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus. Sartre and Beauvoir had played minor roles in the French Resistance against the Nazis during the war, while Camus had played a more significant role in that he wrote and edited a clandestine anti-Nazi paper, *Combat*. Sartre and Beauvoir were products of the most elite schools and universities in France, while Camus was an Algerian-born French citizen who took pride in his “provincial” background. Even before the war, Sartre was famous for his philosophical work and for his novel *Nausea*, which depicted a “hero” who tried unsuccessfully to find meaning in life after realizing that his actions were all ultimately pointless.



*Lifelong companions and fellow philosophers Beauvoir and Sartre.*

While existentialism is a flowery word, its essential arguments are straightforward. First, there is no inherent meaning to life. Humans just exist: they are born, they do things while alive, then they die. During life, however, people are forced to constantly make choices - Sartre wrote that humans "are condemned to be free." Most people find this process of always having to make choices frightening and difficult, so they pretend that something greater and more important provides the essential answers: religion, political ideologies, the pursuit of wealth, and so on. Sartre and Beauvoir called this "bad faith," the pretense that individual decisions are dictated by an imaginary higher power or higher calling.

There was no salvation in existentialism, but there was at least the possibility of embracing the human condition, of accepting the heroic act of choosing one's actions and projects in life without hope of heaven, immortality, or even being remembered after death. The existentialists called living in this manner "authenticity" - a kind of courageous defiance of the despair of being alive without a higher purpose or meaning. Increasingly, the major existential philosophers argued that authenticity could also be found as part of a shared project with others, but only if that project did not succumb to ideological or religious dogmatism.

A large part of the impetus behind not just the actual theories of the existentialists, but its popular reception, was the widespread desire for a better, more "authentic" social existence after the carnage of the war. Appropriately, existentialism had its heyday from 1945 until about 1960. It enjoyed mainstream press coverage and even inspired self-styled "existentialists" in popular culture who imitated their intellectual heroes by frequenting cafes and jazz clubs on the Left Bank of the River Seine in Paris. While the existentialists themselves continued to write, debate, and involve themselves in politics (most became Marxist intellectuals and supporters of third-world uprisings against colonialism), existential philosophy eventually went out of fashion in favor of various kinds of theory that were eventually loosely grouped together as "postmodernism."

The idea of postmodernism is complex; it is a term that has been used to describe many different things and it often lacks a core definition or even basic coherence. That noted, the basis of postmodernism is the rejection of big stories, or "meta-narratives," about life, history, and society. Whereas in the past intellectuals tried to define the "meaning" of history, or Western Civilization, or of "mankind," postmodern thinkers exposed all of the ways in which those "meanings" had been constructed, usually in order to support the desires of the people doing the storytelling. In other words, to claim that history led inevitably to greater freedom or

plenty or happiness had almost always been an excuse for domination and some kind of conquest.

For instance, during the highpoint of European imperialism, high-minded notions of the civilizing mission, the culmination of the liberal and nationalist political aspirations of the nineteenth century, and the emergence of truly modern science all coincided with the blood-soaked plundering of overseas territories. The postmodern historical critique of imperialism was more than just an attack on Western hypocrisy, however, instead arguing that the very notion of history moving “forward” to a better future was obviously incorrect. History, from the postmodern perspective, has no overarching narrative - things simply change, with those changes generally revolving around the deployment of social and economic power.

Perhaps the most famous and important postmodern philosopher was the Frenchman Michel Foucault. Foucault’s work analyzed the history of culture in the West, covering everything from the concept of insanity to state power, and from crime to sexuality, demonstrating the ways that ideas about society and culture had always been shaped to serve power. Foucault’s most evocative analyses had to do with how the definition of crime and the practices of punishment had changed in the modern world to justify a huge surveillance apparatus, one set to monitor all behavior. In this model, “criminality” was an invention of the social and political system itself that justified the system’s police apparatus.

Postmodernism came under fire at the time, and since, for sometimes going so far as to question the very possibility of meaning in *any* context. Theorists like Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida (both, again, French) argued that authorial intent in writing was meaningless, because the text became entirely separate from the author at the moment of being written down. Likewise, both worked to demonstrate that texts themselves were nothing more or less than elaborate word games, with any implied “meaning” simply an illusion in the mind of a reader. At its most extreme, postmodernism went a step beyond existentialism: not only was life inherently meaningless, but even a person’s intentions and actions (the only source of meaning from the existential perspective) amounted to nothing.

That being noted, much of postmodern theory was not itself pessimistic or dour. Instead, there was often a joyful, irreverent play of ideas and words at work in postmodern thought, even if it was largely indecipherable outside of the halls of academia. That joyful irreverence translated directly into postmodern art, which often both satirized and embraced the breakdown between mainstream culture and self-understood “avant-gardes.” Especially during the Modernist period in the decades before and after the turn of the twentieth century, artists and writers had often staged their work in opposition to the mainstream culture and beliefs of their

societies, but artists in the postmodern era could play with the stuff of the mainstream without rejecting or breaking from it.

In turn, the iconic example of postmodern art was pop art. The most famous pop artist was the New York-based Andy Warhol. Pop art consisted of taking images from popular culture - in Warhol's case, everything from portraits of Marilyn Monroe to the Campbell's Soup can - and making it into "fine art." In fact, much of pop art consisted of blurring the line between commercial advertising and fine art; Warhol transformed advertising images into massive silk-screened posters, satirizing consumer society while at the same time celebrating it.



*Warhol's Campbell's Soup, 1968*

## The Youth Movement and Cultural Revolution

What existentialism and postmodernism had in common was that, in very different ways, they critiqued many aspects of western culture, from the progressive narrative of history to traditional religious beliefs. There is some irony in that forms of philosophy that were often radical in their orientation flourished in the midst of the growing affluence of postwar consumer society: discontentment with popular values and a demand for greater social freedom grew

along with, even in spite of, the expansion of economic opportunity for many people. Part of the explanation for the fertile reception of radical thought - very much including Marxism, which remained highly influential - was a straightforward generational clash between the members of the generation that had survived World War II and that generation's children: the baby boomers.

