

CONTEMPORARY WORLD HISTORY

Course Description

This course provides an overview of 20th Century World History from a historical perspective, which includes the broad contexts of technological, social, political, economic, and psychological change and disruption in the 20th century. In this course, political, cultural, economic and social changes are explored.

About the Professor

A widely published author and researcher in world history, Dr. Peter N. Stearns is Provost Emeritus and Professor of History at George Mason University. Stearns was Chair of the Department of History at Carnegie Mellon University and also served as the Dean of the Dietrich College of Humanities and Social Sciences. In addition, he founded and edited the Journal of Social History. Dr. Stearns was educated at Harvard University. Professor Stearns's publications in world history include two popular textbooks and more than 100 works in world history and other topics. His books include *The Industrial Revolution in World History*, *Gender in World History*, *Consumerism in World History*, *Western Civilization in World History*, *Childhood in World History*, and *Global Outrage: The Evolution and Impact of World Opinion*. Textbooks include *World Civilizations* and *World History in Brief*. He edited the *Encyclopedia of World History*.

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Contents

- I. Introduction and The Challenge of Contemporary World History
 1. Main Themes and Regions
 2. The Problem of the Starting Point
 3. Internal Chronologies
 4. Events: Wars, Revolutions, Decolonization
- II. The Importance of Regions
 5. The West
 6. Eastern Europe
 7. East Asia
 8. South and Southeast Asia
 9. The Middle East and North Africa
 10. Sub-Saharan Africa
 11. Latin America
 12. Regional Identities
- III. Political Change
 13. The Decline of Monarchy and Empire
 14. Totalitarianism
 15. Authoritarianism
 16. Democracy
 17. Human Rights
- IV. Social Change
 18. Population Explosion and Immigration
 19. The Urban Surge and the Countryside
 20. The End of Patriarchy
- V. Economic Change
 21. Economic Globalization
 22. Industrializations and Regional Inequality
 23. The Global Environment
- VI. Cultural
 24. Marxism and Nationalism
 25. Science and Consumerism
 26. Religion
 27. Cultural Conflict
- VII. War and Peace
 28. Contemporary War
 29. Innovations in Peace
 30. Decline of War

Section I: Introduction: The Challenge of Contemporary World History

The Problems of Doing Contemporary History

Major developments over the past century or so constitute the history that is most important to know. Some historians would disagree, and certainly many earlier periods are both intriguing, in terms of exploring the past, and influential in terms of subsequent developments and even present-day patterns. But without any question the changes and continuities since the early 20th century most clearly shape the world we live in, and therefore have pride of place.

Yet many history survey courses, at various levels, have trouble making it through the contemporary period. A characteristic problem is the amount of time and detail devoted to earlier periods and cherished moments in the past prior to the past century. Many teachers, as a practical matter, “run out of gas” by the time they get to World War II or the Cold War, and leave a gap between their historical coverage and the present. The result, often, is a lack of adequate knowledge of developments that most directly precede our own time.

But the contemporary period offers more than a practical, survey-course challenge. It is in many ways the hardest period to deal with, for a number of important, if pretty obvious, reasons:

There is, first, the sheer amount of data, of vital things that “must” be covered. Because all of us have lived through at least part of the period, we are keenly aware of how many significant, sometimes troubling issues might need attention. Establishing priorities, creating a manageable historical menu, are no easy tasks.

Because we’re so close to key developments, we lack the perspective that much more readily applies to earlier periods, even the 19th century. As a result, there are, or can be, more basic debates about the appropriate framework (and we will deal with several of these in our early chapters). When, in fact, does the contemporary period begin? Is there really a contemporary period, or rather a lot of shorter chronologies such as the decades of war and depression, the decades of the cold war, the post-cold war decades? Questions like this can be plausibly answered in many ways, which may make contemporary world history seem particularly unsettled.

What regions deserve particular attention? The early part of the contemporary period is sometimes written in terms of Western leadership (or lack of leadership), with the rest of the world reacting to Western initiatives and patterns. But the contemporary period sees a variety of new challenges and alternatives to a “West-centric” history, which means that appropriate regional balance is arguably more essential than was the case for, say, the imperialist 19th century.

What’s the end of the story? Every other period in history comes to a close, however much this “close” may be debated. We know what happens, what the results were of the period’s key trends. This is simply not the case for contemporary history. Here, we know what some of the basic themes are (or at least, we probably know), but we cannot fully establish the outcomes. We know, for example, that traditional political forms like monarchies and empires mostly disappear during the past half century; and so we know that basic political change is a major development. But it is impossible to say what the ultimate result will be: will it be a global conversion to democracy, ongoing division among political forms like democracy or authoritarianism, or something else altogether? On a variety of issues we have to be content with partial understanding, not a completed story line.

None of these issues is crippling, but all require some hard choices; all requires clarity about what those choices are, and what alternatives have been passed over. The chapters that follow will clarify what some of the key choices can be.

Key Assumptions

The chapters are based on three major assumptions – which the chapters will reflect but also try to justify. The assumptions are hardly unique, but they do generate a contemporary history approach that differs from some of the standard textbooks.

First, there is a contemporary period, not simply a collection of subperiods like the era of the World Wars. There are some basic developments that run through the past century or more, that still shape the world we live in.

Second, one of the two basic features of the period is a partial but fairly steady rebalancing of power relationships in the world, away from Western dominance, toward a more multi-polar (though admittedly not equal) regional alignment. This process is accompanied, in some ways complicated, by a fairly steady increase in regional interconnections – the phenomenon we now call globalization. So this aspect of the package is complicated. But we live today in a world that sees greater balance and also greater interchange among major regions, and these changes have been developing over a century – not just yesterday.

And third, the second basic feature of the contemporary period involves a global adjustment to many of the features of industrial society. To be sure, industrial society took shape earlier, mainly in the West, but its implications were not fully worked out even there. But it is over the past century that other regions have worked, amid great variety, to establish the institutions and processes compatible with industrial society – from appropriate political systems, to greater attention to science, to basic changes in family life. Fundamental features of agricultural societies are either replaced or at least widely challenged. And this, also, is a transformation that has been developing over a century – not just yesterday.

Admittedly, not everything fits tidily in these boxes of regional rebalancing/globalization and adaptations to an industrial framework. There are anomalies and certainly resistances. But we will argue that these basic dynamics translate into a set of themes that is manageable yet wide-ranging, helping to make the contemporary period something more than one-thing-after-another.

The Framework

The chapters that follow divide into seven sections. In the first we continue the discussion of basic issues: when the contemporary period began, how important the subdivisions are, how to handle major events without getting consumed by them. Chapter 1 offers an introductory overview of the major themes and regions, expanding on the emphases noted above. Chapter 2 worries about the beginning point, settling on the early 20th century but making it clear that options exist. Chapter 3 details the subperiods, again already noted, but also argues that they do not clearly override a larger coherence to the century as a whole. And Chapter 4 picks up on some major events, noting how they fit or challenge the idea of themes.

Section II more fully explores major regions, how they can be defined, how they interrelate, how they become involved with the rebalancing of power and the process of globalization. None of the regions was created in the contemporary period; each has worked on its own relationship between prior identities and major change.

Section III begins the treatment of the major themes that run through the period and affect each of the key regions. Political change involves the new challenges to established institutions, sometimes in the form of revolutions or decolonization, and the major alternatives that developed. Section IV emphasizes common social patterns, involving among other things the progressive displacement of agricultural structures in favor of urban priorities. Section V takes up economic change – the industrialization of the world – and some of its key corollaries. Section VI focuses on the admittedly complex pattern of cultural change, but also continuity and resistance – where basic patterns are hard to discern than in the case of social developments or even politics. Section VII, finally, raises questions about patterns of war and peace, as they have emerged over a century.

To work in this course, it will be very helpful to pick at least one of the following books, so that there will be access to fuller treatment of basic developments – such as the major wars, or the process of decolonization – and also, in many cases, some alternative frameworks for dealing with the past century. Each chapter will list articles available online, and often some relevant source material, to extend reading on the particular topic involved.

Basic treatments (pick at least one):

A Standard, Comprehensive Text:

Turbulent Passage: A Global History of the Twentieth Century by Michael B. Adas, Peter Stearns, and Stuart B. Schwartz (Pearson 2008). Pages 1-28, 92-155, 180-234.

Offering a Different Perspective with More Social and Populist Themes

The Twentieth Century: A People's History by Howard Zinn (HarperCollins 2003). Pages 1-31.

Good Thematic Essays on Various Strands of 20th Century History:*The Columbia History of the 20th Century* edited by Richard Bulliet (Columbia University Press 2000). Pages 1-80.

Section I: Discussion Questions

Did World War I launch the contemporary period of world history? If so, in what ways? If not, what are the better alternatives?

How fully did the Cold War define the period 1945-89, in terms of contemporary world history?

From a world history standpoint, what are the key differences between the 20th and the 19th centuries?

Chapter I. Main Themes and Regions

Applying the Themes

Here is an interesting exercise. What are the most important ways the world today differs from the world in 1900? Answering this question coherently requires among other things that major technological changes not be overemphasized or unduly detailed, but of course they must enter the picture. Here is a possible list, consistent with the themes suggested in the Introduction but in a bit more detail. First, in 1900 the West and Western imperialism were the most dominant forces in the global power balance, and while a special Western role has not disappeared the overall picture now looks quite different. Second, in 1900 many traditional social and political features held sway over much of the world, including the importance of monarchies and the landed aristocracy and patriarchal gender structures; these features have by now been largely replaced or at least widely challenged. Third, in 1900 only about 20% of the world was directly involved in industrialization, while by 2010 the figure was rising above 60%. Fourth, in 1900 there were at most a handful of structures that were clearly multinational, in business, in the sphere of nongovernmental organizations, in politics; by 2014 this landscape had been transformed. And of course fifth: in 1900, despite the huge advances brought by the steamship, the telegraph, and railroads, movement of goods, people and information around the world was by contemporary standards rather slow; and this has changed greatly.

Complication Areas

Five areas of big change – and many of them are interrelated – are plenty to handle, but obviously there are other issues to keep in mind. Culture – basic beliefs and values, and major systems such as religion – is a clear complexity. Cultural changes over the past century include the expansion of science, the emergence of more widespread consumer culture, and the international impact of Marxism. But older cultural forces retain or regain great vigor as well, particularly among the major religions. It's harder to identify a tidy theme here. War is another challenge. The past century saw two global conflicts, and a commitment of organization and resources to war that one scholar terms "total war." The advent of nuclear war was a huge and menacing innovation. But many wars have been regional and limited, a number of peace initiatives have emerged in practice and not just in principle. Agreeing on a theme here is not necessarily easy. Demography offers a bit theme: the world's population has more than tripled since 1900, the fastest growth on record. But the pace of growth slowed, particularly in recent decades, and this needs to be accounted for as well. Environmental change would be on many lists, thanks to the expansion of industrialization and population growth. Should it be added to the basic set of themes, or simply linked to global industrialization? The past century saw the advent of space exploration, a clear first: should it be on the list, or has it not yet had really significant consequences at least outside the global communications arena? Several areas, in sum, raise some problems of clear-cut definition, others risk providing an unmanageable number of themes. There is ample room for debate.

The Regions

Any list of crosscutting themes must be applied to a regional map, which even globalization has not erased. Each region, based on its history and tradition and world position, reacted to key themes somewhat distinctively. Yet the list of regions is not divinely mandated, for it too involves choices. Possibilities but attendant issues include: the West, the only advanced industrial region in 1900 and still unusually powerful today. But should the West include the United States and other settler societies, as well as Western Europe? East Asia: broadly speaking a region profoundly influenced by Confucian values and, until the late 19th century, a distinctive relationship with other parts of the world. But divisions within the region, and partly the gap between Japan and China, complicate the assessment. South Asia, embracing Hindu but also Islamic traditions. But can Southeast Asia be folded into these regional patterns? Middle East and North Africa constitute a probable zone, based on the Islamic majority but also, arguably, proximity to and tensions with Western Europe and Russia. Russia and other parts of eastern Europe often pose a challenge in historical treatment, because of relationship to but differentiation from the West. Sub-Saharan Africa, a huge region, incorporates many internal divisions based on geography, religion and colonial experience, but it is usually taken as a key area. The same applies to Latin America, where however special relationships to the West also enter in. Decisions about what regions, and how many, need to be crosshatched with decisions about what themes, and how many.

Flexibility

Approaching contemporary world history requires some preliminary choices – for example, about a plausible and manageable list of key regions – but they should be hypotheses, not rigid guides. As with themes, there are

opportunities to modify as the issues become clearer, and indeed some choices may work well for some topics but not all. Having some initial options will help sort out what otherwise can be overwhelming detail, but there should always be room for adjustment as discussion proceeds.

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On Imperialism

“Shooting an Elephant.” By George Orwell <http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/mod/modsbook34.asp>

Platt Amendment <http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/mod/1901platt.asp>

Suggested Reading:

Twentieth-Century Marxism: A Global Introduction. By Daryl Glaser and David M. Walker (Editors), (New York: Routledge, 2007).

Questions

Why do historians often face problems moving beyond the mid-20th century?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of using national frameworks to deal with contemporary history? Why might European and Indian historians disagree on this issue?

What are the main complexities in linking recent economic trends to those of the late 19th century, in dealing with globalization?

Why should demographic history be integrated with contemporary world history, and how is this best done?

Why should environmental history be integrated with contemporary world history, and how is this best done?

Has the concept of “postindustrial society” proved useful in organizing contemporary world history? Why, or why not?

Chapter 2: The Problem of the Starting Point

1914

All sorts of historical accounts break with World War I, and this is certainly true for much world history. The argument, of course, is that the War saw an end to many of the patterns that had predominated in the 19th century, and set in motion a set of new patterns that would last for some time, possibly even to the present day. The War was unquestionably a huge, often tragic event. But what major changes did it embody. Most obviously, the war greatly weakened Europe's position in the world, because of huge population and economic losses and an increase in nationalism in places like India and Africa. Arguably, it set in motion or at least greatly accelerated the process of power rebalancing in the world at large. The War also stimulated the Russian Revolution and also the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, which ushered in huge changes in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, some of which unquestionably reverberate still. The War also expanded government powers, in ways that could persist even aside from wartime. This adds up to a plausible rationale for seeing the War as a pivot between periods, but obviously not all issues are covered.

The Early 20th Century

Some world historians would prefer to pick the early 20th century, to include World War I but go beyond this. This option adds to the War itself: first, the spread of public health programs, from the late 19th century onward, that would begin to accelerate global population growth. Second, the clear expansion of industrialization beyond Western ranks, with Japan and Russia. Third, revolutions in China and Mexico, independent of World War I, which suggested some new dynamics for social and political change (to which the Russian Revolution would add). Fourth (possibly) the expansion of science, with new discoveries in physics and genetics.

The Later 19th Century

Some world historians argue that the contemporary period began a bit earlier, then would accelerate with the developments of the early 20th century and World War I. They highlight the later 19th century because of the acceleration of the industrial revolution and its global impact, even though the actual industrial powers were Western alone at this point; and because of the expansion of research in science and technology (though again primarily in the West). They note Japan's forced embrace of reform and global contact as a turning point for that society and for its role in the world. Above all, they argue that is in the later 19th century, thanks to steamships, the Suez Canal and other factors, that modern globalization really begins, only to intensify later on.

The Mid-20th Century

At the other end, some historians would prefer to begin the contemporary period with the changes that began to take shape after World War II. In this view, the decades 1914-45 would be the rather painful tail end of an earlier period, not the beginning of a new one. Two or three developments highlight this argument. First, while there were hints earlier, it is only after 1945 that extensive decolonization begins to occur, most clearly signaling a global power shift as well as widespread political innovation. Second, many so-called "new global" historians see globalization really beginning at this point, after many limitations and hesitations in the interwar decades. Policy changes associated with creating a more stable global economic framework (the establishment of the International Monetary Fund etc.) as well as new transportation (the global use of jet aircraft, and soon telecommunications revolutions to match) anchor this argument. In this approach the Cold War is acknowledged but as a more transient phenomenon, ultimately overshadowed by the rise of new nations and the onset of "real" globalization.

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Suggested Reading

The New Global History. By Bruce Mazlish (New York: Routledge, 2006)

Questions

What are the various ways that World War I set up some of the major themes of contemporary world history?

Why do some historians seek alternatives to World War I as the contemporary starting point?

What key trends from the later 19th century continue into and through the contemporary period of world history?

What are the tensions between viewing the “world” wars as international events, and emphasizing the European aspects? What are the best ways to resolve these tensions?

Chapter 3: Internal Chronologies

The Problem

A key issue in dealing with the past century plus involves the chronological clusters along the way, which clearly deserve attention in their own right. The question is how much they disrupt the larger trends. At an extreme, some historians abandon the effort to deal with the century as a whole, and simply look to the subperiods. Here's another issue for debate, both now and in the chapters that follow.

The Interwar Period

The decades from 1914 to 1945 are dominated by three or four key developments. The wars themselves, and the unsatisfactory peace that issued from the Versailles conference in 1919 form one category. They are supplemented by the Russian revolution and the end of the Ottoman Empire. Then there was the Depression, that followed in part from the economic results of World War I and that helped set up the causes of the Second war. The rise of fascist or authoritarian regimes is another features that responded to war and economic tension, and prepared new war in turn. These thirty years were also marked by interesting but ultimately abortive efforts at international organization, and by a tendency of many societies to pull away from global contacts, ushering in a partial if temporary retreat from globalization. Included in this last category would be American isolationism, Stalin's socialism in one country, and Japanese and German attempts at creating separate economic spheres.

The Era of the Cold War

Historian Eric Hobsbawm suggests viewing a "short" 20th century, dominated by conflicts in Europe that were supplemented by issues elsewhere as in East Asia. For him, the interwar period and then the Cold War were part of the same dilemmas. But with the end of the Cold War world history, he thought, would take a new turn, centered on much more global issues. Other historians, however, have given the Cold War itself greater precedence, noting how Western Europe was now displaced by the United States and the Soviet Union (in contrast to the 1920s and 1930s) and how tensions and rivalries were becoming much more fully global than had been the case in the interwar years. Still other historians would emphasize the same decades – 1945-1980s – but would highlight the major instances of decolonization more than the Cold War itself. Still other historians see the period as the beginning of real globalization, with the Cold War a bit of a temporary sideshow.