Much more significant in terms of its cultural and social impact than postwar philosophy was the global youth movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The baby boom generation came of age in the 1960s, with unprecedented numbers of young people reaching adolescence right at the height of postwar prosperity. Enormous numbers of young people from middle-class or even working-class backgrounds became the first in their families to ever attend universities, and the contentious political climate of the Cold War and decolonization contributed to an explosion of discontent that reached its height in the late 1960s.

There were essentially two distinct, but closely related, manifestations of the youth movement of the 1960s: a largely apolitical counterculture of so-called "hippies" (a term of disparagement invented by the mainstream press; the contemporary analog is "hipsters"), and an active protest movement against various forms of perceived injustice. Of course, many young people were active in both aspects, listening to folk music or rock n' roll, experimenting with the various drugs that became increasingly common and available, but also joining in the anti-war movement, the second-wave feminist movement, or other forms of protest.



*The album cover from The Beatles' Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, 1967. An iconic expression of the youth culture of the day, the individuals pictured behind the band members include everyone from their fellow musical pioneer Bob Dylan to the "godfather of the beat generation," William S. Burroughs, to the Beatles' younger selves (on the left).*

Western society faced an unprecedented problem as of the 1960s: there were more highly-educated young people than ever before. As late as the middle of the twentieth century, the purpose of higher education was essentially to reinforce class divisions: a small elite attended university and were therefore credentialed representatives of their class interests. In the relative social mobility brought about by the postwar economic boom, however, far more young people from non-elite backgrounds completed secondary schools and enrolled in universities. In turn, it was often college students who formed the core of the politicized youth movement of the time: taught to think critically, globally aware, and well informed, many students subjected the values of their own society to a withering critique.

There was much to critique. The Cold War, thanks to nuclear weapons, threatened the human species with annihilation. The wars associated both with it and with the decolonization process provided an ongoing litany of human rights violations and bloodshed. The American-led alliance in the Cold War claimed to represent the side of freedom and prosperity, but it seemed to many young people in the West that American policy abroad was as unjust and violent as was Soviet policy in Eastern Europe. On the domestic front, many young people also chafed at what they regarded as outdated rules, laws, and traditions, especially those having to do with sexuality.

A key factor in the youth movement was the American war in Vietnam. Despite Soviet control of the Eastern Bloc, the American government was a much more visible oppressor than was the Soviet Union to the more radical members of the youth movement. American atrocities in Vietnam were perceived as visible proof of the inherently oppressive nature of capitalism and imperialism, especially because the Viet Minh was such a relatively weak force in comparison to the American military juggernaut. Vietnam thus served as a symbolic rallying point for the youth movement the world over, not just in the United States itself.

The focus of the youth movement, and a radical philosophical movement called the New Left associated with it, was on the life of individuals in the midst of prosperity. Leftist thinkers came to reject both the obvious injustices of Soviet-style communism as well as the injustices of their own capitalist societies. The key term for many New Left theorists, as well as rank-and-file members of the youth culture of the 1960s and 1970s, was “liberation” – sexual, social, and cultural. Liberation was meant to break down social mores as much as effect political change. For example, the idea that it was perfectly acceptable to live with a romantic partner before marriage went from being a marginalized, “bohemian” concept to one that enjoyed widespread acceptance.

Likewise, elements of the youth movement and the New Left came to champion aspects of social justice that had often been neglected by earlier radical thinkers. In the United States, many members of the youth movement (black and white alike) campaigned for the end of both racist laws and the inherent racism of American culture in general. A new feminist movement (considered in more detail below) emerged to champion not just women's rights before the law, but the idea that the objectification and oppression of women was unjust, destructive, and unacceptable in supposedly democratic societies. In addition, for the first time, a movement emerged championing the idea that homosexuality was a legitimate sexual identity, not a mental illness or a "perverse" threat to the social order.

The youth movement reached its zenith in May of 1968. From Europe to Mexico, enormous uprisings led mostly by college students temporarily paralyzed universities, infrastructure, and even whole countries. What was to become the most iconic uprising against authority by the European youth movement began in a grungy suburb of Paris called Nanterre. There, the newly-opened and poorly-designed university faced student protests over a policy forbidding male students to visit female dormitories. When a student leader was arrested, sympathetic students in Paris occupied the oldest university in France: the Sorbonne. Soon, the entire Latin Quarter of Paris was taken over by thousands of student radicals (many of whom flocked from outside of Paris to join the protest), wallpapering buildings with posters calling for revolution and engaging in street battles with riot police. Workers in French industry instituted a general strike in solidarity with the students, occupying their factories and in some cases kidnapping their supervisors and managers. Students traveled to meet with workers and offer support. At its height, French infrastructure itself was largely paralyzed.



*Leftist workers outside of their occupied factory during the Events of May.*



The student movement had extremely radical, and sometimes very unrealistic, goals for itself, including everything from student-run universities to a Marxist revolution of students and workers. The French public sympathized with the students at first, especially since it was well known that French schools and universities *were* highly authoritarian and often unfair, but as the strikes and occupations dragged on, public opinion drifting away from the uprisings. The movement ebbed by late June, with workers accepting significant concessions from business owners in return for calling off the strike. The students finally agreed to leave the occupied universities. In the aftermath, however, major changes did come to French universities and high schools; this was the beginning of the (relative) democratization of education itself, with students having the right to meet with professors, to question grading policies, and to demand quality education in general. Likewise, and not just in France, the more stultifying rules and policies associated with gender and sexuality within schools and universities were slowly relaxed over time.

The “Events of May” (as they became known in France) were the emblematic high point of the European youth movement itself, at least in its most radical manifestation. The “thirty glorious years” of the postwar economic boom ended in the early 1970s, and the optimism of the youth movement tended to ebb along with it. Likewise, the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, while understandably welcomed by the youth movement, did rob the movement of its most significant cause: opposition to the war.

That being noted, the youth movement’s legacy was profound. While no country in the Western world witnessed a genuine political revolution along the lines imagined by radicals at the time, there is no question that Western culture as a whole became much more accepting of personal freedoms, especially regarding sexuality, and less puritanical and rigid in general. Likewise, the youth movement’s focus on social justice would acquire momentum in the following decades, leading to the flourishing of second-wave feminism, anti-racist movements, and a broad (though far from universal) acceptance of multiculturalism and blended cultures.

## Second-Wave Feminism

One movement of particular importance to emerge from the protest culture of the late 1960s was second-wave feminism (the first was that of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries). In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir, one of the seminal existentialist philosophers mentioned above, wrote an enormous (over 1,000 pages long) book about the status of women in Western societies. Titled *The Second Sex*, the book argued that throughout the entire history

of Western Civilization, women had been the social and cultural "other," always the secondary and exceptional variety of person compared to the default: men. In other words, when men wrote about "human history" they were actually writing about the history of men, with women lurking somewhere in the background, having babies and providing domestic labor (in English, consider phrases like "since the dawn of mankind" or "man's relationship with nature" - the implication is that men *are* the species). Likewise, historically, every state, empire, and nation in history had been controlled by men, and women were legal and political non-entities until the twentieth century.

Thus, as described by Beauvoir, it was not just that men dominated, patronized, and often violently abused women, it was that to be a woman was to be the exception to every kind of political theory, philosophy, and history ever conceived of. Women were, in a sense, not really part of history. Beauvoir critiqued that non-status in *Second Sex*, writing from an existential perspective in which *everyone's* freedom and choice was at the heart of human existence. While she did not set out to start a political movement per se - her political involvement in the 1950s and early 1960s was focused on decolonization and a kinship with Marxism - *The Second Sex* would go on to be the founding document of the second wave of feminism later in the decade.

From the end of World War II until the late 1960s, there were only small feminist movements in most western countries. While women had won the vote after the war (with some exceptions such as Switzerland), and most of the other legal goals of first-wave feminism had been achieved as well, the postwar social order still operated under the assumption that women were to focus on domestic roles. Women were taught as girls that the world of politics and paid work was for men, and that only in motherhood and marriage could a woman find fulfillment. In the process, women as a social category were largely cut off from the sense of political solidarity that had sustained first-wave feminism a generation earlier.

The problem for women in the postwar period, however, was widespread dissatisfaction and unhappiness with the social role into which they were forced, along with both overtly sexist laws and oppressive cultural codes. To cite a few examples, it was perfectly legal (and commonplace) for men to discriminate in hiring and workplace practices based on a woman's appearance - flight attendants ("stewardesses" in the parlance of the time) were routinely fired at age 30 for being too old to maintain the standards of attractiveness enforced by airlines. Pregnancy was also grounds for termination, and unmarried women were generally paid far less than men since it was assumed they would eventually marry and quit their jobs. White women in the United States made 60% of the earnings of men doing the same work, with black

women earning a mere 42%. Rape charges were routinely dismissed if a victim had “asked for it” by being alone at night or being “inappropriately” dressed, and there was no legal concept of marital rape. Domestic violence remained commonplace, and husbands were generally only held accountable by the law if the violence seemed excessive from the perspective of police and judges. In short, while the first-wave feminist movement had succeeded in winning key legal battles, a vast web of sexist laws and cultural codes ensured that women were held in precisely the “secondary” position identified by Beauvoir.

In response, starting in the mid-1960s, the second-wave feminist movement came into existence to combat precisely these forms of both legal and cultural oppression and discrimination. Most of the women who joined the new movement were inspired by the broader anti-establishment counter culture described above, but they arrived at feminism in part because most male “rebels” were just as sexist and repressive as the conservative politicians they detested (e.g. women at gatherings of self-proclaimed revolutionaries were expected to do the dishes and clean up after the men). Beauvoir herself joined the French Women's Liberation Movement, joining many women who were one-third of her age at that point. Likewise, in the United States, second-wave feminism was often referred to as the “Women's Lib” movement, with comparable movements emerging across the Western world.



*Members of the (American) Women's Liberation Movement marching in 1970.*

Everywhere that second-wave feminism emerged as a movement, its goals were the creation of laws that expressly forbid sexual discrimination in the workplace and schools and a broader cultural shift that saw women treated as true social equals of men. This latter focus on equitable culture distinguished it from first-wave feminism, which while certainly cognizant of

sexist cultural norms, had focused on overcoming the most serious legal restrictions on women rather than cultural shifts. For second-wave feminists, the movement was not simply about women having access to the same forms of employment and equal wages as men (although those were obviously very important goals), but about attacking the sexual objectification and sexual double standards to which women were held. For instance, why were promiscuous women the subject of shaming and mockery, while promiscuous men were celebrated for their virility? The essential injustice of sexual double standards was a key issue that second-wave feminists raised.

The demand for sexual liberation was part of the Youth Movement in general, and members of the counterculture fought against the idea that sexuality was inherently sinful and “dirty” (an attitude that had only come of age in earnest in the nineteenth century, incidentally). Second-wave feminists took the demand for liberation a step further and advocated for reliable, legal contraception and legalized abortion. Both were illegal almost everywhere in the western world through the 1950s, and even in countries like Britain and the Netherlands where contraception was legally available, it was difficult to come by and associated with promiscuity. Aided by major advances in related fields of medicine - the birth control pill was approved for contraceptive use in the United States in 1960, for example - second-wave feminists fought a successful campaign for the legalization of contraceptives and abortion by the end of the 1970s, although abortion rights remain a highly charged political issue in countries like the US.