Post-Cold War

Whatever the views of the Cold War, there is no question that the conflict's end, or substantial end, brought real change. Trends associated with the decades 1989-2014 include the further spread of democratic political forms; the clear emergence of China, India, Brazil and other key countries as major industrial and global economic powers; the related acceleration of urbanization, with half the world's population living in cities by 2011. This new period is also marked by the resurgence of religious interests, including fundamentalist currents in several religions; while some of this began a bit earlier, it linked to the decline of communism and the acceleration of globalization, both of which produced a perceived need for renewed faith and identity. New environmental issues and awareness, a slowing of global population growth rates were two other general trends that marked this subperiod. As we will discuss in Chapter 30, some observers also saw in this period a marked decline in collective violence and some real reasons this decline might persist.

Post Industrial (or Post Modern)

Another term that complicates evaluation of the contemporary period in world history is the idea that key economic and social forms begin to move away from industrial patterns into a new "postindustrial" mode. Simply put, post-industrialization can focus on the rise of service sector and knowledge economy operations, with manufacturing increasingly taken care of by more sophisticated technologies. Social structure, city functions and other key indicators change accordingly. Postmodern is a term, focused more on cultural patterns, that similarly sees the forms characteristic of the 19th and earlier 20th centuries replaced by something new. If these concepts are fundamentally valid, they might call for quite a different periodization scheme. But a problem is that they often apply, if at all, only to a few parts of the world (the US, Japan) where industrialization was most advanced, while most of the world was simply entering an industrial phase. Here too, debate continues.

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Part 1 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjNz11vXgzU> an

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Part 2 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-9_uQx6IsQ

Suggested Readings:

The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991. By Eric Hobsbawm (Vintage Books 1996).

The Postmodern History Reader. Edited by Keith Jenkins (Routledge 1997).

Questions

Does the Cold War form a clear subperiod in contemporary world history?

What are the best arguments in favor of the idea of a “short” 20th century (1914-1989)? What are the alternatives?

Did the end of the Cold War usher in a really new framework for world history?

Is postmodernism a useful historical concept in dealing with contemporary world history? Does it establish a distinctive set of subperiods?

Do changes in characteristic political systems around the world constitute a good basis for defining subperiods in contemporary world history?

How does decolonization fit into the subperiods of the past century? What about globalization and the subperiods?

Chapter 4: Events: Wars, Revolutions, Decolonization

Putting Events In

This approach to contemporary world history does not spend a lot of time on individual events. We talk about the decline of Western Europe more than the details of World War I, or the fading of the aristocracy more than the Soviet or Chinese attacks on the landlord class. But obviously events did occur, and they can and should be linked to the thematic approach. This chapter cites some key examples. It also raises (but does not answer) the question: what other events over the past century are so important that they should be included even in a historical “Highlight Reel”?

The Wars

The past century was marked of course by two wars. Both wars deeply affected the power balance in the world. Both led to massive destruction and loss of life, and some observers have argued that they set in motion a pattern of violence that would mark the contemporary era even aside from war. They changed the functions of government. They encouraged militaristic political movements. And the world wars were not the only conflicts to note. A number of major regional wars must be noted, particularly in the Middle East; the Iran-Iraq war, 1980-88, was the longest conventional war of the century, costing over half a million lives, with intensity comparable locally to World War I. Other wars had deep regional impact: the Vietnam war, for Vietnam and the United States; the Afghanistan war, for Russia; the various wars involving Israel. Understanding at least several of the individual wars is a vital part of analyzing the contemporary world history period, and there is of course the larger question: how much of the period's character was and is shaped by war?

The Revolutions

This was also a century of revolution, unprecedented in geographical scope and a vital, if sometimes vicious, force for change. Individual revolutions that need attention include: the Mexican, 1910, with repercussions in other parts of Latin America; the Chinese, beginning in 1911 and extending in some ways to the communist victory by 1949, a huge upheaval in this major country; of course the Russian revolution of 1917, which turned out to be a global event; and the Iranian in 1979, a very different kind of revolution under the banners of Islam. Smaller or less conclusive revolutions that warrant note include Cuba, 1959, and then Nicaragua, 1979; the Vietnamese rising, which was both a revolution and a war for independence; and the Arab spring of 2012. Finally, while with one or two exceptions (Roumania) this was not literally a revolution, the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1989-91 and the emergence of many new states involves a cluster of events with global as well as regional importance. Besides getting some handle on at least several of these events, the pattern of revolution raises two, possibly three questions: are there any common causes, among at least some of the revolutions? What have been the major results, in the countries involved and more widely – how did revolutions contribute to some of the big changes of the contemporary period? And – hesitantly, as we still try to interpret the Arab Spring, is the contemporary age of revolution nearing an end?

Decolonization

The rise of anticolonial movements and ultimate decolonization organizes a third set of events. Some foreshadowing occurred between the wars, with changes in parts of the Middle East. Some understanding of at least some of the big post-World War II patterns is essential. This would surely include India, in 1947; probably the Philippines and Indonesia as two other Asian examples. African decolonization, a bit later, might include case studies of at least one change involving extensive violence (Algeria, Kenya), one process that was more peaceful (probably Ghana, in 1957, which helped set the larger process in motion). It may seem fairly obvious why decolonization happened, but this is still worth some analysis. The results of decolonization certainly warrant assessment, including impacts on the former imperial countries as well as the new nations. In most cases decolonization included hopes for a democratic regime but with the huge exception of India these hopes were usually disappointed at least in the short run, and understanding why so many new nations turned to authoritarian or military regimes is vital. The sheer proliferation of nations and national identities (some of them partly traditional, some fairly new) in an age of globalization sets up some obvious targets for analysis.

Other Events

Besides the events associated with wars, revolutions and decolonization, are there any other events that should be on a manageable list? Some observers might want to include some of the major acts of terrorism; are they important enough to qualify as world-changing? A few examples of women's suffrage might be included, particularly in cases where it was new and contested; this could include the U.S. and Britain, but also possibly Weimar Germany, the

Soviet Union, Atatürk's Turkey. Particularly important new technologies might make the list: the regularization of commercial jet travel (London to Johannesburg, 1952; the word jet lag entered the English language in 1963); the establishment of the Internet. A few consumer symbols might qualify: the establishment of the first overseas McDonalds (United Kingdom, 1974), for example. Major medical or scientific breakthroughs probably need attention. But again, the list cannot be too long or contemporary history just becomes an endless list of events. The criterion of global importance is crucial. So the final set of questions about events goes back to the issues of: how many? What type?

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Questions

What are the key criteria to use in deciding what events "must" be included in any account of contemporary history? What kinds of events besides major wars and revolutions should warrant serious historical attention?

What are the differences between major and minor contemporary revolutions? How do revolutions differ from decolonization movements?

What were the short- and long-term impacts of the Mexican Revolution?

How did decolonization harm some Indians?

What are the differences between major and minor wars in contemporary world history? Where does the Iran-Iraq war fit?

What were some of the key technology changes caused by the world wars?

Section II: The Importance of the Regions

Even ardent believers in globalization note that actual developments still involve the active interaction between the “local” and the “global”. Certainly this kind of interaction must be captured for contemporary world history. There is no time, of course, for really local details, though they need not be forgotten. But the big regions demand attention. Each would be deeply affected by larger global themes, from more extensive levels of world trade to new influences on traditional women’s roles. But each would react distinctively, depending on prior traditions and distinctive contemporary patterns of encounter. The regions must not be overemphasized: there were real global trends, and contemporary world history is far more than one regional story after another. But basic features of the major regions must be established before we return to the larger themes, so that the picture does not become oversimplified.

A number of circumstances served to differentiate major regions. Some, when the contemporary period began, were held as colonies. Others, like China, had not been colonies outright, but had suffered from extensive Western interference. Some were strongly shaped by well-established religions. Others were already more secular, and might become more so. Sub-Saharan Africa, distinctively, was largely polytheistic in 1900 (80% of the population), but would convert extensively either to Islam (40%) or Christianity (40%) by 2000, which reduced African distinctiveness in one respect but constituted a very particular regional dynamic during the 20th century itself. Some regions brought traditions of strong states into the contemporary period, and would seek to maintain or recapture these though possibly in new ways. Others, like Latin America, had not yet built a strong state network. Some regions, like Western Europe, imported a long tradition of military conflict, while others, like Latin America, maintained a much smaller military profile. The varieties are impressive.

Ultimately, comparison becomes essential. This section seeks to establish some broad regional features that can then be juxtaposed. Why was Russia able to push forward with industrialization from the late 19th century onward, whereas China, with a much stronger manufacturing tradition earlier in history, moved out much later? Why would Marxism prove attractive in some regions, but have little impact in places like the Middle East? Comparison is of course challenging. It requires not only knowledge of the regions involved, but also an active ability to put features together in a single comparative statement. Three guidelines are vital. First, comparison should be as free as possible from value judgments. It will be more helpful to understand why many people in the Middle East continue to prefer veiling for women, than to insist that it’s an erroneous practice. Second, comparison involves identifying similarities as well as differences. This is obvious, but in practice regional analysis in world history tends to highlight distinctions. Third, regional characteristics are not static. They can change, which also means that some regions can become more similar, even during a single century, while others diverge.

We have already noted that defining key regions is a somewhat arbitrary act. Each of the chapters that follow identify some challenges in core definitions. Examples include: where should the United States be positioned in contemporary world history? Was it a separate category, or part of a broader Western civilization? Handling Central Asia is another challenge, related to interpreting the Soviet experience and then its aftermath since 1989. We highlight seven major regional cases in the chapters that follow, but the list could easily be longer (could it also be shorter?).

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Section II: Discussion Questions

For the contemporary period, which regions are relatively easy to define, in terms of cultural and political coherence?

What are the challenges in determining the boundaries of contemporary Western civilization?

Discuss two important cases where regional boundaries changed over the past century.

What regions have particular difficulties in interacting with larger global trends, and why?

Chapter 5: The West

The West in Decline?

The power and importance of the West in world history surely declined during the contemporary period. Western Europe's world trade position was weakened by World War I. Decolonization both caused and reflected the West's growing inability to maintain the kind of direct military and political power it had maintained in the age of imperialism. New economic rivals – first Japan, then China and other countries – signaled a more competitive global industrial environment. While the West retained substantial military power, and remained capable of periodic interventions in regions like Africa, overall the rise of strong national militaries in many of the new nations signaled a change in this area as well. The changing role surfaced in international organizations as well. Western nations organized the League of Nations to retain substantial control, but in the United Nations it proved essential to include the Soviet Union and China on the Security Council, along with key Western powers, and the growth of the General Assembly quickly outstripped Western control.

Western power and resurgence

Decline was relative, not necessarily absolute. Western countries showed a great deal of division and indecision in the interwar decades, particularly in the 1930s. But a new set of leaders deliberately learned from these mistakes and vowed substantial change after World War II. The result was a more vigorous set of welfare states, more rapid economic growth, and the formation of new European institutions, beginning with the Coal and Steel Community and ending with the European Union, designed to end the destructive pattern of militant nationalism. After the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1989-91, the eagerness of most nations in east-central Europe to join the European Union showed its success and began to expand essentially Western institutions and processes to most of the rest of the continent. Western strength also involved cultural and social values. Western science continued to provide global leadership; Western feminism helped inspire women's movements and statements of women's rights globally; Western artistic and popular styles had wide influence. Balancing an understanding of Western decline and the signs of continued vitality is a crucial analytical exercise in dealing with world regions in the contemporary period.

Where is the West?

The spread of Western-style values and institutions makes it difficult to draw boundaries around the West, and of course these could change with time – as has been the case in east-central Europe, which was largely outside a really Western orbit in the interwar decades (except for Czechoslovakia) as well as the Soviet period but which seems to have largely joined in more recently. The key question, of course, involves the United States and the other societies widely settled by West Europeans – Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Most of these societies share actively in the production and consumption of Western culture and have institutions that fit within a Western model. The United States, however, has often claimed to be somewhat different from Europe – an “exception”. American exceptionalism showed in the isolationist unwillingness to join with Europe after World War I. It would show in key respects later, as when in the 1980s Americans became more attached to the death penalty even as the European Union banned it. It showed in greater American religiosity. Yet in many ways the United States and Western Europe became more similar during much of the contemporary period, as European class structure, for example, converged with American thanks to the decline of peasantry and aristocracy, or as European and American women began to reenter the labor force in similar fashion in the 1950s and 1960s. As the United States gained increasing military power after World War II, and as European nations actually cut back their military spending, Western relationships clearly became more complicated. Many American observers claimed the 20th century as the “American Century” and after 1991 talked of the United States as the world's only superior power. These claims need to be assessed, and also including in the overall analysis of the West as a world region.

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Questions

What was the impact of the interwar years on the development of a European consciousness? To what extent has this consciousness displaced nationalism?

Is the United States a special case in contemporary world history, or does it broadly fit into larger Western trends and themes?

What were the causes of greater European unity after World War II?

What was the impact of decolonization on the West and its international role?

Chapter 6: Eastern Europe

The Challenge in World History

Eastern Europe, and Russia in particular, have always posed a bit of a dilemma for world historians. Is it a clearly separate region, or can it be handled as part of Europe? The area is Christian, like the rest of Europe, but most of it was Eastern Orthodox, which was not only separate but also somewhat different from Western Catholicism and Protestantism. Orthodox churches and clergy has a closer relationship to the state, to take the most obvious example. Russia developed close ties with Western culture from Peter the Great onward, but there was also resistance to Western values and a clear sense – which began to inform Russian nationalism by the 19th century – that Russia was distinctive and better: less materialistic, less individualistic. And Russia developed quite a different economy and social structure from the counterparts in the West; it focused more on production of grain and raw materials for export, and its manufacturing long lagged. These conditions were changing by 1900, as an industrial revolution developed and cities grew, but a developmental difference remained. Russia also largely avoided the liberal political currents that were so important in the West.

The Communist Experience

Russia's great revolution also proved different from the earlier Western revolutionary tradition, though there were some shared features. The Revolution had huge consequences. It abolished the aristocracy as well as the imperial regime. It promoted important changes such as the rapid expansion of education and better public health facilities. Under Lenin and particularly Stalin, it fostered substantial industrial growth. In some ways, it created a social and economic structure more similar to that of the West. At the same time, however, it remained politically and culturally distinct, sponsoring its own brand of science and particularly art, and developing even stronger state controls including a vigorous secret police. It also maintained the Russian tradition of expansionism, which it indulged after World War II by creating a larger area of control – “behind the Iron Curtain”. The Soviets competed actively with the United States and the West in the cold war, though actual military policies were usually cautious and protection of existing territory may have been a more important goal than further expansion.

The Region

How much did Russian patterns apply to the larger region that ultimately became part of the Soviet bloc? Many other parts of east-central Europe shared some features with Russia, including a substantial peasantry and later industrial development and, in some cases, an Orthodox tradition. Liberal political traditions were limited, except in a few cases. When the Soviet Union absorbed or controlled a larger east-central European territory during the Cold War, differences between this larger “eastern” Europe and the West seemed to intensify. But great restiveness also developed, and was quick to emerge when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989. Another key regional question mark is central Asia, firmly controlled by the Soviet Union as an internal source of raw materials but often with a large Muslim population. Much of this region split into independent countries after 1989, but with strong continuing ties to Russia and little sign of amalgamation with the West, particularly in political structures.

Post-Cold War Russia clearly entered a new period after 1985 or 1989. It developed much more extensive ties with the global economy and with other global influences. The communist political structure was torn down, though key revolutionary achievements were not undone. Consumerism gained ground, as did religion to at least some extent. But Russia did not smoothly accept a Western-style, multiparty democracy, and under Putin from the late 1990s a more authoritarian strain emerged. Tensions with other Western values returned as well. And Putin was able to capitalize on a revitalized Russian nationalism and at least some sense of territorial ambition, toward recapturing a greater regional role.

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Questions

Do Russia and related parts of eastern Europe constitute a separate civilization in contemporary world history, or are they better viewed as a distinctive region in a larger European orbit?

How much does the Orthodox tradition and ongoing religious thought define a particular east European culture and political style?

How was “eastern Europe” best defined during the interwar decades? During the Cold War? Since 1989?

Was revolution inevitable in Russia by 1917? How much did the revolution change Russian society and culture?

Chapter 7: East Asia

Inclusion

East Asia is a fairly familiar geographic region, embracing particularly China, Japan, the Koreas, and (though it gets little modern attention) Mongolia; Vietnam and Singapore may be included as well, because of propinquity and interaction, in Vietnam's case, significant Chinese population in Singapore's. Within recent decades, the region has been characterized by rapid economic growth (Vietnam at a bit of a lag, and North Korea is simply an exception to almost everything). Linked to this is a pronounced reduction in birth rates, though achieved in various ways. More basic coherence derives, first, from frequent if often unpleasant interactions (remember, Western Europe is normally taken as a coherent region despite huge internal quarrels). Military and diplomatic exchanges, between Japan and China with Korea caught in the middle, dot the contemporary period. But the region also has a history of recurrent exchange that goes beyond battles and negotiations. Most importantly, the region is often described in terms of a shared, if somewhat varied, Confucian heritage, resulting from earlier contacts with and from China. This heritage has been greatly modified; industrialization, among other things, depended on changing Confucianism somewhat to accept more new knowledge and a greater interest in science and technology. But Confucian values of order, family, education, and communal harmony arguably still play a huge role, and help to differentiate the region, culturally and to an extent organizationally, from other regions. The fact that it sets a largely secular, thisworldly cultural tradition, in which religions, though significant, play a lesser role also deserves note, again a common current among the national components. Some observers see a successfully adapted Confucianism as the common framework for recent economic growth.

Tensions

Obviously, the region can also be assessed in terms of major internal differences. Only China and Vietnam, in the contemporary period, had real revolutions, which among other things involved some explicit attacks on Confucian values. The difference between China's experience with communism, even modified by more free market activities and global exchanges since 1978, and the political and economic system of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore (which do have elements in common), is admittedly huge. Even earlier, differences among key components of the region prompt many observers to talk of separate, if mutually influenced, cultures, rather than a basic East Asian zone. And there is the stark contemporary fact of deep seated mutual enmity. Japan warred with China in the 1890s, and then periodically and sometimes brutally invaded until 1945; Japan controlled Korea from the early 20th century until 1945. This recent history has left deep scars and easily-inflamed nationalisms. At the same time Japan's postwar demilitarization differentiates this nation in yet another way from its regional neighbors. Finally, longstanding Vietnamese nervousness about its powerful Chinese neighbor has been rekindled recently by more assertive Chinese policies. At various points, in dealing with major themes, we will move back and forth between noting some common reactions and some significant disparities.

An East Asian Century?