While the battle for sexual equality is obviously far from over, second-wave feminism did achieve many important goals. Legally, many countries adopted laws banning discrimination based on gender itself, as well as age and appearance. Laws pertaining to both sexual assault and domestic violence were often strengthened and more stringently enforced. Culturally, sexual double-standards, the objectification of women, and prescribed female social roles were all called into question. As with racism, the numerous forms of sexism embedded in Western culture all too frequently weathered these feminist assaults, but arguably they did weaken as compared to the past.

## Conclusion

It cannot be overstated how much cultural change occurred in the decades following World War II. Perhaps the most important changes had to do with the extension of liberal democratic ideas to their logical conclusion: *everyone* in a democracy was supposed to have equal rights, to be treated with essential dignity, and to possess the right to protest the

conditions of their education, employment, or even their simple existence (in the case of women facing misogyny and harassment, for example). The legacy of the cultural revolution that began with the youth movement of the 1960s remains strong to the present day.

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## Chapter 15: Toward the Present

### Introduction

As we approach the end of this textbook, we are left with the quandary facing all histories of the recent past: at what point are we no longer talking about “history” but instead about present-day reality, which is the realm of sociology, economics, and the other social sciences? We are confronted with the fact that history is happening in real time, and just like people in the past, we are forced to live our lives and try to work toward a better future without being sure of how to do that effectively. In other words, there is no definitive point at which the recent past stops being the subject of history and starts being part of the present. That transition depends on the subject, event, or issue under consideration. In this case, this final chapter will attempt to address some of the major political, economic, and environmental changes that have shaped the contemporary world, bringing its coverage up until about 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted almost everything about “normal” life for billions of people around the globe.

### The “End of History”

In 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed. Like the proverbial sorcerer’s apprentice who unleashed an enchantment he cannot control, the (last, as it turned out) Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev had begun a series of reforms in 1986 that ultimately resulted in the dismantling of the Soviet state. In 1989, the communist regimes of the Eastern Bloc crumbled as it became clear that the USSR would not intervene militarily to prop them up as it had in the past. Nationalist independence movements exploded across the USSR and, finally, the entire system fell apart to be replaced by sovereign nations. In 1991, Russia itself reemerged as a distinct country in the process rather than just the most powerful part of a larger union.

In 1992, following the Soviet collapse, the American political theorist Francis Fukuyama published a book entitled *The End of History and the Last Man*. Put briefly, *The End of History*’s central argument is that humanity was entering into a new stage in which the essential political and economic questions of the past had been resolved. Henceforth, market capitalism and liberal democracy would be conjoined in a symbiotic relationship. Human rights would be guaranteed by the political system that also provided the legal framework for a prosperous capitalist economy. All of the alternatives had already been tried and failed, after all, from the

old order of monarchy and nobility to modern fascism and, as of 1991, Soviet communism. Thus, former dictatorships would (if they had not already) join the fold of American-style democracy and capitalism soon enough.

As it turned out, Fukuyama's predictions were true for some of the former members of the Eastern Bloc: East and West Germany were reunited, and the countries of Eastern Europe in general, from Romania to newly-independent and separate Slovakia and the Czech Republic, elected democratic governments and sought to join the capitalist western economies. So, too, did Russia initially, although almost immediately its economy foundered in the face of the "shock therapy" led by western advisors: the rapid imposition of a market economy and the dismantling of the social safety net that had been the one meaningful benefit of the former Soviet system for ordinary citizens.

In the long run, however, countries all over the globe in the post-Soviet era were as likely to embrace an economic and political system unanticipated by Fukuyama in 1992: authoritarian capitalism. To the surprise of many at the time, there is nothing about market economics that requires a democratic government. So long as an authoritarian state was willing to oversee the legal framework, and occasional economic interventions, necessary for capitalism to function, a capitalist economy could thrive despite the absence of civil and political rights. This pattern was (and remains) true even of those states that remain nominally "communist," the People's Republic of China most importantly. Likewise, starting with the election of Vladimir Putin in 2000, Russia would soon adopt the model of authoritarian capitalism, with a single political party controlling the state and exercising enormous influence, if not outright control, of the press. Meanwhile, in the countries of central and western Europe in which battles over economics and politics had finally been resolved in favor of the democracy/capitalism hybrid in the postwar era, social and cultural problems developed by the 1970s that remain largely unresolved in the present.

## The End of the Postwar Compromise in Europe

The contemporary "western" world struggles with the legacies of the postwar era. The incredible economic boom of the postwar decades came to a screeching halt in the early 1970s, with high inflation rates slowing economic growth by the end of the 1960s. Then, OPEC, the international consortium of oil-producing nations, instituted an embargo of oil in protest of western support of Israel in the Yom Kippur War of 1973. Gas prices skyrocketed, and the incredible economic growth of the postwar era simply stopped, never to regain the momentum it

had from 1945 - 1973. In Europe, those critical decades of the baby boom and economic boom had left their mark in several ways, however, resulting in social democracy, large immigrant populations, and high standards of living. Contemporary European politics have grappled with each of those factors in turn.

Politically and socially, one of the most difficult legacies of the postwar years has been immigration. While racism was always a factor in Europe, during the boom years immigrants were generally regarded as at the very least “useful” for European countries and their economies. They did the jobs that Europeans did not want and formed a vital part of the economy of Western Europe as a whole. When the economic boom ended, however, they were rapidly castigated for their supposed laziness, penchant for criminality, and failure to assimilate – in a word, they were the scapegoats for everything going wrong with economics and social issues in the post-boom era. Thus, the far right in Europe was reborn, a generation after the defeat of fascism, in the form of harshly anti-immigrant political parties, often with a smattering of fascistic and antisemitic rhetoric mixed in (France’s National Front was the first, and remains a powerful force in French politics, today rebranded as the National Rally).