It was early in the 20th century that the German Emperor Wilhelm unpleasantly called attention to what he called the "yellow peril." He was referring to Japanese victories over China and Russia and possibly to growing, if still early-industrial, economic strength. For many decades Japan stood rather alone in constituting a new challenge to Western dominance. The nation expanded its empire after World War I, and through the second conflict. China in contrast was engulfed in internal revolution and war, and then direct Japanese invasion. But with communist victory in China, and then stabilization after the chaotic cultural revolution period, China entered its contemporary phase of rapid growth in world manufacturing and in a new range of global interaction (for example with Africa). As China replaced Japan as world economy #2, the Japanese still stood at #3; and South Korea, with its economic miracle from the 1960s onward, had gained seventh place. Despite all its internal disparities and disputes, this seemed to be a region collectively on the move. Unquestionably, whatever one's view of prospects for the future, the return of East Asia to a position of global leadership, but in very new ways, is a fundamental component of the rebalancing of world power in the contemporary era.

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Questions

Does a Confucian legacy still help to define a common political and social culture in the various countries of East Asia? How has Confucianism been modified over the past 150 years?

To what extent has communism differentiated China from other parts of East Asia?

Why does the interpretation of the Cultural Revolution loom so large in contemporary Chinese history?

Why has East Asia proved to be particularly dynamic in the world economy during the contemporary period?

Why did Japan turn to militarism? To what extent has it subsequently turned away?

Chapter 8: South and Southeast Asia

Traditional Base

South and Southeast Asia have long been complicated regions in world history (and partly because of this, southeast Asia often gets less attention than deserved). The region has historically been extremely important in world trade and world cultural interactions, and this has obviously continued into the contemporary era. India developed a clear cultural and social tradition around Hinduism and the caste system, which ultimately spread through the subcontinent; and it did export Hinduism to a few other areas in southeast Asia, along with some wider cultural influence. But the Indian subcontinent itself was divided among a number of languages, and Islam became a strong minority religious force. Nor did India develop a strong tradition of centralized government, with many empires formed by external invasion and with strong emphasis on more localized political units. And southeast Asia received a mix of influences, not only from India but also China and Islam. The region was religiously divided (with Buddhist as well as Islamic areas and groupings), and characteristically into regional monarchies. By 1900, most of the region was held as Western colonies, with Dutch and French as well as British involvement. Imperialism had tended to press for concentration on raw materials and foodstuffs (including the spices for which the region had long been famous), undercutting though not eliminating manufacturing.

Decolonization

Clearly the dominant development during the first decades of the contemporary era involved the rise of nationalisms and efforts at decolonization. Famously, Mahatma Gandhi developed a distinctive approach based on nonviolence, while seeking to use nationalism to unite castes, genders and (he hoped) even religious groups. Significant nationalist movements developed in Indonesia (against the Dutch) and Vietnam. Nationalist pressures had been encouraged by World War I, but no concrete gains resulted. The disruptions of Western control in World War II, when the Japanese took over portions of southeast Asia, had more significant results. Except for French resistance in Vietnam, there was relatively little hesitation about granting independence in the late 1940s. Decolonization had, however, complex results. In India, hopes for Muslim-Hindu collaboration faded quickly, and an independent Islamic Republic in Pakistan emerged in 1947 (later, Bangladesh would split off); an important Muslim minority remained in India and religious tensions both within India and between India and Pakistan continued to exert strong influence on the region. In Pakistan and most of southeast Asia, authoritarian regimes emerged despite some initial democratic hopes; India stood out for its ability to construct and defend a functioning democracy, while also seeking to implement crucial social changes around the legal abolition of the caste system. Vietnam mingled a communist revolution with its decolonization struggles, under Ho Chi Minh, though later would adopt a compromise with private enterprise along the lines developed in China after 1978.

Non-alignment

Much of the region participated strongly in the “nonaligned” movement that took shape in the 1950s, seeking to avoid involvement with one side or the other in the Cold War. Indian and Indonesian leaders were particularly strong advocates of nonalignment, though countries from other regions participated as well. India also sought a wider advocacy for peace, with wide protests, for example, against the spread of nuclear weapons; though ultimately the nation would itself (along with Pakistan in its wake) develop nuclear capacity.

Economic Development

The region was long known for high rates of poverty and difficulties in stimulating a fully industrial economy. Gaps between rich and poor, city and countryside, were and remained considerable, and rapid population growth compounded the problem. The term “Third World”, initially applied to the nonaligned group, ultimately came to highlight this economic position. But change also occurred. By the 1970s several parts of southeast Asia, such as Malaysia, were benefiting from the prosperity of Japan and the Pacific Rim, and advancing their own industrial and export production; several of these countries became known as “Little Tigers”. Several regional centers, and particularly India, benefited as well in the 1970s from improvements in seed strain – the co-called “green revolution” at the time – that improved food supplies for a growing population. India also expanded its industrial sector. The Indian government tried to encourage growth. Efforts to dampen population growth were not fully successful, and tariffs on manufacturing imports were combined with possibly excessive bureaucratic regulation. But rapid growth emerged in the 1990s, as the nation liberalized its economic policies and as strong sectors in software engineering and telephonic services spurred the growth of a large middle class. Along with China and Brazil (and Russia on a slightly different basis), India became a key member of the BRIC group of new global economic powers.

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Questions

Compared to decolonization in other settings, what were the distinctive features of the process in India, and how can they be explained?

Discuss the nature and contemporary evolution of India's connections to other parts of Asia.

What were the major causes of economic growth in southeast Asia, from the colonial period onward?

By comparative standards, to what extent have south and southeast Asia constituted a relatively peaceful region since World War II? What explains the Vietnamese exception?

Chapter 9: The Middle East and North Africa

Coherence

This is an old region, that presents relatively few definitional problems. The region was shaped by the rise of Islam and Arab expansion, from about 600 CE onward. Previously, North Africa and the whole Middle East had not been conjoined, though of course the Roman Empire had covered the whole Mediterranean basin. But the Islamic and Arab surge created what was clearly a common cultural zone (briefly extending to Spain as well), a region that would share much common historical experience as well from that point onward. Shared culture included artistic and literary forms, based in part on Islamic criteria as well as written Arabic. For several centuries, under the Caliphates, the region was loosely united politically as well. Substantial commerce was another longstanding feature of the region (and not a new one even at that point); Islam encouraged trade on the whole, and commercial links throughout the region were combined with active ventures into Africa and through the Indian Ocean. The establishment of the Ottoman Empire, from the mid-15th century onward, did not restore complete unity: the Ottomans did not control the southern part of the Arab peninsula and they battled fiercely with a rival Persian Empire; this conflict created new dimensions as well to the Sunni-Shiite split, with the Persian Safavids firmly backing Shi'a Islam, the Ottomans in the Sunni camp. But the Ottomans did long control much of the Middle East and part of North Africa (plus southeastern Europe), producing considerable internal stability through much of the region.

Tensions

Substantial cultural and historical coherence must not mask some major analytical challenges. The region embraced, and embraces, an array of ethnic and linguistic minorities, as well as minority religious groups. Islam is divided not only between Shi'a and Sunni but with many smaller sects in addition. While Iran is Muslim, it also looks back to a rich Persian heritage that differs from the Arab legacy. Turkey, and of course Israel, are other key non-Arab states. In the contemporary period the region has also been divided – indeed, many individuals in the region have been divided – between traditional cultural identities, newer sources of religious zeal, but also the attraction of more secular ideas and practices as well. Women (and the men around them) thus debate whether or not to veil, styles of dress change for some groups, secular national states seek to claim or command new loyalties. This is a region divided, in other words, by various aspects of tradition but by new controversies and combinations as well.

Trouble Spot

The contemporary period in the Middle East effectively began with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Increasingly hard-pressed by European rivals and internal national loyalties, the Empire could not survive defeat in World War I. The most obvious result was a new set of political divisions – many small states, whose boundaries were set by European imperialists with scant attention to cultural or economic logic. The region was thus ripe for greater instability, within and among many of the states involved. In part to grapple with instability, authoritarian regimes predominated. The ultimate creation of Israel added further issues. The region was also deeply affected by its proximity to Europe and Russia, which had long competed for influence; direct or indirect outside intervention, with the United States joining in after World War II, played a recurrent role. This was exacerbated in turn by the growing importance of oil. Western companies initially developed the new energy source, but national governments gained control during the 1950s, as a special aspect of decolonization, and the formation of OPEC in 1960 solidified this change. The result was tremendous new wealth for those countries blessed with reserves, but also continued external interference to assure supply.

Trends

Recurrent external interference and internal wars or civil wars in the region should not obscure other trends and debates, some of which might seem to point in more positive directions. Substantial manufacturing developed, and in recent decades countries like Turkey have emerged as significant players in the global economy (along with Israel and the oil states). The region in fact pioneered some policies, like import substitution, that would later have wider effects. Considerable urbanization marks the period, along in some cases with growing urban poverty. Population growth was rapid, but in recent decades birth rates have dropped sharply in several countries, signaling important changes in family dynamics. Educational expansion has been considerable, though marked by debates over educational priorities (how much science?) and gender roles. The region, in sum, has participated in and in some cases helped shape some of the larger global themes of the contemporary era.

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Questions

What tensions are there in the formation of nationalism in the Middle East? What was the role of religion in the development of nationalism in Lebanon?

What is the historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire in Europe? Why is Atatürk an enduring symbol for Turkish nationalism?

What key developments led to Egypt's economic changes in the late 20th century?

How has oil been utilized for development in Arab nations?

Chapter 10: Sub-Saharan Africa

The Setting

As noted, this is a huge subcontinent with many regional divisions in terms of climate, soil, and other basic geographical features. Nor was sub-Saharan Africa ever united, or even substantially united, by a single major religion or culture; it has long combined more local features, including particular polytheistic religions, with reception of some external influences such as Islam. While many large kingdoms developed at various points, the subcontinent has also been marked by frequent internal warfare; and no unit ever organized more than a small fraction of the total territory. However, some scholars, and some African nationalist leaders, have claimed some loosely shared features, such as an emphasis on tightly-knit extended families with a strong female role; effective kinship groups; a positive appreciation of interactions with nature; a positive community sense. By the later 19th century, the region was also united, if negatively, by its common subjection to European imperialism; the whole subcontinent was submerged, with only Ethiopia holding out until the 1930s. Imperialists of course divided, in two senses: French territory was somewhat different from British, in turn from Belgian; and the Europeans set up new states with no real reference to earlier political or ethnic tradition, a fact which would make the formation of stable independent states quite difficult in many settings. Imperialism was also an economic fact. Africa had long been part of the world economy, providing gold, slaves, vegetable oils and other products. But from the late 19th century onward, and in some cases still today, Europeans (and other outsiders) were eager to create greater profits by expanding mining, commercial production of crops like cotton (not always suitable to the local environment) and by prompting many workers (particularly males) to seek new jobs at usually low wages. Economic conditions varied by region, but on the whole until quite recently sub-Saharan Africa was marked by growing poverty and economic dependence. Colonialism left a social mark as well: Europeans often encouraged a reorganization of the African family, toward the greater subordination of women; and subsequent feminist movements did not necessarily address the situation in that they, too, tended to downplay family and community structures in favor of individualism.

New Nations

Decolonization came a bit late to Africa, after the development of considerable nationalist agitation in the wake of World War II. New nations emerged from the 1950s onward. Most initially sought to establish democratic, constitutional republics. Almost all the new nations however quickly moved toward one-man, one-party, or military rule. They faced huge problems, that made democratic regimes difficult to sustain. Several countries were wracked with outright civil war (Nigeria, Congo). Others faced endemic tribal and religious disputes. Independence disrupted some established economic patterns, though substantial external economic control persisted, through global corporations. Little outright warfare occurred but there were border skirmishes and efforts to exploit internal unrest. The decolonization process was also marked of course by an unusually large white minority in the southern nations, particularly South Africa, which long sought to retain control through policies like apartheid. These frameworks were dismantled, at least in terms of legal structures, by the 1990s. By the 1990s, indeed, much of the subcontinent was undergoing a resurgence of democratic political systems, that would gain ground not only in South Africa but in Nigeria, Kenya and many (but not all) other countries.

Other Trends

Poverty, disease, and frequent political instability obviously conditioned other trends, but did not prevent significant change. African cities grew, though urbanization was somewhat less advanced than in many other regions. Educational opportunities expanded, though again somewhat gradually. Cultural change included the spread of Islam and Christianity as new missionary forces. But consumerism and nationalism also gained ground, as new loyalties, and Marxism made more limited inroads. The overall package was mixed and complicated, but cultural change was considerable overall. Artistic traditions might be retained but modified in ways that would please the tourist trade or exporters. By the early 21st century several African countries seemed to be breaking through toward more rapid and consistent economic development, aided by growing competition among industrial states (including China, India as well as the West) for African resources.

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Questions

“What were the distinctive features of the decolonization process in Africa? What were some key differences in the process among major African regions?”

What factors have limited the spread of democracy in postcolonial Africa? Are those factors easing?

What was the relationship between religion on the one hand, and both colonization and decolonization on the other?

Discuss the nature and distinctive features of urbanization in Africa

Chapter 11: Latin America

Neglect?

Critics correctly note that Latin America is frequently given short shrift in world histories. There are several reasons for this. The region has contributed much to world culture, but it never generated a major new religion or philosophy; rather, it has mixed elements from its various human components: Native Americans, Europeans, Africans, and in some regions Asians. The region has never been a center for major war or great power conflict. Indeed, in terms of conventional military experience the region is noteworthy for the absence of significant war, despite internal interventions by the military in some cases. Economically, Latin America was a vital part of world trade from the 16th century onward, but mainly producing foods and minerals, in considerable economic dependence on Western Europe and ultimately the United States, and amid widespread poverty. Many of these features would continue to characterize Latin America well into the 20th century.

Trends

The region, amid considerable internal diversities, has changed considerably during the contemporary period. Several developments stand out. Urbanization is one. Peasant agriculture remains important, and periodically generated important land disputes (a key component of the Mexican revolution in 1910, and later risings after World War II), but cities began to grow rapidly. Demography changed. Population growth rates remained high into the 1970s, amid efforts from several quarters, including the Catholic church, to discourage birth control. But most regions entered the pattern of demographic transition by the 1970s, with significant reductions both in per capita birth rates and in infant mortality. Economic development was a third sector: several Latin American countries took a lead in gaining greater independence in economic policy, during the 1930s and 1940s, and beginning to promote significant industrial growth. The region was still shaped in part by cheap export production, in commodities such as coffee, and also by the power of multinational corporations seeking low-cost labor. But economic growth accelerated, and countries like Brazil and Mexico rated among the world's leading developing nations; growth rates even in some of the Andean region picked up after 2000. Partly on the strength of these trends, encouraged in some cases by more effective governments, social indicators began to change as well, in terms of education levels, health levels, women's roles.

Politics

Long known for political instability and recurrent authoritarian rule, or caudillismo, Latin American politics seemed to display business as usual for much of the 20th century. The important Mexican Revolution by the 1920s yielded one-party control. More effective authoritarian regimes emerged in Brazil (Vargas) and Argentina (Peron), toward midcentury. Marxist influences played some role, but gained primacy only in Cuba. Many countries alternated between brief periods of democracy and authoritarian or military rule. But in the 1970s a more systematic and possibly durable move toward political democracy took hold, affecting virtually every country except Cuba by 2000. Genuine political competition occurred in most places. The Latin American version of democratic politics included strong socialist elements than was characteristic of Europe or certainly the United States in the same decades, and also unusually strong participation by women in political leadership.

Western or Latin American?

Latin American historians recurrently debate the best analytical framework for their regional story, and while the issues involved are not just contemporary they spill over into current assessments. The region has maintained close cultural as well as political and economic ties with the West. Latin American high culture, indeed, is essentially Western, and popular culture has also contributed to a common Western agenda, for example in dance and popular music. The strong position of the Catholic church is Western in one sense, though in contrasts to the decline of faith in Western Europe; in several countries in recent decades, evangelical Protestant missionaries have also won many converts (Brazil, Guatemala). Political trends overlap with the West as well, as in the vaguely fascist trappings of Peronism or more recently the democratic surge. Urban consumerism also reflects international tastes and motives. But the course of contemporary Latin American history is not simply Western: different issues in economic development; less warfare and military involvement; a different population mix (though worth comparison with the United States, another immigrant and former slave society); a recurrently distinctive political trajectory.

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Questions

For the contemporary period, how do racial issues in Latin America compare with those in the United States?

Discuss the role of peasants and peasant revolts in contemporary Latin American history.

How, and to what extent, did Latin America break out of a pattern of economic dependency in the past century?

How have developments in the past 25 years altered the trends that had prevailed during much of the 20th century?

How did key social trends in Latin America relate to the economic patterns?

Discuss key aspects of the role of religion in contemporary Latin American political and cultural history.

Is it most accurate to deal with Latin America in the contemporary period as part of a broader Western civilization, or as a separate cultural, social and political system?

Chapter 12: Regional Identities

The Problem of Identity

Distinctive regional patterns in the contemporary period were accompanied by widespread concerns about identity. There were several challenges. Early in the contemporary period, reflecting trends that had begun at least in the 19th century, Western power and influence clearly challenged regional identities. Both before and after World War II several Japanese intellectuals worried that their culture was being overrun by Western standards, and a few urged dramatic action in response. After World War II, United States cultural influence, particularly in consumerism, raised similar concerns; French critics talked about a “cocacolonization” of popular tastes, while various protests would later target McDonald’s fast foods as symbols of Americanization. More broadly, certainly by the 1970s, globalization seemed to intensify the issues. Faster communication created even more opportunities for cultural imitation. Imported patterns included widespread participation in beauty contests, clearly a Western import that challenged many local ideas about women’s roles and sexual propriety. Not only Western, but Japanese and South Korean styles often competed successfully against local models. United Nations agencies frequently seemed to be preaching a Western-style feminism, as they highlighted women’s rights. A Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe, showed how Western-style consumerism undermined traditional family cohesion, by putting individual earnings ahead of the commitments appropriate for example when a death occurred (*Things Fall Apart*). A Mexican novelist wrote about how distinctive Mexican identity, forged earlier from native, Western and other influences, was yielding to faceless urban consumer standards. The concern was widespread, affecting many different regions.

Nationalism

One response, though it was also ironically partly imported, was nationalism. Nationalism – an emphasis on the distinctiveness of the national culture and usually the importance of the nation as a separate political unit – had emerged first in Europe by the 18th century. It spread during the 19th to most other regions. The 20th century saw widespread nationalist movements, most obviously protesting European imperialism. Gandhi, for example, saw Indian nationalism as a way to unite castes, genders and hopefully even different religions in opposition to British rule. Nationalism became an important force in Africa and southeast Asia. Even communist countries – though Marx had attacked nationalism as a bourgeois ploy against the international working class – often played up nationalism, and after the communist collapse nationalism by itself became a key component in Russia. Nationalism could help define and protect cultural identity. The power of nationalism certainly undermined most of the great multinational empires that entered the 20th century: the Austro-Hungarian, the Ottoman; even the Russian empire was partly undercut by nationalism as it splintered after 1989. But nationalism also had some limitations. Many nations were too small to be effective economically, a key issue in east-central Europe between the wars; hence the effort to modify national separately by new confederations like the European Union. In many regions nations themselves were artificial, the product of colonial boundary setting; this limited the utility of nationalism in the Middle East and Africa.