The new European far right called for extremely limited quotas for immigration, laws banning the expression of non-Christian religious traditions (most importantly, those associated with Islam), and a broader cultural shift rejecting the tolerance and cosmopolitanism of mainstream European culture after the war. They also attacked non-white citizens of European countries, citizens born in Europe to immigrant parents. In other words, citizens of immigrant ancestry were legally the same as any other citizen, but the far right capitalized on a latent racist definition of British or French or Swiss or German, as *white*. This racially-based definition and understanding of European identity was simply factually wrong by the 1960s and 1970s: there were hundreds of thousands of Europeans of color who had been born and raised in the countries to which their parents or grandparents had immigrated, but it remained the basis of the appeal of far right politics to millions of white Europeans.

While the far right has gained strength in many European countries over time, of greater overall impact was 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.

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, resulting in an explosion of unemployment in manufacturing areas.



*Margaret Thatcher in 1977.*

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.

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 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 the final and definitive 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.

Across the “Western” world, since the Great Recession of 2008, the last major factor in political developments has been the rise of not just neoconservative but right-wing populist and sometimes overtly neo-fascist politics. In European countries like Hungary and Poland, nativist,

anti-immigrant parties and leaders have systematically worked to weaken democratic checks and balances and to cement their own power. In the US, in a symptomatic political moment in January of 2021, the aftermath of the presidency of Donald Trump saw a full-scale insurrection of rightist militia members, which briefly seized control of the US Capitol building. The concept of the end of history, which included the complacent assumption that the US would continue to champion the importance and validity of democracy as a political system, has never seemed more naïve.

## The Collapse of Soviet Communism

While the politics and economics of Western Europe underwent a number of changes in the decades following World War II, they nevertheless represent an essential continuity (i.e. market economies, welfare states, democratic politics) in many ways right up to the present. The opposite is true of Eastern Europe: while the postwar order of command economy communism and single-party, authoritarian rule held true almost through the 1980s, that entire system imploded in the end, with lasting consequences for the region and for the world.

As of the 1970s, the economic stagnation of the east was far worse than that of the west. Real growth rates were lost in a haze of fudged statistics, and technology had failed to keep up with western standards. By the 1980s the only profitable industries in Russia were oil and vodka, and then oil prices began a decade-long decline. Politically, Eastern European governments were so corrupt that it was basically pointless to distinguish between normal "politics" and "corruption" - every political decision was governed by personal networks of corrupt politicians who traded political favors and controlled access to creature comforts (like the coveted *dachas* - vacation cottages - in the USSR). The USSR's politburo, the apex of political power in which decisions of real consequence were made, was staffed by aging apparatchiks who had spent their entire lives working within this system.

Then, the old men of the order simply started dying off. Brezhnev died in 1982, then the next two leaders of the Soviet communist party died one after the other in 1984 and 1985. Mikhail Gorbachev, who took power in 1985, was a full generation younger, and he brought with him a profoundly different outlook on the best path forward for the USSR and its "allies." Unlike the men of the older generation, Gorbachev was convinced that the status quo was increasingly untenable - the Soviet economy staggered along with meager or no growth, the entire educational system was predicated on propaganda masquerading as fact, and the state could barely keep up its spending on the arms race with the United States (especially after the

American president Ronald Reagan came to office in 1980 and poured resources into the American military).

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 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 to their own government and social system.

Simultaneously, Gorbachev introduced Perestroika, meaning “restructuring.” This program was meant to reform the economy, mostly by modernizing industry and allowing limited market exchange. The two policies - openness and restructuring - were meant to work in tandem to improve the economy and create a dynamic, truthful political and social system. What Gorbachev had not anticipated, however, was that once Soviet citizens realized that they could publish views critical of the state, an explosion of pent-up anger and resentment swept across Soviet society. From merely reforming the structures of Soviet society, Glasnost in particular led to open calls to move away from Marxism-Leninism as the state’s official doctrine, for truly free and democratic elections, and for the national minorities to be able to assert their independence.



*Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987.*

Meanwhile, the Soviet economy continued to spiral downwards. Soviet finances were in such disarray by the second half of the 1980s that Gorbachev simply ended the arms race with the United States, conceding the USSR could not match the US's gigantic arsenal. Starting cautiously in 1988, he also announced to the governments of Eastern Europe that they would be "allowed to go their own way" without Soviet interference. Never again would columns of tanks respond to protests against communism. This development caused considerable dismay to hard-line Communist leaders in countries like East Germany, where the threat of Soviet intervention had always been the bulwark against the threat of reform. When Gorbachev made good on his promises and protest movements against the communist states started to grow, it was the beginning of the end for the entire Soviet Bloc.

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 Russian dominance. An attempted counter-revolution led by Soviet hardliners failed in the face of mass protest in Moscow, and the first free elections since the February Revolution of 1917 were held in 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) hugely 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 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 Ukraine in 2014. While the latter prompted Western sanctions and protests, it was successful in supporting Putin’s power in Russia itself. Finally, Putin’s outright invasion of Ukraine in 2022 led to the implementation of full scale dictatorial powers for the first time; open dissent of the war was legally banned, and Russian democracy was revealed as the fiction it already had been for years.

## The European Union

At the start of the postwar boom, most of the nations of western Europe entered into various international groups that sought to improve economic relations and trade between the member nations. Those culminated in the creation of the European Community (EC) in 1967, essentially an economic alliance and trade zone between most of the nations of non-communist Europe. Despite various setbacks, not the least the enmity between French and British politicians that achieved almost comic levels at times, the EC steadily added new members into the 1980s. Its leadership also began to discuss the possibility of moving toward an even more inclusive model for Europe, one in which not just trade but currency, law, and policy might be more closely aligned between countries. That vision of a united Europe was originally conceived in large part in hopes of creating a power-bloc to rival the two superpowers of the Cold War, but it also encompassed a moral vision of an advanced, rational economic and political system, in contrast to the conflicts that had so often characterized Europe in the past.

The EC officially became the European Union in 1993, and various member nations of the former EC voted (sometimes barely) to join in the following years. Over time, passport controls at borders between the member states of the EU were eliminated entirely. The member nations agreed to policies meant to ensure civil rights throughout the union, as well as economic stipulations (e.g. limitations on national debt) meant to foster overall prosperity. Most spectacularly, at the start of 2002, the Euro became the official currency for most of the EU nations, with notable exceptions like Great Britain and Denmark.

The period between 2002 and 2008 was one of relative success for the architects of the EU. The economies of Eastern European countries in particular accelerated, along with a few unexpected western countries like Ireland (called the “Celtic Tiger” at the time for its success in bringing in outside investment by slashing corporate tax rates). Loans from wealthier members to poorer ones, the latter generally clustered along the Mediterranean, meant that none of the countries of the “Eurozone” lagged too far behind. While the end of passport controls at borders worried some, there was no general immigration crisis to speak of.



*The European Union in 2016. As of early 2020, Britain is no longer a member.*

Unfortunately, especially since the financial crisis of 2008, the EU has been fraught with economic problems. The major issue is that the member nations cannot control their own economies past a certain point – they cannot devalue currency to deal with inflation, they are nominally prevented from allowing their own national debts to exceed a certain level of their Gross Domestic Product (3%, at least in theory), and so on. The result is that it is terrifically difficult for countries with weaker economies such as Spain, Italy, or Greece, to maintain or restore economic stability. Instead, Germany ended up serving as the EU's banker and also its inadvertent political overlord, issuing loan after loan to other EU states while dictating economic and even political policy to them. This led to the surprising success of far-left political parties like Greece's Syriza, which rose to power by promising to buck German demands for austerity and by threatening to leave the Eurozone altogether (it later backpedaled, however).

In the most shocking development to undermine the coherence and stability of the EU as a whole, Great Britain narrowly voted to leave the Union entirely in 2016. In what analysts largely interpreted as a protest vote against not just the EU itself, but of complacent British politicians whose interests seemed squarely focused on London's welfare over that of the rest of the country, a slim majority of Britons voted to end their country's membership in the Union. Years of bitter political struggle ensued, but the country finally left in early 2020. Since then, the British economy has struggled in sectors tied to trade links to the EU, and overall growth is down considerably, but there has not yet been an outright economic crisis.



## The Middle East

The Middle East has been one of the most conflicted regions in the world in the last century, following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in World War I. In the recent past, much of that instability has revolved around three interrelated factors: the Middle East's role in global politics, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the vast oil reserves of the region. In turn, the United States played an outsized role in shaping the region's politics and conflicts.

During the Cold War the Middle East was constantly implicated in American policies directed to curtail the (often imaginary) threat of Soviet expansion. The US government tended to support political regimes that could serve as reliable clients regardless of the political orientation of the regime in question or that regime's relationship with its neighbors. First and foremost, the US drew close to Israel because of Israel's antipathy to the Soviet Union and its own powerful military. Israel's crushing victory in the 1967 Six-Day War demonstrated to American politicians that it was a powerhouse worth cultivating, and in the decades that followed the governing assumption of American - Israeli relations was that Israel was the most reliable powerful partner supporting American interests. Part of that sympathy was also born out of respect for the fact that Israel's government is democratic and that it has a thriving civil society.

Simultaneously, however, the US supported Arab and Persian regimes that were anything but democratic. The Iranian regime under the Pahlavi dynasty was restored to power through an American-sponsored coup in 1953, with the democratically-elected prime minister Muhammad Mosaddegh expelled from office. The Iranian Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi ruled Iran as a loyal American client for the next 26 years while suppressing dissent through a brutal secret police force. The Iranian regime purchased enormous quantities of American arms (50% of American arms sales were to Iran in the mid-1970s) and kept the oil flowing to the global market. Iranian society was highly educated and its economy thrived, but its government was an oppressive autocracy.

Likewise, the equally autocratic monarchy of Saudi Arabia emerged as the third "pillar" in the US's Middle Eastern clientage system. Despite its religious policy being based on Wahhabism, the most puritanical and rigid interpretation of Islam in the Sunni world, Saudi Arabia was welcomed by American politicians as another useful foothold in the region that happened to produce a vast quantity of oil. Clearly, opposition to Soviet communism and

access to oil proved far more important from a US policy perspective than did the lack of representative government or civil rights among its clients.

This status quo was torn apart in 1979 by the Iranian Revolution. What began as a coalition of intellectuals, students, workers, and clerics opposed to the oppressive regime of the Shah was overtaken by the most fanatical branch of the Iranian Shia clergy under the leadership of the Ayatollah (“eye of God”) Ruhollah Khomeini. When the dust settled from the revolution, the Ayatollah had become the official head of state and Iran had become a hybrid democratic-theological nation: the Islamic Republic of Iran. The new government featured an elected parliament and equality before the law (significantly, women enjoy full political rights in Iran, unlike in some other Middle Eastern nations like Saudi Arabia), but the Ayatollah had final say in directing politics, intervening when he felt that Shia principles were threatened. Deep-seated resentment among Iranians toward the US for the latter’s long support of the Shah’s regime became official policy in the new state, and in turn the US was swift to vilify the new regime.