Other Options

To the extent that cultural nationalism proved inadequate, people in many regions looked to other defenses. In some cases Marxism provided an option, though it was not traditional. Socialist realist styles were touted as preferable alternatives to the corrupt bourgeois taste of Western consumerism, though this alternative largely collapsed by the 1990s. Some regions attempted to turn back to tradition directly. As communism declined as a cultural loyalty in China, there was some effort to revive Confucian styles and education. Tribal or ethnic allegiances remained powerful forces in Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia. Religion or religious revival clearly reflected (among other things) the importance of a cultural defense against too many outside influences, and in some cases the clear inadequacy of local nationalism. The interconnection of religion and identity might help explain a decline in tolerance, a greater propensity to attack other groups, that was also a feature of contemporary history in some regions.

Compromises

Identity issues should not be overdrawn. Many individuals developed real comfort in living amid cultural variety, like Saudi Arabians who spent extended time in the United States, claiming to be “bicultural” in their ability to move back and forth. Important movements – like Bollywood movies in India – merged traditional themes with Hollywood touches, and gained great popularity. Syncretism – the blending of cultures – was a common response, and while it modified identity it did not obliterate it. Balancing the successful compromises against the often passionate, sometimes violent defenses of identity is a key analytical challenge in dealing with contemporary world history and the role of regions

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Questions

What is the concept of “glocalization” all about? Does it adequately address the balance between local and global factors that has emerged in the contemporary period of world history?

Is the West still practicing cultural imperialism? Discuss with regard to beauty standards, but also other areas where the issue can be tested.

What are the contemporary roles of nationalisms?

Do some societies have greater concerns about identity than others? What factors might explain the differences involved?

What are some key examples of syncretism in contemporary world history? Does syncretism provide adequate safeguards against global homogenization?

Section III: Political Change

In 1900 most regions of the world were ruled by kings or emperors. By 2000, monarchy (except as a ceremonial office) had virtually disappeared, and most formal empires were gone as well. This means, obviously, that the contemporary period has witnessed massive political change. Only a few major countries still have basically the same political system today that they had a hundred years ago, and some countries have gone through a series of different regimes. This degree of political change, worldwide, is unprecedented. It reflects a widespread need or desire to get rid of political institutions that had often served for centuries, even millennia – as in China’s jettisoning of its imperial structure after 1911. Of course it was always possible that older forms might come back some day; in the chaos of post-communist Russia in the early 1990s there was some nostalgia for the Romanov emperors. But frankly restoration seems unlikely. And of course change was not always as substantial in reality, as it was on paper. Many rulers, though technically in charge of a republic, might seem to behave as kings once did. On the whole, however, change was quite real, and marks a key feature of contemporary world history.

Removing old systems was widespread, agreement on new systems was harder to come by. Several options emerged. Out of the experience of World War I several regimes attempted to highlight an unprecedented level of state control, as both communist and fascist regimes extended the power of the state and the single political party. Much more common were authoritarian regimes, sometimes building on nationalism, more often utilizing military leadership. Democracy was of course another option, and its global fortunes went through several distinct periods over the past century. Analysis of contemporary global political history must include assessment of and comparison among the various options. Another factor deserves attention as well: gradually and incompletely, some sense of global political standards emerged during the 20th century, in the human rights movement. Far from triumphant, human rights efforts and interventions on their behalf nevertheless became a significant part of the recent global political story.

Another aspect in contemporary politics is crucial: with some exceptions, no matter what the political systems, governments began to take on new functions, or extend their commitment. The contemporary period saw the growth of the state, even under most democracies. Government bureaucracies expanded, and training programs became more widespread. Revolutions might disrupt this process briefly – Mao Zedong struggled for a different approach to bureaucratic training and recruitment in China – but the process almost always resumed, even when new personnel were involved. Again no matter what the system, governments began to pay more attention to: providing mass education and seeking to oversee some protections for children; expanding public health programs; developing at least a partial welfare system, to provide some protections in ill-health or later age. Overall, in other words, governments developed new and direct contacts with ordinary people, beyond traditional functions of justice systems, taxation and military recruitment. Governments even introduced new regulations for international travel; the ubiquitous passport system unfolded fully only from the 1920s onward.

Of course government effectiveness varied, in part because of differences in economic levels and available resources. And there were important cases of “failed states” in the contemporary period, where governments became so ineffective that even basic functions – administration of justice; protection of order – could not be assured. Finally, in the 1990s there was considerable global movement against “overregulation”, that saw a reevaluation of government involvement in the economy that ranged from China, to India, to key Latin American states. But the growth of government and the redefinition and expansion of functions constituted a vital theme, again to some extent regardless of regime. One of the first foci of communist revolutionaries both in Russia and in China, for example, involved extending support for public health centers and mass education facilities – just as Western democracies had been doing. With rare exceptions – the Taliban in Afghanistan – Islamic governments also clearly accepted a new responsibility for public education. Some shared and fairly new ideas about what the state should do form a global undercurrent in contemporary political history, and deserve real attention along with the regime issues.

One other variable should be noted, to be taken up more fully in Section VII: contemporary governments have NOT agreed on the military functions of states. Some have been aggressively expansionist; some firmly alert but largely defensive; but some eager or at least willing to see a significant reduction in military expenditures. These differentials became particularly important in the decades after World War II.

This section on political change is the first opportunity to test one of the key themes of contemporary world history – the abandonment of traditional political forms, the effort to innovate – across the century as a whole. The theme is of course complicated by the internal subperiods: political options between the wars were partly different from those available after World War II. And it is closely wrapped up in regional differentiation: the jettisoning of old forms

was widespread, but decisions about what to substitute reflected marked regional differences, and often perpetuated those differences. Since the 1970s the resurgence of democracy (Chapter 14) may ultimately cut across regions to an unusual extent, but we cannot yet be sure, and even this resurgence has not yet erased some stubborn regional lines.

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Section III: Discussion Questions

Why have some regions been particularly resistant to democracy in the contemporary period?

Why could monarchy not adapt to the conditions of the contemporary period? What explains the exceptions to the general process of decline?

How and why have governments expanded their functions over the past century?

Chapter 13: The Decline of Monarchy and Empire

The Manifestations

This chapter briefly explores the first part of the contemporary political equation: the decline of traditional political forms. Part of this process is easy: revolutions, whether major or minor, almost uniformly attacked monarchs and emperors as part of their demand for fundamental political change. This was true whether their ideologies were Marxist, or liberal (the basic thrust of the Chinese revolution first phase), or even Islamic (the Iranian displacement of the Shah as part of the 1979 revolution). Even modest efforts, such as the 1952 rising that displaced King Farouk in Egypt, led to destruction of monarchy. Revolutionary ideas and, sometimes, the personal ambitions of leaders who wanted power for themselves (the case in Egypt), combined. And of course the decline of empires is obvious: nationalism and the pressure for decolonization attacked all the overseas empires that existed in 1900. In several key cases, the disappearance of monarchy or empire is also associated with defeat in war, because in most contemporary wars defeat is essentially total: thus the office of German emperor died after World War I, the Japanese emperor was scaled back to figurehead after World War II, the whole Habsburg monarchy collapsed as did the Ottoman Empire after 1918, and few if any of the new states created a replacement royalty. So: nationalism, revolutionary ideals and ambitions of various sorts, and the pain of loss in war combined to do the trick. Yet the result is nevertheless worth noting: institutions that had been durable and resilient for many centuries were simply tossed aside.

The Problem

This leads in turn to at least a noticeable analytical problem: what were the causes involved? We can leave the revolutions aside here, their goals though varied were incompatible with preserving a monarchy, and the examples of revolutions before them – French, American – all pointed in the direction of republics. But why did the new nations formed through decolonization not seek monarchies? This had actually been the standard pattern in the late 19th century. When nationalists gained independence for Bulgaria, Greece, Romania at various points before 1900, they always sought a monarch to head their new state (usually choosing a minor German prince, who often brought along excellent breweries). Why not do this in the 20th century? Obviously, even when no revolution was involved, monarchy by this point seemed too backward, too associated with an old order that even the nationalists wanted to replace, that the option rarely gained any consideration at all. In India, the association of regional princes with British imperialism helped foreclose any monarchical option. The new states of Africa would have had trouble identifying a relevant royal family, despite a strong monarchical tradition earlier in African history.

The Exceptions

The basic trend is both clear and important. But of course there were a few exceptions, worth brief consideration. Most established monarchies that survived turned into ceremonial positions – the pattern in Europe and perforce in postwar Japan. But Thailand was an interesting exception, where the king retains substantial traditional reverence and real political power alongside a democratic system. Several monarchies persevered or were newly created in the Middle East; Saudi Arabia was a perseverance case, Jordan a fascinating example of a new creation that has so far survived. Most new nation regimes in the region, beginning with Turkey, opted for republics as the suitable modern form, but the few anomalies remain interesting. A few African states retained or revived monarchies, though the cases are fairly small. (The most glorious monarchical tradition, in Ethiopia, which had resumed after the Italians were dislodged in 1942, had ended with a military coup in 1974-5.) Alongside the few significant active monarchies were cases where authoritarian rulers, without proclaiming monarchy, set up an equivalent: thus North Korea managed to pass rule through three generations of the Kims; Syria passed rule from al-Assad father to son.

Significance

The global end of monarchy may seem so obvious and logical that further analysis is unnecessary. But two points can be added. First, with again a couple of exceptions, the decision to forego monarchy raised obvious problems of succession. If rule is no longer hereditary, how does one pick a new leader? Democracy offered one answer, but other regimes – and the problem has sometimes been agonizing under communism – needed to develop other options. The result may be a gain, to the extent the heredity did not always assure quality, but there can be challenges involved, and this becomes a more common issue in contemporary political history. More generally, regardless of the precise motives in abandoning monarchy, its abolition raised the crucial question: what next? And here the answers have been quite diverse. The three following chapters deal with the major options.

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Questions

What features of British monarchy have helped it survive throughout the 20th century? How has it adapted during the contemporary period?

What challenges did Jordan face in the establishment of its monarchy? How was it able to achieve stability?

What gains and losses resulted from the decline of multinational empires?

Using Ethiopia as an example, explain how some ruling monarchies managed to operate after World War II?

Why did China break its historic pattern of replacing a failing dynasty with a new one, after a popular protest, and instead replaced the system after 1911?

Chapter 14: Totalitarianism

Basic Features

Totalitarian regimes developed in Soviet Russia and then in Nazi Germany. Systems were imitated or developed to some degree elsewhere, as in fascist Italy, Mao's China, Kim's North Korea. Totalitarianism represented an effort to subject all major social systems, including even aspects of the family, to the control of party and state, usually also under the mantle of a single revered Leader. The systems could generate important results: Hitler's control in Germany helped pull the nation out of severe economic depression, through state-sponsored projects; Stalin pushed Russia into more extensive industrialization. Both states provided some new welfare and vacation provisions for workers, though amid many constraints. But the systems were also marked by extensive operations by political police, many arrests and camp incarcerations, a huge death rate for "enemies of the state" variously defined, an atmosphere of fear and terror. They were also marked by incessant state-sponsored publicity, aimed at winning active loyalty and preempting other sources of information.

Causes

Totalitarianism was a new phenomenon, at least for political units larger than city states. It depended on some modern technologies, including rapid communication systems and propaganda mechanisms. It also reflected new ideologies – the Soviet version of Marxism, Hitler's definition of fascism, that called for the state to "remake" the citizenry, to create the conditions for a true communist state (Soviet) or pure Germanness (Hitler). Totalitarianism was also prepared by the huge expansion of governments in World War I, seizing control of many economic sectors, expanding controls for political police, and issuing massive, often fraudulent propaganda; Lenin was directly guided by the precedent of Germany's wartime state. In Russia's case, totalitarianism also reflected a modern extension of the usual period, after a major revolution, in which a leader or group seized dictatorial power in hopes of restoring stability (like the Jacobins in the French revolution); it was now possible to press this stage further.

Soviet Totalitarianism

Marx had talked of the need for a "dictatorship of the proletariat," a period in which the state would seize control in order to root out all the facets of a capitalist society. Lenin, when he gained power, quickly banned competing political parties. The state extended activities, as in expanding education, and sought to use the schools to unseat earlier loyalties (attacks on religion) and create positive ties. Children were even encouraged to spy on parents, to help assure compliance. Lenin recognized the need for some compromises, and the New Economic Policy most notably allowed some small businesses and peasant farms separate from state control. But as Stalin took over, from 1929, the state's authority expanded, with the campaign to force peasants into collective farms (an effort that required great force, with many imprisoned – sent to brutal labor camps in Siberia -- or killed) and the series of five-year plans that organized the pace of industrialization under state control. Expanded party activities included the formation of active communist youth groups and periodic show trials and purges of presumed dissidents.

Nazism

Totalitarianism under Hitler even more directly attacked the liberal, parliamentary state, seen as hopelessly weak and divided. After gaining power in 1933 (technically legally) Hitler moved quickly to crush competing groups under the policy of *Gleichschaltung*, or leveling. Other parties, unions were disbanded, many leaders (particularly socialists) sent to the first German concentration camps. Hitler was a master of mass rallies and developed an elaborate propaganda apparatus. Schools and universities were bent to party control. While not all of the former leadership was purged – for example, the officer corps – Hitler filled the bureaucracy with Nazi faithful and created elite groups, like the SS, to rival the military. The goal was the apotheosis of state and leader, and rapid preparation for war. Attacks on Jews – totalitarian systems need to identify enemies that must be attacked – led ultimately to the Holocaust (with brutal attacks as well on gypsies, homosexuals).

Limitations

Scholars have noted that totalitarian systems were not necessarily as all-encompassing as many believed, and as the leaders themselves proclaimed. Hitler shied away from directly attacking the operations of big landlords and industrialists, and while he tried to limit independent religion he was careful in dealing with the Catholic Church. He even tolerated the widespread employment of domestic servants, who technically could have provided labor for war industries. Stalin kept careful tabs on worker opinion, to make sure this crucial group could see some benefits from his policies. Totalitarian systems were fairly successful in preventing much outright protest. A few efforts were mounted against Hitler, by a Munich student group and later by some army officers, but they came to naught. Stalin,

increasing paranoid, tried to attack real or imagined opposition within the Party before any serious effort could develop.

Imitations

Suppression of dissident groups, praise for state and leader, the creation of militant party faithful appealed to a number of regimes in addition to the Soviet Union and Germany. Mussolini, particularly after Hitler came to power and put him somewhat in the shadow, extended state controls, even developing a campaign against Italian Jews. Franco's Spain, Peron's Argentina, a few states in eastern Europe developed clear fascist trappings, without however developing a full totalitarian program. Mao's China went through a clearer totalitarian phase, particularly when the 1960s Cultural Revolution directly attacked competing sources of authority.

The End?

The major totalitarian systems ultimately failed. Hitler's system died in war, and the resulting loss, and international outrage, has limited recourse to the fascist example ever since. The example is not forgotten, but it has not created any new totalitarian models since the 1945 collapse. The fate of communist totalitarianism, in both Russia and China, was more complex. Successors to Stalin and Mao loosened controls to some extent, and tended to substitute party committees for single leaders in decision-making. The apparatus, including the secret police, was not entirely undone, but there was a clear relaxation. This was true in the Soviet Union even before the arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985. Gorbachev then attacked totalitarian principles directly by urging greater local initiatives, more openness. Fundamentally, he argued that totalitarianism in Russia was simply not adequately galvanizing the economy, and that more active contacts with the outside world were also essential. Chinese leadership had made a similar decision in 1978, in allowing wider global contacts and more leeway for private enterprise.

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Questions

What similarities are there between Stalin and Hitler? In what ways did Stalin and Hitler’s ideologies of power differ?

What were the different goals of Nazi propaganda, and how did Nazi Germany disseminate propaganda? What role did it play in Hitler’s consolidation of power and control of the country?

What were the differences between the “special” police forces of Italy, Spain, and Germany? What common tactics did they employ to assert control?

Why did late 20th century anti-Soviet Union dissidents characterize it as totalitarian? Who defended the Soviet Union from the totalitarian label, and why?

Given what we now know about the limitations of many totalitarian governments, is totalitarianism in fact a useful term? Should we be talking instead about a range of authoritarian systems?

To what extent, and why, has totalitarianism largely ended, among the political options available to world societies?

Chapter 15: Authoritarianism

Features

Authoritarianism was hardly a contemporary invention. Authoritarian leaders had recurrently emerged, for example, in 19th-century Latin America, where there was little interest in monarchy but where more liberal political systems periodically broke down. Authoritarian regimes in the contemporary period typically closed down most if not all political opposition; political prisoners and use of police to repress dissidence were common fare. They might operate under one-party regimes, as with the Baath party in several Middle Eastern countries. They might emanate from the military, a recurrent option in Pakistan, in Argentina and elsewhere. Authoritarian systems differed, however, from totalitarianism in not seeking quite such overwhelming state control and, usually, developing a more modest approach to propaganda and praise for the leader. The state role in the economy was typically limited. In some cases, authoritarian societies probably lacked the technology and resources for totalitarianism, but more commonly the leaders, though ambitious, simply did not have the sweeping plans and ideologies to motivate a more disruptive effort.

Settings

Authoritarianism sometimes responded to a desire of upper-class interests for protection against attack from below. This was a clear factor, for example, in the turn to authoritarianism in east-central Europe in the 1920s. These were countries in which, for the most part, large estate owners sought to prevail against a peasant majority, and were deeply concerned about preventing the prospect of radical land reform. Democracy, in their view, was too dangerous, and an appropriately responsive authoritarian leader far more acceptable. In some instances, religious institutions also backed authoritarianism, as a protection for established values. The Catholic Church often supported authoritarian regimes in Latin America until the 1960s. Islamic authorities often supported authoritarian controls as a means of enforcing at least some Islamic laws and limiting religious competition; this was a factor in several Middle Eastern countries and in Pakistan, after World War II (more particularly, after about 1970), and played a role in the interesting amalgam of religious control and open elections in Iran after the revolution of 1979. Religion was a tricky variable, however. Authoritarian regimes in Egypt, Syria and Iraq were in fact secular, eager to protect religious minorities as part of an effort to control the zeal of the Muslim majority.