The 1980s and 1990s saw a botched Israeli invasion of Lebanon, an ongoing military debacle for the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, and a full-scale war between the new Islamic Republic of Iran and its neighbor, Iraq. Ruled by a secular nationalist faction, the Ba’ath Party, since 1968, Iraq represented yet another form of autocracy in the region. Saddam Hussein, The military leader at the head of the Ba’ath Party, launched the Iran-Iraq War as a straightforward territorial grab. The United States supported *both* sides during the war at different points despite its avowed opposition to the Iranian regime. In the end, the war sputtered to a bloody stalemate in 1988 after over a million people had lost their lives.

Just two years later, Iraq invaded the neighboring country of Kuwait and the United States (fearing the threat to oil supplies and now regarding Hussein’s regime as dangerously unpredictable) led a coalition of United Nations forces to expel it. The subsequent Gulf War was an easy victory for the US and its allies, even as the USSR spiraled toward its messy demise as communism collapsed in Eastern Europe. The early 1990s thus saw the United States in a position of unparalleled power and influence in the Middle East, with every country either its client and ally (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Israel) or hostile but impotent to threaten US interests (e.g. Iran, Iraq). American elites subscribed to what President George Bush described as the “New World Order”: America would henceforth be the world’s policeman, overseeing a global market economy and holding rogue states in check with the vast strength of American military power.

Instead, the world was shocked when fundamentalist Muslim terrorists, not agents of a nation, hijacked and crashed airliners into the World Trade Center towers in New York City and

into the Pentagon (the headquarters of the American military) on September 11, 2001. Fueled by hatred toward the US for its ongoing support of Israel against the Palestinian demand for sovereignty and for the decades of US meddling in Middle Eastern politics, the terrorist group Al Qaeda succeeded in the most audacious and destructive terrorist attacks in modern history. President George W. Bush (son of the first President Bush) vowed a global “War on Terror” that would stretch on for the next two decades, and in some ways continues to the present. The American military swiftly invaded Afghanistan, ruled by an extremist Sunni Muslim faction known as the Taliban, for sheltering Al Qaeda. American forces easily defeated the Taliban but failed to destroy it or Al Qaeda. Tragically, the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan in 2021 after American troops finally withdrew after 20 years of trying to prop up the hopelessly corrupt and ineffective government that came to power after US forces first toppled the Taliban.

In a fateful decision with continuing reverberations in the present, the W. Bush presidency used the War on Terror as an excuse to settle “unfinished business” in Iraq as well. Despite the complete lack of ties between Hussein’s regime and Al Qaeda, and despite the absence of the “weapons of mass destruction” used as the official excuse for war, the US launched a full scale invasion in 2002 to topple Hussein. That much was easily accomplished, as once again the Iraqi military proved completely unable to hold back American forces. Within months, however, Iraq devolved into a state of murderous anarchy as former leaders of the Ba’ath Party (thrown out of office by American forces), local Islamic clerics, and members of different tribal or ethnic groups led rival insurgencies against both the occupying American military and their own Iraqi rivals. The Iraq War thus became a costly military occupation rather than an easy regime change, and in the following years the internecine violence and American attempts to suppress Iraqi insurgents led to well over a million deaths (estimates are notoriously difficult to verify, but the death toll might actually be over two million). A 2018 US Army analysis of the war glumly concluded that the closest thing to a winner to emerge from the Iraq War was, ironically, Iran, which used the anarchic aftermath of the invasion to exert tremendous influence in the region.

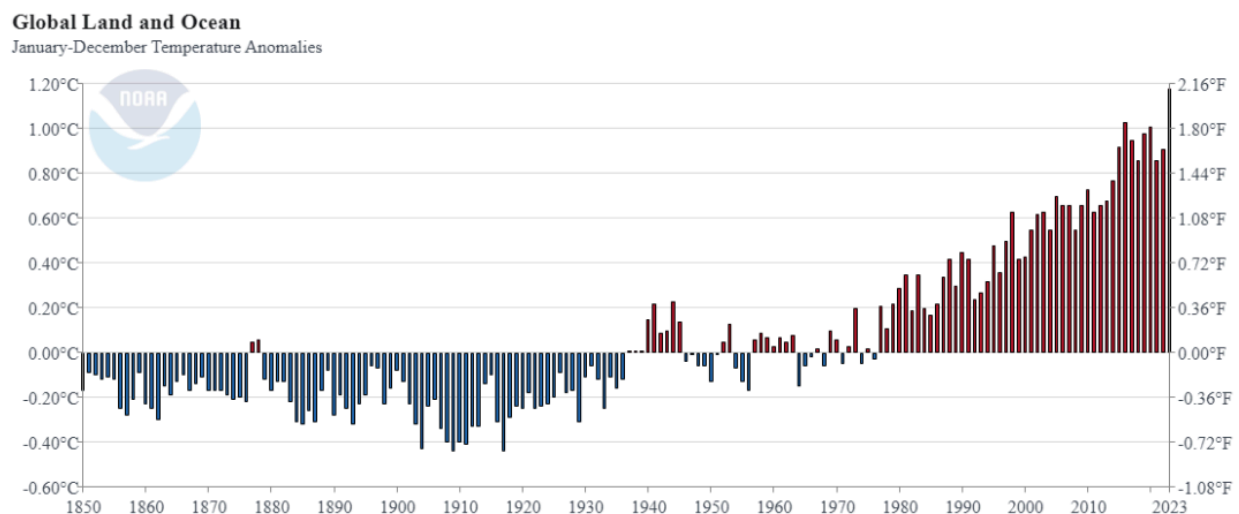
## Climate Change

Despite its importance in historical scholarship, environmental history has not been a major theme of this textbook, which focuses primarily on political history. Here, however, it is of critical importance to take note of the greatest human-caused environmental catastrophe since the dawn of agricultural civilization: climate change. As noted in the chapter on the industrial

revolution, fossil fuels in the form of coal and, subsequently, oil dramatically altered humankind's relationship with nature, unleashing an incredible bounty of energy that was put to use in industry, transportation, communication, and leisure in countless ways starting in earnest in Europe in the nineteenth century. The burning of fossil fuels to harness that energy releases carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) into the atmosphere, which has the effect of trapping and re-releasing heat in the atmosphere originally generated by the sun. This has led to the term "greenhouse gasses," since heat trapped this way near earth's surface is similar to the trapped heat within a greenhouse in a garden. Other gasses play a role as well, most notably methane, but carbon dioxide is the most prevalent.

From the beginning of the industrial revolution in the late eighteenth century through the post-WWII era, the steady increase in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions did not have a measurable impact on climate, thanks to the facts that, first, large sections of the surface of the earth were still forested or otherwise wild (with plants absorbing carbon dioxide) and, second, much of the world remained non-industrialized. Unfortunately, since the 1980s the pace of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions continued to grow as nations like China and India industrialized, forests were felled and natural landscapes destroyed, and both conventional and high-tech industries consumed energy at a massive rate. According to [NASA](#), in 1960 there were 320 parts per million of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere, whereas there over 420 parts per million as of 2023.

The result is the steady warming of the earth, as demonstrated in the chart below from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) measuring average global temperatures over time:



*As pictured above, all of the warmest years on record have occurred since 2000.*

Whereas in the past this phenomenon was described as “global warming,” the term climate change has been used instead since the early 2000s, because the increase in temperatures overall have led to powerful and erratic changes in weather that are more complex than warming on its own. On a global level, hurricanes have increased in frequency and severity, both droughts and flooding are more common and more destructive, and extreme weather events like polar vortexes and heat domes (both of which have occurred repeatedly in the United States) have become more common as well. There is tremendous concern that rising temperatures will melt both significant portions of the polar ice caps and the permafrost of the far north, raising sea levels and potentially releasing even more greenhouse gasses (currently trapped within the frozen turf of the permafrost) into the atmosphere. In sum, climate change is already having [severe destructive effects](#), and the potential for even greater disasters is growing.

From a historical perspective, climate change is unprecedented at this scale, as is the fact that it is caused directly by human actions. Humankind has never had a collective responsibility to see to its own survival in this way, and to date the steps necessary to reduce carbon emissions have been half-hearted and (too) limited, not least because of a massive political movement to downplay and/or deny outright that climate change is even occurring despite mountains of scientific evidence. It is likely that future generations will regard the lack of will to take decisive action against climate change as a pathetic failure on the part of their ancestors.

## Toward the Present

Climate change unquestionably plays a role in destabilizing politics, as extreme weather events undermine regional economies, lead to dearth or even famine, and cause mass migrations. In the United States, both the CIA and the leaders of the American armed forces have acknowledged that fact publicly, and in all likelihood those political disruptions will only grow in scale unless climate change is somehow held in check. Simultaneously, political crisis has been endemic across many world regions for reasons that are not necessarily linked to climate change. While Europe has suffered from economic and, to a lesser extent, political instability since the 1980s, that instability pales in comparison to the instability of other world regions. In particular, the Middle East entered into a period of outright bloodshed and chaos as the twenty-first century began. In turn, the shock waves of Middle Eastern conflict have

reverberated around the globe, inspiring the growth of international terrorist groups on the one hand and racist and Islamophobic political parties on the other.

To cite just the most important examples, the US invasion of Iraq in 2002 inadvertently prompted a massive increase in recruitment for anti-western terrorist organizations (many of which drew from disaffected EU citizens of Middle Eastern and North African ancestry). The Arab Spring of 2010 led to a brief moment of hope that new democracies might take the place of military dictatorships in countries like Libya, Egypt, and Syria, only to see authoritarian regimes or parties reassert control. Syria in particular spiraled into a horrendously bloody civil war in 2010, prompting millions of Syrian civilians to flee the country. Turkey, one of the most venerable democracies in the region since its foundation as a modern state in the aftermath of World War I, has seen its president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan steadily assert greater authority over the press and the judiciary. The two other regional powers, Iran and Saudi Arabia, carry on a proxy war in Yemen and fund rival paramilitary (often considered terrorist) groups across the region.

In Europe, fleeing Middle Eastern (and to a lesser extent, African) refugees seeking the infinitely greater stability and opportunity available to them abroad have brought about a resurgence of far-right and, in many cases, openly neo-fascist politics. While fascistic parties like France's National Front have existed since the 1960s, they remained basically marginal and demonized for most of their history. Since 2010, far right parties have grown steadily in importance, seeing their share of each country's electorate increase as worries about the impact of immigration drives voters to embrace nativist, crypto-racist political messages. Even some citizens who do not harbor openly racist views have come to be attracted to the new right, since mainstream political parties often seem to represent only the interests of out-of-touch social elites (again, Brexit serves as the starkest demonstration of voter resentment translating into a shocking political result).

While interpretations of events since the start of the twenty-first century will necessarily vary, what seems clear is that both the postwar consensus between center-left and center-right politics is all but a dead letter. Likewise, fascism can no longer be considered a terrible historical error that is, fortunately, now dead and gone; it has lurched back onto the world stage. A widespread sense of anger, disillusionment, and resentment haunts politics not just in Europe, but in much of the world.

This, however, is not an exceptional state of affairs from a historical perspective, nor is it cause for despair. History, western or otherwise, has been shaped by people who struggled for survival, for improvements in their lot in life, and in the name of concepts of justice and morality,

all without the slightest assurance that their struggles would be successful, and all in historical circumstances that were not of their making. As the current generations in the process of creating history, we have the ability to shape it through our actions, for better or for worse.

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