New Nations and the Military

We have seen that the problems of new nations often led to authoritarian responses. Army leaders, or individually ambitious politicians, argued that firmer state controls were necessary to assure adequate political stability, against economic challenges, dissident groups or regions that did not accept the legitimacy of the nation itself, in some cases also against a threat of outside intervention." New nations" problems clearly prompted authoritarianism in much of Africa and the Middle East. In these settings, authoritarian leadership might also reflect the ambitions of a particular group – a single ethnic group in Kenya or Afghanistan, or a single Islamic sect in Syria – to assure its predominance in a pluralist society. Finally, again often in new nations settings, the interests of the military in protecting itself, and the nation, against undue instability, and the capacity of the military to provide some experienced leadership, spurred authoritarian responses. Even aside from new nations' situations, military leaders who operated rather separately from civilian control frequently imposed authoritarian solutions when political dissent seemed to threaten stability and the interests of the military itself. This was a huge factor in Japan's turn to authoritarianism in the 1930s, with military ambitions for operations in China adding impetus. It recurrently played a role in Turkey after World War II, and in Pakistan, where democratic and authoritarian periods often seemed to oscillate.

Post-revolution

In many cases, at various points in the contemporary period, revolutions created settings in which authoritarianism could thrive. And the decay of outright totalitarianism, in situations where leaders and possibly many ordinary people still sought some special protection for social order, also could generate authoritarianism as replacement. The Arab spring outbreak in Egypt, in 2012, and the initial democratic election of an Islamic slate, led the military to re-impose authoritarianism in the name of stability. China, moving away from totalitarianism and any full ideological commitment to communism, created an effective authoritarian apparatus from 1978 onward, severely limiting political dissent or religious or ethnic dispute, but with opportunities for far more varied economic activity. Russia, under Putin after 2010, may be moving in a similar direction. Turkey, after World War I and a successful military operation against Western intervention, offers an important example of essentially authoritarian politics used to

promote a “revolution from above.” The new leader, Kemal Ataturk, used a strong government to extend education, to promote changes in dress, to limit the range of Islam, and of course to promote economic development.

Range

Obviously the range and forms of authoritarianism were quite varied in the contemporary period, affecting virtually every region to some extent. At some points, some kind of authoritarian system seemed to be the most logical and feasible response to the need to defend an established order – social, military, religious or in several Middle Eastern countries secular – in a situation where monarchy was no longer a solution but democracy seemed too dangerous or unwieldy.

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“Why was authoritarian rule so common in newly-independent states after World War II?”

What are some of the perceived advantages of authoritarian rule in the contemporary period of world history?

Explain the ways in which authoritarian control was limited by citizens in Argentina and Brazil.

Why were transitions from authoritarian to more representative governments in east and central Europe often marked with violence?

What historical events have influenced Pakistan’s development of authoritarian control? What role do the military and religion play?

Are certain regions durably committed to authoritarian political systems, and if so why?

Chapter 16: Democracy

Features

Democratic political systems were already established in several countries in 1900, defined as systems in which large numbers of people had the vote, in which elected legislative representatives had serious powers alongside an elected executive and in which there was considerable freedom for competing political parties. Several countries, shortly before or after 1900, also added women's suffrage to the characteristics of modern democracy. Everywhere, democratic systems (even for male voters only) were fairly new. Except in the United States most voting systems early in the 19th century had massive property qualifications, and in 1900 this remained true in Latin America, Italy, and Japan. But by 1900 democracy was clearly operative in Britain, Scandinavia, France as well as the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand. Germany would become a full democracy under the Weimar Republic, Italy, Japan and several Latin American countries began to expand voting rights soon after World War I. Most of the small new nations in east-central Europe, set up under the Versailles treaty, initially aimed at becoming democracies, though only in Czechoslovakia did the system last until World War II.

The Interwar Period

Democracy did not do well in the later 1920s and 1930s, surviving only where it had already been firmly lodged. Economic problems, and then the depression, led to authoritarian or totalitarian replacements in Italy, most of east-central Europe, then Germany. Relatively few democracies survived in Latin America. Voting systems might remain, but political competition and real choice ended. Democracy at this point seemed ineffective. Even the established democracies saw growing partisan divisions (between conservatives and socialists, in most cases, with a weakening of the liberal "middle") make forceful decisions difficult, in meeting the problems of the depression and then the rise of Hitler. Somewhat more successful efforts in Scandinavia, in expanding the welfare state, and in the American New Deal ran counter to the dominant trends.

Post-World War II

Democracy was clearly on the ascendant in 1945. The democratic countries, along with the Soviet Union, had defeated fascism, really eliminating that option. Under Western guidance, most of the defeated countries (West Germany, Italy, Japan) quickly established democracies that, aided by economic growth, fared very well. Most of the new nations created through decolonization intended to set up democracies as well. Only in India – where democracy clearly survived and in some respects thrived; a hugely important exception – did the system not collapse under the weight of the various problems faced by new nations and amid the ambitions of authoritarian leaders. Somewhat ironically, Cold War competition did not benefit democracy systematically; the United States was frequently willing to embrace authoritarian systems if they could join the alliances against communism.

The New Wave

Conditions turned more favorable for democracy after the 1950s. Authoritarian leaders were replaced by quickly-successful democracies in Spain, Portugal, Greece; Western Europe, increasingly united, became uniformly democratic for the first time in history. Then in the 1970s democracy began to spread in Latin America. It was encouraged by the United States and Western Europe, it was promoted by the failures and excesses of several authoritarian systems, for example in Argentina. It seemed to be linked to economic success. By the 1990s, when Mexico turned away from its one-party system, virtually all of Latin America was democratic. Several Asian states turned to democracy, including Turkey, South Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, by the 1970s or 1980s. The collapse of European communism in 1989 led to swift adoption of functioning democracies throughout most of east-central Europe, with only a few exceptions. Democracy spread to many though not all of the nations of sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s. A few other gains after 2000 included regime changes in Georgia and Ukraine. Never, obviously, had this political system been so widespread globally.

Caveats

There were still important holdouts. China continued to try to combine a relatively free market and explosive economic growth with authoritarian political controls, repressing dissent. Russia, experimenting with democracy in the 1990s, at least modified the system under Vladimir Putin from 1999 onward, attacking (though not fully banning) competing political parties and extending growing controls over the media. Central Asia and much of the Middle East continued to avoid democracy, though several Middle Eastern countries created some new voting opportunities in local elections. The Arab spring initially seemed to promise new recruits for democracy, but at least in the short run the effort was stillborn. Under the pressure of new economic difficulties, such as the global recession

of 2008, several other democracies experienced limitations on free media and political competition – Turkey, Hungary – though not as yet a full replacement. Some scholars argued that the continued success of the leading democracies plus the logic of contemporary communication systems, which made free exchange of information more difficult to repress entirely, plus the collapse of the leading alternatives to democracy, would lead to further gains. But the jury was out. Explaining why some societies continue to prefer other systems, and what some further challenges to democracy may be going forward, are legitimate targets for comparative analysis.

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Questions

To what extent has democracy in contemporary world history been tied to economic performance?

Why did Europe achieve such a high level of political stability in the postwar period? What was the impact of the Cold War on democracies?

In what ways do Asian democracies differ from Western democracies? How does Japan compare with other Asian democracies?

What ushered in the Latin American democracies in the late 20th century? What problems have these nations faced in sustaining democracies?

What is the most plausible prediction for the near future, and why? Democracies will largely maintain their existing hold. Democracies will retreat. Democracies will expand into additional regions.

Chapter 17: Human Rights

Origins of Human Rights

The basic human rights concept holds that all people, as a condition of their humanity, deserve protection in certain fundamental categories. An early concept, for example, argued that everyone has the right not to be enslaved. Other common rights include freedom of conscience and expression, and protection against arbitrary or excessive punishment. The reference to all people means that rights are protected regardless of race, gender, religion and (though are some constraints here for children) age. Some of the components of the human rights agenda go well back in history, for example to elements in some of the major religions. But a coherent definition of human rights (though not yet so labeled), and some movements on their behalf, date to the Western Enlightenment of the 18th century. Efforts to define and support human rights moved ahead sporadically in the 19th century – as in the widening antislavery effort.

The Interwar Decades

Human rights discussions continued after World War I. Several new political constitutions spelled out human rights. The Soviet Union adopted key human rights in principle, but also added others, for example the right to education. And there were other pressures to add to the rights list; feminist groups, for example, pressed for international recognition of women's rights (including the importance of women's consent to marriage). The League of Nations, set up by the Versailles treaty, supported human rights discussions without however advancing firm commitments. Various League agencies were also involved; for example, the new International Labor Office began a long campaign to ban child labor, as part of a definition of children's rights. Actual treatment of human rights clearly deteriorated however, as in the brutal attacks on Jews and others in Nazi Germany, the use of political police in many totalitarian countries.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The interwar contrast between rights advocacy and the actual record spurred new efforts after World War II, with support from leaders such as Franklin Roosevelt. The formation of the United Nations included references to human rights, but they remained vague as the three leading power worried that a firm definition would bring them under scrutiny: the Soviet Union, for political prisoners; Britain, for imperialist policies; the United States, for racial policies. Momentum continued, however, and in 1948, thanks to work by an international body of legal scholars, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was issued, and it was soon signed by most, though not all, of the world's nations. Many new political constitutions now included human rights provisions (India, Japan, etc.), and the United Nations itself set up a human rights division.

INGOs

An important further step began in 1961, with the formation of Amnesty International. This group, an International NonGovernmental Organization, based in London, quickly formed an international membership and worked to call global attention to human rights abuses in various countries (including the West, most notably in Northern Ireland). By this point there were perhaps 2000 INGOs in existence, and this number would double over the next two decades. INGOs grappled with many issues, not just human rights, but rights were at the forefront, not only for Amnesty International but also Human Rights Watch and a host of local groups that were eager to identify abuses for the umbrella groups, which in turn would mobilize petitions, email campaigns and diplomatic representations. INGOs were deeply involved in successful efforts to protect political prisoners, for example in Central America in the 1980s, and in some cases to replace offending regimes. International efforts, including economic boycott, combined with strong local resistance to bring down the apartheid system in South Africa in the 1990s. More quietly, human rights declarations brought recognition of fuller women's rights to property, as they were incorporated into many African constitutions.

Limitations and Objections

Human rights campaigns posed an obvious challenge to authoritarian governments. Many sought to ban INGOs outright: this was the pattern in China; increasingly in Russia under Putin; in Egypt after the Arab Spring. Other countries accepted human rights in principle, as a means of gaining international respectability, but often ignored them in practice. There were other problems. Both India and the United States long resisted efforts to craft an international document on children's rights; both countries relied to some extent on child labor (in the United States, on the part of foreign migrant farm workers). A milder document was finally issued in 1989, but even then the United States did not sign; but the nation's Supreme Court did, later on, agree that children should not be subject to

the death penalty for crimes, citing “international principles.” An important movement developed in East Asia, headed by Singapore and China, to argue that human rights declarations were too individualistic and Western, that they should be tailored to regional cultural standards; the East Asian alternative, leaders argued, should stress the rights of communities. Debates over human rights records continued to play a diplomatic role, affecting for example U.S.-China relations.

Impact

Global human rights statements and organizations had real, though inconsistent political impact. They constituted one way that increasing global interactions played a role in larger political patterns during the contemporary period or at least its more recent stages. At points, as with apartheid, the efforts led to real change, despite initial internal resistance; they could modify national independent action. Few nations, by 2000, simply ignored human rights principles, even if they tried to limit impact. It was revealing, in 2012, that when the nation of Burma (Myanmar) sought greater international contact, the leaders promised greater adherence to human rights standards. At the same time, human rights as a component of international politics was limited not only by regional differences and alternatives, but also by the fact that the human rights list itself kept expanding. For the European Union, for example, the death penalty ran contrary to human rights, but many other nations disagreed. By the early 21st century gay rights constituted an increasingly accepted extension of human rights in the West, but this was vigorously resisted in the Middle East, Russia and Africa.

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Questions

Why and in what ways did human rights receive greater attention after World War II?

What national/political interests and cultural differences caused problems for the spread of human rights? How did finding “universal” standards for human rights prove difficult even between culturally similar areas like the U.S. and Europe?

How do children born of war present a difficult situation in terms of children’s rights and human rights across national borders? What measures have international groups and governments employed to protect these children?

In what ways do INGO’s undermine state sovereignty? What pressures cause nations to ratify international rights?

What have the main changes been in the list of widely accepted human rights over the past century? What have been the main causes of change?

Have human rights impacts been sufficiently great to be included as part of the basic political history of the contemporary world?

Section IV: Social Change

Social change in the contemporary period was in most ways even more clear-cut than political change. Not only were old patterns increasingly replaced, but the nature of the new patterns was often quite definite. The world was steadily becoming more urban, increasingly dominated by an upper middle class of big businessmen and some allied professionals, increasingly mobile geographically.

Of course there were important regional variations. Some of these mainly involved the date and rate of key developments. Africa remained more rural than the Middle East or Latin America, with China and India (though increasingly urban) a bit in between. Basic trends were the same in all places, just later to develop in Africa. (And projections for Africa, as of 2014, involved huge urban growth soon to come.) Other patterns were more complex. Even before the 20th century it was clear that some regions were recipients, other sources of immigrants, and this distinction continued vividly through the contemporary period. Population trends varied, and this was linked to immigration. Some areas shut down rapid population growth early, others only began the process late in the 20th century, and this led to differences that would reverberate for many decades still.

There were also important question marks. New issues about traditional roles for and ideas about women spread widely, and patriarchal assumptions were challenged. But regional responses varied here as well. Was this simply another difference in timing – with some regions responding earlier than others – or would durable regional distinctions remain?

Several factors combined to cause the basic social changes. New public health measures spread widely, from the late 19th century onward, and while rich societies benefited more than poor ones, some repercussions were quite general, leading to potential population growth. Only in a few war- or disease-torn countries did health conditions deteriorate more than briefly. Revolutions played a role, attacking the previous social class structure and potentially affecting gender standards as well. Decolonization had less sweeping social results – it is worth comparing social conditions in revolutionary and non-revolutionary settings --, but it too could encourage some change. Decolonization in India, quickly moving to the legal abolition of the caste system, actually had sweeping social implications at least in principle, and gradually in fact. More generally, expanding international trade and expanding manufacturing, including increasing participation in industrialization, constituted a basic source of social change. Globalization had a role: international agencies spread knowledge of widely-accepted standards, for example concerning women's rights, which could promote both change and resistance.

Social change, finally, had varied outcomes. It provided new opportunities for many groups, for example many women despite variations and debates. Immigrants might gain new opportunities as well, but they also might be miserably treated and exploited. Population and urban growth played a clear role in growing environmental and pollution problems. The rapidity and the extent of change inevitably promoted some sense of disorientation, a source of real confusion as well as some resistance.

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Turbulent Passage: A Global History of the Twentieth Century by Michael B. Adas, Peter Stearns, and Stuart B. Schwartz (Pearson 2008). Pages 324-45.

The Twentieth Century: A People's History by Howard Zinn (HarperCollins 2003). Pages 182-300.

The Columbia History of the 20th Century edited by Richard Bulliet (Columbia University Press 2000). Pages 345-380, 528-556.

Section IV: Discussion Questions

Which will be more important in shaping the 21st century at a global level, population ageing or continued population growth?

What gains and losses are involved in the progressive decline of the peasantry in contemporary world history?

What are the characteristics of the middle class on a global level, or do regional differences prevent a useful general definition?

Why have gender issues proved more contentious than other aspects of contemporary global social change?

Chapter 18: Population Explosion and Immigration

Massive Population Growth

World populations expanded between 1900 and 2000, from about 2.5 billion to over 6 billion, and were still growing rapidly in the 21st century. By 1970 there were more adults alive than had lived, previously, in the whole of world history. The surge reflected better public health measures above all, that began to reduce infant mortality. Life expectancy went up in almost all regions, thanks to less infant death but also some medical improvements for adults plus, often, better overall living standards. The result was a double whammy: more people surviving to and through adulthood, which increased population totals in and of itself, and then more people available to have children of their own. This second factor caused populations still to grow rapidly for several decades, even after birth rates per person began to drop. Food supplies on the whole kept up, though there were constant worries about famine and, in a few desperate cases into the 21st century (particularly on the fringes of the Sahara in Africa) outright famine, as well as wider-spread malnutrition, did occur. Better transportation, that facilitated food movement, and improvements in seed strains and other agricultural basics accounted for the growth on the supply side.

Results

Growth at this revolutionary and unprecedented level had many impacts. It increased poverty for many, at least for a time; more people were not matched by more jobs. In many countries and at many points in time, unemployment or underemployment of the youth sector caused particular concern, as population growth expanded this population. Stress on the environment was obvious: population growth created more human pollution, more resource demand. Population pressure was a key cause of the diminution of forested areas, in countries like Indonesia and Brazil: both rural and urban demand for land escalated steadily. The same population growth of course allowed many societies quickly to compensate for population loss, in war and revolution. The psychological impact of such loss might be severe, but numbers were often made up quite quickly.

Immigration

Population growth was not evenly allocated. Western Europe and the United States were already slowing their growth rates by the early 20th century, making the *demographic transition* to low infant death levels but also low birth rates. Yet, with exceptions such as the Depression or war, their economies and labor needs continued to expand. Population growth was highest in societies yet to convert to substantial industrialization, making them obvious sources of out-migration. And of course transportation improvements facilitated the movement of people over longer distances. Hints of change came between the wars, for example as a flow of North Africans began to move into France. But the real surge began in the postwar prosperity of the 1950s. The United States, despite some initially restrictive policies, received its largest immigrant numbers ever, while parts of Latin America, plus Canada and Australia were important targets. Western Europe became a major immigrant-receiver for the first time. The United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia began depending on immigrant construction workers. Sources included the Caribbean, Turkey, India and Pakistan, the Philippines, various parts of Africa and Central Asia. Never before had immigration mixed so many different peoples. Impacts were felt back home as well: many immigrants not only sent money to relatives, but also returned on visits, which could have interesting mutual cultural impacts. Recipient societies faced new ethnic tensions – including significant urban riots periodically in places like France and Britain. They also varied in their degrees of welcome: Germany called immigrants “guest workers” but made citizenship difficult to achieve and concentrated many immigrants in urban ghettos. The Emirates did not allow citizenship at all, and expelled immigrants quickly if they lost their jobs. Japan, despite labor shortages, limited flow. Tensions over immigration surfaced widely, which is one reason policy responses varied so greatly. At the same time, high immigration rates not only filled labor needs but provided spurs to new entrepreneurial innovation, particularly in relatively tolerant settings like the United States.

Cutting Back

Many societies, besides the West, began to reduce population growth during the contemporary period. While the Soviet government sought to encourage growth, ordinary Russians, facing the need to find housing and support children during schooling, began to cut back their birth rates before World War II. And later, Russian population would actually drop, as birth rates remained low. Japan ushered in its demographic transition in the 1950s, with South Korea close behind, again cutting infant mortality but also birth rates ultimately to levels below population replacement. China introduced its famous one-child policies after 1978. By the early 21st century the total numbers of Chinese children actually began to drop. Latin America and India also saw reductions, even though populations

continued to grow for a time; many parts of the Middle East, including Iran, saw severe birth rate cuts by the early 21st century. Many families, in other words, began to compensate for earlier growth by unprecedented new limits on average family size; efforts often correlated with educational access for women. The result was massive change in age structures, with older segments gaining ground as the youth group shrank. The challenge of supporting a growing elderly population spread increasingly in the West, the Pacific Rim and China. While part of the world was still dealing with basic growth, by the early 21st century, other regions were beginning to take on new challenges, particularly in terms of ageing and retirement.

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Questions

How has food production changed in response to population increase? What was the impact on social structure in the developing world?

What impact has the one-child policy had on economic development in China? What cultural factors have impacted it?

Where did Britain's immigrants come from following World War II? How did their arrival impact politics?

What global and domestic factors precipitated migrant workers going to Saudi Arabia? What tensions did this cause within Saudi Arabia and the region?

Why have some regions been so much slower than others to make the turn to the "demographic transition"?

What is new about migration patterns in the past century? In what ways do they reflect a larger process of globalization?

Chapter 19: The Urban Surge and the Countryside

Urbanization

Population growth helped account for rapidly growing levels of urbanization in virtually every part of the inhabited world. In many societies – for example, many parts of Latin America and the Middle East – surging populations simply could not find support in the countryside; there was not enough land to go around. But modern cities allowed a foothold, though often in dire poverty. In many places, new patterns of slums emerged, shantytowns springing up on the city perimeter, with wealthier populations and core commerce dominating the inner space. Over a billion people were urban slum dwellers, worldwide, by the year 2000. But population growth, and resultant urban poverty, were not the only factors in global urbanization. Many societies began to expand their manufacturing base, created greater economic concentrations in the cities. This was for example the key factor in the creation of more gigantic cities in China, which had long preserved a substantial rural population. Overall, urbanization led to an unprecedented urban majority in the world as a whole, by the early 21st century. The results had implications for politics – more potential for effective protest – and culture, as well as social relationships.

Megacities

A key product of urbanization in contemporary history was the megacity, an agglomeration with over 10 million people, another phenomenon unprecedented in previous world history. By 2013 there were 24 megacities in the world. China had the largest number, but India, parts of Latin America, and other parts of Asia registered strongly as well. In the West, only New York and London made the cut. Lagos, Nigeria, was the first African city to gain this status. Tokyo, with 35 million people, was the largest megacity of all. Megacities prompted a variety of concerns. Some seemed out of the control, with high crime rates and other signs of disruption. But Tokyo, Seoul, and other East Asian examples showed that megacities could in fact be quite orderly. Protest was another concern, particularly when megacities generated slums and high youth unemployment; the protests in Cairo, Egypt, during the 2012 Arab spring might be portent of megacity disorder elsewhere. Again, however, megacities did not automatically generate this kind of unrest, as economic conditions and living standards varied greatly. Transportation was a more legitimate universal concern. Megacities struggled to move people, and in many cases the expansion of automobile traffic led to massive traffic jams and various efforts to restrict car use. Alienation and loneliness, amid the forest of high rise apartment units, were other themes widely explored in assessing megacities.

Rural Populations

Urbanization inevitably affected the countryside. The flow to the cities inexorably drained many villages of young people. In China, many young adults headed to cities to find work, sometimes leaving children back home with grandparents, visiting only during annual holidays. In Africa, urbanization often removed not only the young, but the male, as disproportionate numbers of women stayed back and tended farms. Gaps in living standards between countryside and city often expanded. Urban China, clustered along the Pacific coast, thus contrasted increasingly with the more rural interior. While agriculture remained vitally important, and generated some important changes as in levels of food production, attention increasingly shifted to cities and to manufacturing. The same shift also affected popular protest. Peasant risings had been a classic, if sporadic, source of protest historically, and this pattern continued in great 20th-century revolutions such as Mexico, Russia and China. But major rural risings receded by the later 20th century (though there were still specific clashes over land availability, in parts of Mexico for example). In some cases, as in Egypt's Arab spring, rural populations were clearly more conservative, politically and religiously, than their urban counterparts. Rural adjustments of various sorts continued.

Social Structure and Social Elites

Urbanization was part of a larger shift in the composition of the world's upper classes. Just as peasant roles and relative numbers diminished, so the hold of the traditional landed elite decreased. In 1900, a landed aristocracy retained pride of place in many societies, but by 2000 their social position had eroded almost everywhere. Revolutions in China and Russia directly undermined the historic aristocracy, while Mexico's revolution, less sweeping, did lead to partial land reform. Where revolution was not involved, ongoing industrialization increasingly displaced most aristocrats, creating instead a dominant upper class of top business figures, with some key allies in the ranks of political and professional leadership. This global upper middle class (elements of which emerged even in communist countries, and certainly in China after 1978) dominated the top ranks of wealth and exercised disproportionate political power. Individual members of an old aristocracy might participate in this new upper class, but overall hereditary birth and status were increasingly irrelevant, replaced by family connections and education

levels. This reconstitution of elites was a fundamental change in its own right, part of the larger process of replacing social forms characteristic of agricultural societies with industrial substitutes.

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Questions

How does urban poverty differ from rural poverty? What factors have caused developing countries to have a higher incidence of urban slums?

What was the relationship between colonialism and urban development?

How has the competition for land impacted tensions between social classes in Brazil? How has urbanization led to the formation of new social categories and what tensions with traditional groups are impacting Brazil?

How has urbanization been influenced by political and cultural change in China? What factors have hindered urbanization in the late 20th century?

What is new about the emergence of megacities, compared to earlier patterns of urbanization?

What happens to rural populations as cities seize center stage? Does a new urban-rural split suggest ongoing social tensions?

Chapter 20: The End of Patriarchy?

The Question

Conditions for women changed in most societies of the world during the past century, in many cases fundamentally. Voting rights form a key example, both substantively and symbolically. In 1900 women could vote in very few places: New Zealand, a few American states, parts of Scandinavia. Voting rights expanded greatly after World War I, thanks to feminist agitation but also communist commitments and other factors. Thus by the late 1920s Britain, Germany, the United States, the Soviet Union, Turkey, and several Latin American countries had joined in. Another expansion occurred after World War II, including most of the rest of Europe (Switzerland would oddly hold out for a few more decades), India, and indeed virtually all of the new nations created through decolonization. Yet the idea of women voting ran fundamentally counter to the traditions of patriarchy, the characteristic gender system of agricultural societies. Did this suggest that patriarchal structures were beginning to collapse more generally? Was this a generalizable social change, across regional boundaries? The questions were legitimate, given the scope of change, but the answers were still debated.

Other Signs of Change

Along with the spread of voting rights, other legal rights were established in many countries. Many independent African countries, for example, offered women clearer opportunities to own property, though the subject was still debated. Educational opportunities expanded. In the Middle East and Africa, males were still more likely than females to receive basic education, but the gap narrowed steadily. In many countries, as diverse as the United States and Iran, women formed the majority of university student populations by the early 21st century. Not only the vote, but political participation more generally expanded for women, though there were important regional variations. Many women leaders emerged in Scandinavia, Latin America and scattered other instances. Women formed significant portions of the ranks of legislators, again in Latin America, parts of Europe and elsewhere. Several countries – India, France – ultimately mandated that a certain percentage of elected officials had to be female, to press change more directly. Finally, where living standards advanced, many women gained new opportunities as consumers, where opportunities or pressures for innovation clearly expanded.

Causes of Change

Several factors pushed for some fundamental changes in women's roles and standards. The decline of the birth rate was a key element, either resulting from other shifts – birth rates reductions were related to new educational experiences for women, or causing other adjustments as women sought compensatory roles. Various protest groups pushed for change. From the early 20th century onward feminist organizations in Western Europe and North America pressed for various new rights, attacking patriarchal structures and ideas. Many of these groups also reached out to other countries, and while large feminist movements did not develop everywhere, individual women's right leaders cropped up in many countries, such as Japan, Mexico, and Iran. Communist movements saw key women's rights as an important element in their goals, and communist victories invariably brought voting rights, new educational levels, and further economic participation. After World War II, the United Nations played a key role in spreading the idea of women's rights. Gender equality was a key part of all the major human rights declarations, including the 1948 Universal Charter, and from the 1960s onward the United Nations began to sponsor recurrent "Years of the Woman" campaigns, with huge meetings in places like Mexico and Kenya; many local rights movements resulted directly. Rights efforts included attempts to ban arranged marriages and marriages of girls before a certain age. Broader processes of imitation could develop as well. Kemal Ataturk saw gender change as a fundamental part of the revolution from above he sought in Turkey, requiring changes in women's dress, education and to an extent work roles from the 1920s onward.

Limitations

The idea of a systematic revision of patriarchy faces important complications, which are also part of the contemporary world history story. First, nowhere was full equality achieved, though Scandinavian countries came close. In many countries where women did gain new economic roles, as in the United States and Western Europe, pay lagged behind men – though gaps did narrow by the 21st century. Communist victories brought real change, but men formed the bulk of the leadership ranks and many women continued to face the challenge of combining fulltime work with primary family responsibilities. Economic opportunities varied. Women began to form a growing part of the labor force in the West from the 1950s onward, a truly historic change; but labor force participation in Japan expanded more slowly. Regional variations loomed large in other respects. Saudi Arabia, notoriously, did not allow

women to drive, and several Middle Eastern countries continued to deny the vote to women. African countries eagerly signed on to United Nations rights declarations, but some courts of law invoked older traditions in denying women property rights. Even where political rights clearly existed, participation varied: women's service as political leaders in the United States, for example, lagged noticeably behind Latin America.

Resistance

In some cases, outright resistance or counterattack resulted from the pressures for change. Violence against women was a key issue in many societies, and could be a reaction to real or imagined shifts in gender roles. India and Pakistan, by the 1990s, faced a series of dowry murders, in which women were killed because of allegedly inadequate dowries. Rape remained a key problem. Human rights movements, and groups like Amnesty International, called increasing attention to rape as a fundamental crime, and the issue did receive some new attention in the West, in India and elsewhere. But rapes continued, and in some cases may have increased in response to concerns about changes in gender roles. Fundamentalist religious movements in some cases pushed back directly. The Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan not only insisted on traditional dress for women, but attacked schools for girls.

Conflicted Goals

A final complication to the overall patterns of change involved disagreements among women themselves as to appropriate goals. Western and United Nations feminist standards were not uniformly applauded. Several women intellectuals in Africa, for example, mocked the individualism of the Western approach, urging instead a gender system that would restore family and community protections for women. Indian women's magazines urged a continuation of arranged marriages as preferable to the pressures on women, to remain beautiful and sexy, they saw predominant in the West. In many Middle Eastern countries, quite apart from outright traditionalist resistance, many women debated whether or not to adopt customary dress, including veiling. Some found that veiling provided a sense of identity and a protection from unwanted male advances. The advent of a Muslim government in Turkey, early in the 21st century, and attendant relaxation on bans on traditional dress made it clear that some women were not comfortable with Western options in this category. Debate, and variety of choice, continued in many ways and in many places.

Forecast?

Obviously, gender issues form a fascinating opportunity for intelligent guesses about the future. Will change become more widespread, as birth rate reductions and educational expansion continue? Or would variety and resistance be the most important features going forward. It was, obviously, possible to mount plausible arguments in several directions.

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Questions

How did women's suffrage impact politics in Western Europe? How did women vote differently as a bloc?

What contributions to science and technology empowered women in the early 20th century? How did these successes shape their role in these fields in the 20th century? What impediments did they face?

How did national differences make women's social movements different within Latin America? What distinct features of women's social movements in Latin America differentiated them from other regions?

What role have NGO's played in reducing patriarchy? How? What impact have global concepts like universal human rights had on women's rights in the contemporary world?

Why has access to education often been regarded as the most important opportunity for women in contemporary world history?

What aspects of Western feminism have not proved uniformly popular with women in many other regions?

On balance, assessing changes in gender roles over the past century on a global basis, but also continuing inequalities, is it accurate to point to an end to traditional patriarchy?

Section V: Economic Change

Two kinds of fundamental economic changes took shape during the contemporary period, both with wide global effects. First, economic globalization involved massive intensification of international economic interactions. Not only did trade expand, but new organizational structures built a new set of specializations into the production process that coordinated operations across boundaries to an unprecedented degree. The emergence of the multinational corporation was a key measure of this change. Second, industrialization spread directly to the majority of the world's regions and peoples. It was estimated that 20% of the population was explicitly involved in industrialization in 1900 – though far more in the often challenging indirect effects – but 60% by 2010. The contemporary period, in many ways, has quite simply seen an industrialization of the world, and ultimately this process linked up with globalization.

Both of these developments unfolded gradually, amid considerable complexity. Economic globalization actually receded in some respects between the world wars. Communism, and Stalin's decision to emphasize "socialism in one country", pulled the Soviet Union out of significant participation in the global economy. Japan and Germany, in the 1930s, essentially embarked on programs designed to create separate economic empires, to reduce dependence on global market forces. Only after 1945 did a firmer commitment to develop effective global economic systems emerge, and even then many countries – now including communist China – continued to opt out for several decades.

Gradual also describes the industrialization process. In 1900 most Western countries were industrialized or, like Canada and Australia, deeply involved with industrial economies. Japan and Russia were clearly getting started, and their advances would continue, though in different ways, after World War I. But there were no clear new entrants to the industrialization process from that point until after World War II. Rather, during the interwar period, a number of societies began to make adjustments that would help prepare for industrialization later on – this was the case, for example, with Turkey and Brazil. But even after World War II the only definite addition to the industrial ranks – and it was important, though involving fairly small countries – involved the ascendancy of the Pacific Rim from the 1950s onward. Only in the 1990s did it become obvious – though still debated -- that nations like China, India and Brazil were, however diversely, entering the industrial ranks.

This somewhat complex, unsteady chronology also had massive implications about regional economic inequality around the world. At key points, inequalities increased. Gaps between industrial and raw materials producing countries intensified in the 1920s, as commodity prices dropped; the resulting market weakness helped cause the Depression. Inequalities probably increased again in the 1960s-1980s decades. Advanced industrial economies, now including Japan and the Pacific Rim, became more complex, with more sophisticated technologies and a wider array of products, and other regions often struggled to keep up. Globalization, with multinational companies based in the privileged regions, was often seen as compounding the growing patterns of inequality. Only from the 1990s onward – assuming recent trends persist – did it become clear that regional inequalities were decreasing (though other inequality issues did not yield so readily), and that globalization was probably contributing to this process.

Finally, both globalization and global industrialization, along with population growth, contributed directly to growing environmental problems. Human impact on the environment was not new, but previously it had operated locally or at most at regional levels, as with the air and water pollution that resulted from early industrial cities. In the contemporary period, however, though amid some controversy, environmental change went global, with developments in one region affecting air quality and temperature in other areas and, in some cases, literally around the world. Environmental globalization – the newest form of globalization – produced important efforts at global policy remedies, but to date at least these have continued to fall short – another key part of the contemporary world history story.

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Section V: Discussion Questions

How important were the limited economic changes between 1920 and 1960, in places like Korea, Brazil or Mao's China, and the later, more rapid industrializations?

Why and how did economic globalization accelerate after World War II?

Is it possible to reconcile the environmental policy disputes between developed and developing countries?

Discuss the impact of the Great Depression on subsequent world history.

Trace the fluctuations in levels of regional economic inequality over the past century.

Chapter 21: Economic Globalization

Precursors

We have seen that international trade began to intensify in the later 19th century. Western industrialization generated growing demand for foods and raw materials from other regions, and a need as well to export manufactured goods. Steamships (effective from the 1840s onward), the construction of the great canals, and railroads speeded transportation and increased its volume. Trade balances were highly unequal: Western firms derived disproportionate profits, and sales from most of Asia, Latin America and Africa depended on low-wage labor. But something of a global framework did exist. The framework was challenged after World War I and during the Depression. As noted, several countries pulled back from world trade, at least in part, seeking more independent economic activity. In response to the Depression virtually every major nation raised tariffs and sought – mostly in vain – to protect a national economy at the expense of global economic health. Trade remained important, but it was severely challenged.

The New Agreements

Western leaders sought to learn from these mistakes as World War II drew to a close. Important agreements were reached in 1944, at a Bretton Woods (New Hampshire) conference, to try to stabilize international currencies, promote trade, and provide investment funds initially for postwar recovery. This result was the International Monetary Fund and what became the World Bank. Ongoing discussions about tariff levels later (1995) resulted in the World Trade Organization (WTO). Even before then, the formation of the European Common Market, later the European Union, created an increasingly free trade zone in much of Europe, and various other interregional trade arrangements were achieved. The framework was established, then, for a more systematic global economy. Communist nations held back, but key decisions toward establishing a freer market in China (1978) and Russia (1985) led ultimately to these nations participating more fully in the global economy and ultimately joining the WTO. No major nation, by the 1990s, now sought isolation, and overall levels of world trade increased accordingly.

New Technologies

This framework was enhanced by technologies that further increased the speed and volume of international transportation and communication. Key developments included the onset of jet air travel; satellite communications and ultimately the internet; and the introduction of container shipping and the expansion of ship size.

Multinationals

The formation of multinational corporations, often with huge financial and political power, was not of course brand new. International companies had previously set up sales and production operations in many places and sought to control raw materials in one country and combine them with manufacturing operations in another. The new multinationals did these things but also more. Increasingly they established specialized production facilities in many different places, taking advantage of particular labor costs, environmental regulations, raw materials: thus an automobile might combine parts made in Indonesia and Detroit, with assembly completed in Korea or Mexico. This kind of coordination was novel, and gave multinational corporations great flexibility in moving operations wherever seem most profitable. And the number of multinationals began to expand rapidly. In 1914 there were about 3,000 international companies (not yet with full multinational capacity); the number had doubled by 1970. By 1988, however, there were 18,500, and by 2000, 63,000. Most of the companies were located in the West or the Pacific Rim, with several Chinese firms increasingly joining in.

Impacts

Economic globalization embraced more and more workers and businesspeople in international sales and services. Not only goods were involved. Countries like the United States and Korea began to export entertainment packages – indeed broadly construed these became Japan's leading category by 2000. Financial and insurance services were widely exchanged, with service personnel chiming in from India and the Philippines (for English language) or Morocco (for French). Opportunities, of course, were sometimes matched by threats. Workers in many countries worried about low-wage competition from elsewhere, and there was unquestionably some displacement. Regulating the global economy was not easy, despite the postwar institutions. Leaders of the industrial nations periodically met to provide some additional guidance, but periodically major downturns occurred even so: the recession that began in 2008 was a particularly vivid example, driving down growth rates in many regions. Protests against globalization, of the sort that began to accompany international economic meetings from 1999 onward, targeted environmental damage, regional inequality and low wages, and multinational competition against local fare – the McDonalds

restaurant chain was a frequent symbol. Nevertheless, no major nation proposed any clear alternative to economic globalization, and international public opinion polls suggested some confidence that the system was beneficial overall, along with some anxieties about loss of control.

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Questions

Are multinationals a new phenomenon in the contemporary world? What innovations separate them from earlier international businesses? How do they impact globalization and nations?

What problems have multinationals faced when entering foreign countries? In what ways do they support or undermine domestic governments?

What alternatives to economic globalization emerged in the years following World War I, and what were their main causes?

What has the impact of globalization been on the world economy? What nations have gained the most and why? What has limited economic growth in the 20th century?

Why did the protests against the WTO occur in 1999? How did international banking and other similar economic institutions like the IMF contribute to instability in developing countries? On the other side, how have they helped other nations?

Chapter 22: Industrializations and Regional Inequality

Between the Wars

New breakthroughs to industrialization did not occur in the interwar years. Western economic dominance, including the growing muscle of the United States, made competition difficult; the Depression was a huge constraint, hitting raw materials producers hard. Japanese industrialization, already launched, entered a more mature phase, with particular focus on a heavy industry sector. After the immediate post-revolutionary chaos, industrialization also advanced in the Soviet Union, with government orchestration under the five year plans. Without industrializing outright, several countries ventured some new policy steps that would prove important later on. Particularly interesting were efforts at *import substitution*. Here the goal was a tariff structure that would protect local industry, allowing some further mechanization, and limit reliance on some of the simpler factory imports from the West or Japan: textiles constituted a common focus, but automobiles entered in as well. Iran and Turkey explicitly promoted import substitution as a way to encourage local factories, and the policy was widely adopted in Latin America during the 1930s (and by India after independence). Import substitution ran against the grain of globalization, of course, but it could force feed an industrial process and create somewhat greater independence of action in the world economy. Other developments, unnoted at the time, may have had some preparatory value. For example, the Korean economy, now under Japanese control, was mainly prodded to generate goods useful for Japan, at low prices; but the process actually expanded factory industry and may have inadvertently set the stage for Korean activities later on.

The Pacific Rim and Beyond

Clearly industrial economies began to emerge in several Pacific Rim countries in the 1960s: Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong. These were countries closely aligned with either the United States or Britain, benefiting from considerable economic assistance. They had relatively strong, authoritarian governments that explicitly promoted economic growth. They benefited from markets that expanded as Japan moved toward the second place among industrial powers. They may also (like Japan) have been able to adapt Confucian values to support hard work, education and economic change. These were the first new industrial revolutions that had occurred since the 1890s, and they stood out from the development problems that seemed to dominate many other regions. Yet there were other signs of change. The Brazilian government, for example, began to promote a competitive modern steel industry. China, under chairman Mao, experimented with household manufacturing, trying to take advantage of the nation's huge population; the efforts failed in the short run, but may have provided useful industrial experience. In the Middle East, oil-producing states were able to seize control of their own resources by the 1950s, soon organizing the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries to sustain prices and profits; the result was a huge surge of wealth in some countries, with opportunities for further investment.

Postindustrial Patterns?

As these developments occurred they risked being overshadowed by the continued evolution of the advanced industrial countries, headed by the United States and Japan. More sophisticated technology churned out goods with less labor involvement, and working classes began to shrink in favor of the growth of the service sector. Professional managers, with specialized training, began to take over from the classic factory owner. Knowledge and schooling became more elaborate, as the ranks of the college-educated expanded rapidly. Some observers talked of a new, "postindustrial" economy that would differ dramatically from its purely industrial predecessor. And they speculated that new gaps might be opening up between these advanced, "high tech" leaders and the rest of the world, making it difficult if not impossible to catch up.

The BRICs (and others)

Earlier economic development, plus new policies instituted in the late 20th century, promoted clear breakthroughs toward industrialization and greater prosperity. China opened to more international interaction and a more market-oriented economy after 1978; India and several Latin American countries reduced regulatory complexity in the 1980s and 1990s. Several key countries began to register annual growth rates of 9-10% -- this was true for China, for India after 1992, for Turkey and Mexico. Brazil, Russia, India and China drew particular attention because of their size -- hence the new BRIC category. But industrial growth reached beyond. Some observers worried about durability, noting huge pollution problems and social tensions in China for example. But growth rates persisted, slowing but not ceasing even under the impact of the financial recession of 2008. Many of the new countries combined substantial industrialization with continued cheap labor and resource exports -- the clear pattern in Brazil for example. But change was unmistakable.

Inequalities

Recent developments clearly reduced regional economic inequalities, creating among other things a growing global middle class. A few areas continued to lag: some of the less stable Central American countries, for example, or parts of Africa. But opportunity may have continued to spread. Uganda and several other African nations seemed to be generating greater prosperity, and the same applied to Peru in the long-challenged Andean region. Regional inequalities, even so, remained troubling, and in some cases the competition of the new industrial giants, like China, brought new challenges. On the whole, however, world industrial expansion and economic globalization seemed to be working in tandem by the early 21st century. More troubling, overall, was the clear increase of economic inequality *within* many countries. Urban-rural gaps created greater inequality within China and India. Growing inequality within the United States and many West European countries reflected differences in education access and other issues, sometimes including lower-wage competition from other countries. This pattern may have become less tractable than the older regional issues.

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Questions

Why were there no new industrial revolutions in the interwar period?

In what ways did Japan continue to industrialize following World War II? How did Japanese industrialization differ from Western models of industrialization, and what impact did this have on the greater East Asian region?

What are the main ways that countries long backward in the world economy managed to gain ground at various points during the past century?

What led to Latin American countries adopting import-substitution? How have differences in these countries impacted the success or failure of these models?

How did communist regimes advance industrialization in their countries? What were the main limitations of their approach?

How have the NICs of the Pacific Rim industrialized? What cultural differences have shaped their industrialization? What about global forces?

What regional differences have led to different models for industrialization?

Discuss the evolution of regional economic inequalities during the past century, in the context of world history.

In what ways have inequalities increased within key regions (such as the United States) in recent decades, and what are the main factors involved?

Chapter 23: The Global Environment

The Problem

Environmental change and deterioration constituted a clear concomitant of some of the basic social and economic trends of the contemporary world history period. Environmental change had occurred before, obviously: societies had recurrently over-hunted, some had over-farmed leading to permanent soil damage. Industrialization brought important new levels of air and river pollution around many factory centers. It also encouraged the cultivation of crops – like rubber in Brazil, or cotton in Mozambique – that not only reduced forestation but directly contributed to soil erosion. In the Soviet Union and other parts of east-central Europe, rapid industrialization produced widespread environmental damage in the later 20th century, in raw-materials regions such as central Asia as well as in the factory centers. It was estimated that 20% of the Soviet population lived at the edge of “ecological disaster” by 1990. But it was the new level of global environmental change that began to attract particular attention by the end of the 20th century. High smoke stacks, designed to prevent local pollution, spread pollutants to more distant regions, creating acid rain that damaged forests from Canada to Scandinavia. More massive industrial accidents, like oil spills from giant tankers, generated obvious challenges. Air pollution from factories and automobiles affected global atmosphere and ocean chemistry alike, enhanced by the rapid reduction of rain forests in countries like Brazil to meet demands by developers and timber interests. Measurable global warming was the most general result, rapidly reducing Arctic and Antarctic ice mass, leading to higher water levels and, probably, more dramatic storms. But specific new centers of pollution also opened up, most obviously in Chinese cities where air quality could become dangerously bad.

Responses

Two kinds of response developed from the late 20th century onward. First, individual countries, and particularly some of the advanced centers, devoted considerable resources toward improving water and air quality, often with dramatic results. Fish returned to the Thames River in London. Cases of industrial poisoning in the 1970s in Japan led to more vigorous government action, reducing air pollution and the need to wear special masks in public. These developments were encouraged by the emergence of a clear “green” movement, aiming at greater sustainability and with particular resonance in countries like Germany and the Netherlands. On a global level, international conferences began to address environmental issues from the 1990s onward. Here too, a green movement, including INGOs like Greenpeace, promoted wider awareness. A major gathering in Kyoto, in 1997, produced a protocol in which many industrial countries agreed to reduce hydrocarbon levels, particularly from automobile exhausts. Several followup meetings occurred through the early 21st century.

Constraints

Several limitations clearly bedeviled the efforts at environmental control. National disagreements were one factor. Public opinion in the United States was noticeably more divided and on the whole measurably less concerned about environmental issues than was true in Europe. United States failure to ratify the Kyoto accords was a clear problem in inducing wider compliance. Another set of issues divided industrial from “developing” countries like China. Industrial leaders sought concessions from rising rivals like China, lest the environmental restrictions they bore reduce their competitive standing. Developing nations, on the other hand, thought they should be allowed to focus on growth – as the West had done in its early industrial heyday – without the complication and cost of environmental control. The rifts were not irreducible, particularly as popular pressure in countries like China drove home the local need to do something about air quality. But generating concerted, effective action was at best a work in progress. In the meantime, many environmental leaders began to turn away from attempts simply to roll back pollution levels – though attention here remained – to discussions of what kind of adaptive measures made most sense given environmental changes that had become irremediable. The Dutch, for example, particularly vulnerable to higher sea levels, began to levy a special tax to invest in further protective measures. Overall, the debate continues.

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Questions

In what ways have humans impacted the environment more drastically in the contemporary period? What scientific and technological developments of the contemporary period have contributed to this development?

What economic incentives caused deforestation in Brazil in the latter part of the 20th century? What international pressures limited this process?

How does world-systems theory explain the distribution of environmental damage globally? What drives the inequality?

How have international relations affected China's decisions to pursue more environmentally friendly legislation? What economic benefits are there for going “green”?

Discuss the main international efforts to curb environmental change. Why have they been largely ineffective?

What are the major regional differences in levels of concern about environmental change, and how can they be explained?

Section VI: Cultural Change

Many people changed their belief systems in the contemporary world history period, sometimes in fundamental ways. Three secular cultural “packages” competed for attention, though they all had roots in the 18th or 19th centuries. Nationalism urged fierce loyalty to cultural identity and the nation state, and sometimes clashed with religious priorities in the process, particularly when religion seemed to be constraining national strength and economic development; this was the pattern for example in Ataturk’s Turkey. Marxism was a latter-day missionary faith, preached by party leaders and governments in many places. At its most intense, it sought to replace religious beliefs (which it often attacked directly) by commitments to party and proletariat, combining the need to fight capitalism and bourgeois remnants today with a hope for a utopian tomorrow in which the state would wither away and people would live in approximate equality. A third cluster, more loosely organized, involved some amalgam of beliefs in science, in consumer expression and progress, and often in considerable tolerance. Artistic movements developed alongside these systems, with the West and other key regions generating “modern” art, but communists and some nationalists seeking to put forth clear artistic alternatives.

All three belief systems touched base, or could touch base, with modern science as a source of understanding and research advances. Nationalists might tout science as a means of increasing national strength – this was a key element, for example, in Jomo Kenyatta’s African nationalism when he acknowledged an African need to gain ground in this area. Other nationalists, to be sure, either ignored science or, as with Nazi leaders, attacked it as part of a larger attack on rationalism. Marxism explicitly embraced science – indeed, referred to “scientific” socialism, and of course scientific advance was a key element in culture and education industrial and aspiring-industrial countries.

These three belief systems could both compete and combine. Marxism opposed nationalism in principle as a false loyalty, but often joined in fact, as in the Soviet Union under Stalin. Consumerism and nationalism often combined. Important fluctuations also occurred. Nationalism advanced in many places, but in Europe it reached a distorted frenzy under fascism and then receded somewhat. Marxism advanced in many ways through most of the 20th century, winning converts in many places, but then receded clearly when Soviet collapse suggested fundamental weaknesses in practice. Many people were and are left to scramble for cultural alternatives.

Collectively, the secular cultures clearly made some inroads on traditional religious beliefs. Religious commitments and practices declined markedly in most of Western Europe and in Japan. Religion clearly receded in Soviet Russia, though not as extensively as many imagined at the time. It enjoyed some resurgence after 1989, as a response to the loss of Marxism, but did not bounce back to prerevolutionary levels. But in other key cases – India, much of the Middle East, Latin America, the United States – new cultural interests combined with active religious interests, modifying but not replacing them.

And religions were sources of cultural change and resistance as well. The missionary success of Islam and Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa was a key case in point, but so was Christian advance in Korea. Evangelical Protestantism made new gains in Latin America, and fundamentalist currents in other religions, particularly Islam, combined religious fervor with impressive capacity to take advantage of modern communication opportunities. A variant of Buddhism advanced in China, to the dismay of the political leadership. On the whole, something of a global religious resurgence constituted an important cultural phenomenon from the 1970s onward. These trends combined rather awkwardly with science in many cases.

The result, obviously, is a particularly complex pattern, where cultural change did not point in any single direction and cultural diversity and clash created new tensions in the world at large, in many key regions, and even within particular individuals who were trying to sort through the various attractive but incompatible options.

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The Columbia History of the 20th Century edited by Richard Bulliet (Columbia University Press 2000). Pages 81-101, 172-228, 403-507.

Section VI: Discussion Questions

Why were the modern secular belief systems not more successful in displacing traditional religions, during the contemporary world history period?

What were the main reactions to the decline of Marxism as a belief system option?

Discuss the strengths and limitations of science in contemporary world cultures.

Discuss the impact and limitations of “modern” art forms in contemporary world history.

Chapter 24: Marxism and Nationalism

Marxism

Marxism had made important gains before 1900, particularly among elements of the European working classes, though it also drew some prominent professional people and intellectuals. As a cultural system Marxism emphasized the importance of class struggle and the inevitable victory of the proletariat over the capitalist bourgeoisie. Intense effort was necessary to prepare for revolution and then to purge society of bourgeois remnants. Solidarity with the working class should provide the core identity. Current struggle would ultimately yield a society in which classes were abolished and equality – each producing what he could, taking what he needed – did away with the need for any state. The communist cultural vision continued to be attractive for many decades, adding converts in China, Vietnam, many countries in Latin America as well as various parts of Europe. As it matured under Soviet control, Marxism also added further rituals – opportunities to celebrate proletarian solidarity as alternatives to religious holidays – and also promoted Socialist Realism as an artistic movement opposed to the decadence of Western modern art. Marxism did not make significant inroads in the Middle East, where its attacks on religion seemed unacceptable, or in the United States.

Marxism and Science

Marxism accepted the importance of science and a scientific outlook, certainly seeing science as a source of technological advance. Scientific medicine was also an integral part of the Marxist worldview, though Chinese Marxist leaders modified this with some interest as well in more traditional Chinese medical practice. Marxist promotion of science faced some limitations, however. Actual communist states, as in the Soviet Union, gave scientists a great deal of prestige but also watched them closely, for there could be no excuse for political deviance in the name of freedom of inquiry. Certain scientific conclusions were also unacceptable, particularly undue emphasis on the randomness of biological evolution; Marxism seemed to call for more predictable progress.

Nationalism

Nationalism did not offer the embracing worldview of the Marxists, which is why in practice it so often combined with religion or consumerism, or even modified versions of Marxism. Some nationalist advocates, however, sought to make it a more encompassing loyalty. Fascist and Nazi theorists posited that the state, as the embodiment of the nation, should command absolute loyalty, seeing in this a vital alternative to liberal individualism and its constraint on decisive policy. Violence was a legitimate expression of the state as well, and fascist nationalism extolled action for its own sake, as opposed to rationalism or intellectualism. Fascist excess and defeat largely discredited this cultural option by 1945, though it would crop up in various neo-fascist movements in various parts of the world. Elsewhere and more generally, nationalism urged a strong but less belligerent loyalty to the state and the national culture. It created standard rhetorical assumptions for many political leaders, in established states as well as anticolonial nationalist movements. It was widely inculcated through the –national – school systems. Nationalism and religion could intertwine, but some tensions could complicate the relationship. Indian nationalists for example debated whether Hinduism was the national expression – in which case, what about religious minorities most obviously Indian Muslims – or whether nationalism must espouse a wider tolerance and rise above religious divisions. Nationalists could also grow impatient with aspects of religion that seemed to hold the nation back and, in contrast to the fascists, they typically embraced the importance of science as crucial to national strength.

Assessing Nationalism

Because it was rarely a full cultural statement and so often combined with other beliefs, it is not easy to assess the role of nationalism in contemporary cultural change. It could prove inadequate, particularly in nations that themselves were artificial creations: thus, to take an obvious example, while Iraqi nationalism existed, after the nation was created by negotiations among European colonialists, it could not override loyalties to particular religious or ethnic groups. It could seem too narrow. After the dangers of nationalist excess became inescapable in Europe, following World War II, concerted effort went into constructing a more European identity, not eliminating but downplaying the nationalist option. But nationalism continued to run deep, at least in many places. Japanese nationalists helped limit their country's willingness to apologize for atrocities committed in World War II. Dutch nationalist leaders urged the importance of reemphasizing the nation's history and culture in response to a growing immigrant Muslim minority. American nationalists worried that too much educational space was being given to world history, and in 1994 the United States Senate voted disapproval of a world history curriculum framework because it lacked proper appreciation for national and Western values – by a vote of 99-1. As Marxism faltered in

Russia, after 1989, strong nationalist feelings clearly helped provide alternative identity, particularly under the leadership of Vladimir Putin. For many people and many places, the growing array of global sports competitions – particularly, World Cup football and the Olympics, provided new spurs to the expression of national loyalty as part of personal cultural and emotional identity. There is no way not to give nationalism, though amid important regional variations, a key role in the evolution of contemporary cultures.

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Questions

What limited the spread of Marxism after World War II? What role did the Soviet Union have in its spread and decline?

What was the relationship between Marxism and science during the Cold War?

What are the major types of nationalism? Why are some types more conducive to conflict than others?

What were the main cultural factors operating in southeast Asia after World War II, and how did they interact?

What were the principal reasons for the appeal of Marxism during the 20th century? What was the cultural impact of Marxism's decline by the 1990s?

How have nationalist leaders sought to balance tensions between cultural traditionalism and cultural change, in key world regions during the past century?

Chapter 25: Science and Consumerism

Basics

Science and consumerism were not simply cultural factors of course, but both played a great role in shaping contemporary cultures, and both had wide ramifications. They involved different values, to be sure, but both were primarily secular in focus and they could combine toward creating a belief in progress, a sense that life in this world was becoming, or should become, better. Science seemed both to unlock new secrets of nature and paint a broadly rational picture of the world around us, while also contributing to new technologies and medical treatments. Consumerism was more inchoate, but helped build a commitment to measuring one's life and one's society by the availability and excitement of new things. Both forces, finally, had global qualities. Clearly, during the 20th century, a world scientific community emerged, with researchers collaborating and learning across national lines. Global consumer tastes also emerged, particularly but not exclusively for youth.

Science

Several developments advanced the cultural role of science. First were basic new discoveries. The contemporary period was dotted with key advances in areas such as quantum physics, genetics, and biochemistry. Whole new fields, like neuroscience, emerged. Science continued to generate new knowledge. Second, somewhat ironically, science became somewhat more removed from full popular comprehension. Newer theories, like Einstein on relativity, were hard to grasp, creating new gaps between experts and ordinary people. Scientific labor, furthermore, was increasingly concentrated in large groups operating from sophisticated and expensive laboratories, another substantial change. At the same time, in the minds of many elements of the public, governments, and often scientists themselves, science became more directly connected to technology and medicine than ever before, though there were precedents in the 19th century. New drugs, new software programs, new machines, and new weapons all were directly linked to the scientific enterprise. As a result (though again there were some precedents here) when a "modern" person had a health problem, she or he increasingly turned to a scientifically trained individual. And finally, commitments to science spread geographically. Japan had already modified its Confucian heritage in the late 19th century to include the importance of science and new discovery, and this shift spread to other East Asian countries through the 20th century, as the region joined the West and Russia in scientific leadership. But strong science education emerged in parts of the Middle East, sometimes fueled by oil profits; promotion of science was a key goal of Atatürk in Turkey.

Consumerism

Consumerism, like science, was hardly new, but it unquestionably became more extensive and more widespread in the contemporary world history period. Consumerism involved a delight in buying things – things that were not necessary to subsistence – and also consuming professional entertainment as a key element in leisure. New technologies were involved: consumerism benefited greatly from the radio, movies and television, and later computerized gaming (in which Japan developed leadership). New organizations spurred consumer interests. Department stores had been spreading beyond the West by the 1890s, but they became even more ubiquitous and then were joined by malls and online shopping. Advertising became a major business form almost everywhere. Multinationals played a direct role. McDonald's restaurants began their rapid global expansion in the 1970s. Disney set up parks in several countries, while also luring tourists to its North American sites. The global element loomed large. Popular Western TV or movie stars became worldwide figures; the same applied to Japanese and Korean popular musicians. Symbols like Barbie dolls or Hello Kitty spread readily across national lines. Consumer-linked jingles, like Happy Birthday (introduced in the United States in the 1930s), were translated into most major languages. The popularity of consumerism helped undercut European communism, and after 1991 provided a great source of popular interest among so-called "new Russians" and others.

Resistance

Science and consumerism, in shaping more secular cultures, obviously sparked resistance. Many people worried about foreign influences and loss of identity. Strict Muslims, and many Christians, had hesitations about aspects of science, for example the theory of evolution. Others worried when science might apply to them: disease outbreaks in Africa revealed widespread suspicion of doctors. And of course the sheer expense of modern science created regional differentials as well. Consumerism was often attacked as materialistic and frivolous. Nazis blasted consumerism for its foreign tastes and distraction from national purpose. Communist leaders found consumerism a challenge, for example in Russia. They did not want to ignore consumer gains, but they were suspicious and of

course concerned about the allocation of scarce resources. Soviet department stores, as one result, offered relatively bleak experiences. Consumerism also came under fire for its frequent association with more blatant sexuality, a link that obviously encouraged attacks as in Iran's 1979 revolution. Other cultural traditions might inhibit consumerism, for example the strong penchant for family savings that loomed large in East Asia.

Compromise and Diversity

Inevitably, given the power of science and consumerism but also some of the resistances, compromises (syncretism) and regional diversities emerged. Many Taiwanese began to turn to modern medicine, but combined this with recourse to traditional rituals and remedies. Pious Muslims interestingly began to buy greeting cards during the fast of Ramadan, while sometimes celebrating evening feasts in fast food restaurants that adapted for the month. Christmas became a popular buying holiday in many countries which had no wide interest in converting to Christianity. All of this meant, further, that different regions developed their own versions of consumerism and their own adoptions of science; there was no single model.

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Questions

What role did science play in the construction of India? How did “native” scientific institutions interact with global efforts to export scientific models and institutions from the U.S.?

What characteristics separated “big science” in the middle of the 20th century from prior periods? What role did the West have in this development and how did it treat indigenous forms of scientific knowledge?

What is scientific nationalism? How did Mao utilize this in the creation of modern China? How did consumer culture work in the construction of a unique Hong Kong identity on the other side?

What role did gender play in 20th century American consumer culture? In what ways is consumption a form of political participation and identity more broadly?

Is it possible to define a global consumer culture by the later 20th century? What are some of the major regional variants?

What are some key tensions between popular culture and science over the past century? Did they diminish by the later part of the 20th century?

Chapter 26: Religion

Appeals

If many cultures became more secular during the contemporary period, in a few cases aggressively so, religions obviously retained great appeal. They responded to the limitations and arguable shallowness of consumer materialism. For many, they answered questions that science could not. They also appealed to many people who did not have full access to consumerism or science, because of location or economic constraints. In many cases they clearly provided a sense of identity amid so many foreign or global influences. Many religious leaders also became adept at combining traditional methods of outreach with some of the newer technologies, particularly by the later 20th century. Radio and television evangelists could and did spread their message widely. Many Islamic leaders extensively utilized social media to get their message across.

Missionary Activities

Missionary outreach, particularly from Islam and Christianity, maintained great momentum. Christian and Muslim missionaries in Africa had great impact, often effecting conversions in patterns similar to those in earlier periods. The missionaries could invoke their connection to a more global religion, as opposed to the regional status of polytheism. Islam could combine this with careful distinctions from Western influence. Christian missionaries, particularly until after decolonization, could point to job and education opportunities, along with the spiritual gains. The result was the really massive switch of Africans from majority polytheism, in 1900, to a majority that was either Muslim or Christian – a huge change in beliefs and rituals, though often with some older practices persisting as well. Africa, along with Latin America, became one of the great religious regions. Missionary efforts from Evangelical Christians, often based in the United States, constituted another important phenomenon. After 1989, Evangelicals worked hard in Russia and east-central Europe, though they encountered resistance from Orthodox clergy and often from the state. Evangelical efforts in parts of the Middle East drew similar concern from Islamic leaders – for example in Turkey – who professed tolerance for existing Christian groups but not for new levels of missionary zeal. Evangelicals had particular success in parts of Latin America, such as Brazil, where they capitalized on discontent with Catholicism and its association with the status quo but also with some of the dislocations that accompanied the urbanization of the poor.

Other Innovations

Other developments showed the continued attraction of religion, and its power to change. The Catholic Church, from the 1960s onward, recurrently worked to update its message. It began to deliver masses in local languages, rather than Latin. Several popes (though not all) worked to support protections for the poor and oppressed. The Church became active in opposing many wars and embracing a greater degree of tolerance for other religions. Specific Catholic movements, for example in Latin America, went even further in linkages with the causes of the urban poor, creating a movement under the heading “liberation theology” (the term was first introduced by a Peruvian leader in 1971). In China from the 1990s, an intriguing spinoff from Buddhism, the Falun Gong movement, won wide support with a message of spiritual devotion, though it also drew extensive attacks from the state. Falun Gong leaders urged meditation and moral rectitude as paths to better physical health but also ultimate spiritual enlightenment. In Russia Orthodox leaders, long repressed under communism, showed new energy after 1990, in working in collaboration with leading politicians and expanding educational outreach.

Fundamentalism

Also in the later 20th century, fundamentalist religious currents developed in many religions, urging a return to stricter traditional practices and levels of devotion and (often) seeking political alliances to enforce their views. In India Hindu fundamentalism surged in the 1990s, and fundamentalist politicians twice captured the presidency. Islamic fundamentalists, gaining followers in many parts of the Middle East but also Afghanistan and Pakistan, insisted on the primacy of the faith and Islamic law, opposing more secular governments (many of which worked to repress their movements) as well as consumerism and women’s rights. Some, of course, also returned to more aggressive definitions of jihad.

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Questions

What strategies did Christian missionaries use to attempt conversion in Africa? What factors limited conversion and how did Africans selectively adopt aspects of Christianity?

Why did Islam and Christianity spread throughout sub-Saharan Africa so quickly? What determined which religion was adopted by different African groups?

How did religion contribute to the formation of democracies in Latin America and how did the role and strategy of the Catholic Church change in the second half of the 20th century?

How did the fall of the Soviet Union impact missionaries in Eastern Europe? In what way did syncretic religious innovations develop?

Why did the United States remain more religious than most industrial societies?

What were the main causes of the rise of religious fundamentalism?

Why has the Chinese government opposed the Falun Gong movement so vigorously?

Chapter 27: Cultural Conflict

A Clash of Civilizations?

In 1992 a Harvard political scientist, Samuel Huntington, opened a public discussion of what he called the “clash of civilizations” (revamping an argument that others had used previously). Huntington saw a post-Cold War world dominated by mutually hostile cultures, with little chance for compromise or negotiation. His chief protagonists were the West and Islam. Russia and the “Orthodox” cultural zone might align with either group; Latin America was probably safely Western; India, predominantly Hindu, could move in either direction; Asia was separate but less engaged in the key cultural tensions. And so on. The concept won wide attention, because obviously the post-Cold War world was far less peaceful than had been hoped, and values clashes between the West and Islam seemed increasingly prominent. At the same time, many commentators objected: they worried that the argument might become a self-fulfilling prophecy – if one assumes mutual hostility, it will be easy to generate it; but above all they contended that it was inaccurate. The counterthrust involved emphasizing significant overlap among the cultural zones, among other things thanks to the more successful impacts of globalization, and the importance of division within as well as among the key regions. After all, so this argument went, both the United States and much of the Middle East were actually trying to figure out how to combine a commitment to religion with successful modernity – were there not mutual bridges in these combinations, and not simply stark divisions?

Splits

There could be no doubt that new and old cultural patterns divided in many ways. Religious groups attacked consumerism and sometimes science. Fundamentalists jostled with co-religionists who had accommodated more liberal and scientific viewpoints. Globalization clashed with attachments to separate cultural identities: international polls suggested that cultural globalization was the aspect of the process that was most feared and disliked, with 72% opposition in some cases. Yet contacts grew ever-closer, which made the various cultural divisions almost impossible to ignore. Divides were expressed also in art. Several regions of the world, heavily secular, increasingly opted for dramatic modern art styles, that like consumerism emphasized innovation and change. Nazism and communism had resisted these styles. On the whole, regions heavily defined by a major religion – most notably, much of the Middle East and India – also stood apart.

Intra or Infra?

A key problem involved the extent to which divisions operated *within* key regions, and not just among them (and this was arguably a key deficiency in the Clash of Civilizations approach). The Islamic Middle East, obviously, hardly presented a united cultural front: it was divided by old disputes, as between Sunni and Shia, and new ones, with seculars versus religious. The United States became marked, from the 1980s onward, by what were called the culture wars, again pitting more religious, conservative, nationalist groups against more scientific, secular, globalist (though both groups, on the whole, embraced consumerism). China presented much interest in science and consumerism, some residual Marxism, but also the strong Falun Gong religious current. Rather than seeing the world divided among hostile culture regions, it might be more fruitful to note the prevalence of internal rifts in all but the most coherent cultures (Japan?), plus some regional cultural boundaries, plus some larger, shared global cultural impulses such as elements of science and consumerism.

Tolerance

The contemporary period presented a complex framework for tolerance. On the one hand, many cultural groups urged and largely practiced considerable tolerance, accepting religious differences, for example, or different degrees of commitment to science. The human rights movement obviously supported and to some extent furthered tolerance, with freedom of conscience high on the list. But tolerance was not a central cultural tradition in some regions – for example, Chinese political traditions had often seen governments try to rein in too much cultural diversity, and in this sense the tensions with Falun Gong were a contemporary version of an old story. And in some places, almost certainly, tolerance was declining in favor of nationalist or religious particularism. Westerners – as in France, which banned Muslim headgear – wondered about how much tolerance to extend to traditional Islam. Hindu nationalists often seemed to move away from that religion’s historic openness to other groups. Several more extreme Islamic groups began to attack other minorities, such as Christians, in ways that, while not unprecedented, went against mainstream Islamic tradition.

Blending

Clearly, the cultural patterns in contemporary world history were more complicated than those in politics (which of

course had its own, sometimes related divisions) or the economy. Trends were less clear cut, differences and clashes more central, innovation less clearly overtaking tradition. Yet, as so often happens when cultural change or contact occurs, there were important examples of successful amalgams as well, as in the various combinations between consumerism and religious identity, or the accomplished scientists who retained religious faith. Many regions and individuals found big and small ways to reconcile some of the different cultural strands. What was not clear was whether a more orderly pattern might develop in future – whether a more unifying force such as globalization might prevail, as seemed to be the case in the economic sphere – or whether cultural fragmentation, the uneasy jostling of older and newer cultural elements, was here to stay.

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Suggested Readings:

Consuming China: Approaches to Cultural Change in Contemporary China. Edited by Kevin Latham, Stuart Thompson, and Jakob Klein (Routledge, 2007).

The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future. By Vali Nasr (W.W. Norton & Company, 2007).

Questions

What role did sectarian conflict play in Iraq and how did religion impact nationalism(s)?

How has nationalism been reshaped to incorporate disparate cultural and religious influences from immigrants?
How have international developments impacted this concept of nationalism?

What differences are there between the U.S., France, and Turkey regarding balancing secularism and religious freedom?

How has Japan blended Neo-Confucianism with modern consumerism?

How is consumer culture being integrated in China and what impact is it having on politics and social structure?

How do cultural divisions in the United States compare to those in the Middle East over the past half century?

How and why have levels of tolerance changed in contemporary world history?

Is the Clash of Civilizations a persuasive description of world history developments over the past quarter century? Is there a good alternative model?

Section VII: War and Peace

The contemporary period in world history must be known for its brutal wars, and this is the final area to explore for basic themes or trends. Military technology became steadily more intimidating, from World War I onward: the addition of air warfare was obviously the most striking single development. The capacity to wage “total” warfare seemed to be a defining feature of the age, at least until the later 20th century. Highly militaristic societies cropped up recurrently, most obviously under fascism but not then alone. A blurring between the military and the civilian, particularly from the 1930s onward, signaled another important change, and often a bloody one.

At the same time the contemporary period saw a flowering of ideas and movements direct toward peace, including the important theme of nonviolence generated initially by Mahatma Gandhi. Peace movements could seem naïve or abortive, as was largely the case between the world wars. But they did have some impact. They helped limit certain kinds of weaponry. In the United Nations they created agencies that, if inconsistently, could directly help in the maintenance or restoration of peace. They could alter the conduct of war itself. And they led some societies to an unusual renunciation of military approaches.

Juxtaposition of undeniably important warfare and military trends, and the less common but arguably equally important view of the contemporary period as part of an active history of peace, leads to another complex assessment. By the early 21st century some analysts argued that collective violence was actually declining in the world as a whole, and that there were reasons to believe this might not be just a temporary phenomenon. Was this plausible? Were new forms of violence replacing the old? The questions could not fully be answered, but they form a final analytical challenge in moving from contemporary world history to anticipation of the future.

Basic Treatments (pick at least one):

Turbulent Passage: A Global History of the Twentieth Century by Michael B. Adas, Peter Stearns, and Stuart B. Schwartz (Pearson 2008). Pages 370-383.

The Twentieth Century: A People's History by Howard Zinn (HarperCollins 2003). Pages 426-475.

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Section VII: Discussion Questions

A French scholar, Raymond Aron, once described the 20th century as the “century of total war.” Does this turn out to be a useful description in assessing the past hundred years as a whole?

What regions of the world have been particularly peaceful during the past century? During the past 50 years? And why?

Why, in the past quarter century, does warfare seem to be moving away from state to state conflict, and more toward non-state actors?

Compare the limitations of the League of Nations with those of the United Nations, in dealing with conflict situations.

Discuss the main changes in military history over the past century.

Chapter 28: Contemporary War

Technology

Persistent changes in military technology created new features in warfare in the contemporary world history period, and extended destructive power. World War I saw the use of tanks and poison gas (later outlawed), along with steadily more deadly artillery. Submarine activity created a new naval front. The war also introduced the military use of airplanes, though it was not until the 1930s (Japan's invasion of China; German and Italian operations in the Spanish Civil War) that this fully came into play. World War II of course involved the use of missiles as well as far more extensive air bombardments, and the dropping of the two atomic bombs on Japan. Later innovations included more powerful nuclear weapons, longer-range and more powerful missiles, and the development of computer-guided weapons including drones. Steadily by the same token older technologies dropped away. Traditional cavalry saw their last gasp early in World War II. Infantry forces shrank in favor of smaller tactical deployments and more use of artillery and air power.

Arms Races

An arms race had helped lead to World War I, and particularly the battleship competition between Britain and Germany. Efforts to curb the race had some impact after the War (see Ch. 29), but a race resumed with the rearmament of Germany, the militarization of Japan, and belated but rapid efforts by the Soviet Union and the Western powers to catch up. The Cold War, of course, featured a fairly steady arms buildup, after only a brief respite in the late 1940s. By this point the leading powers had the capacity to wipe out humanity several times over, and it was not clear that – always barring accident – the nuclear aspect of the race would have any impact save in promoting fear. But there was no question that additional countries felt obligated to boost their own capacity, and the number of nuclear powers grew steadily, embracing (at least) the United States, the Soviet Union (which acquired nuclear weapons in 1949), Britain (1952), China, France, India and Pakistan. Other arms races had regional dimensions. India and Pakistan kept wary tabs on each other. Most Middle Eastern states were heavily armed. After 2010 Chinese military expansion led to new discussion about military growth in Japan.

The Role of Munich

In 1938 the leaders of Britain and France met with Hitler (and Mussolini) in an effort to defuse a German threat to invade Czechoslovakia, ostensibly to protect ethnic Germans there. They agreed to let Hitler take over the western part of the country. The British leader went home proclaiming that he had won “peace in our time.” Hitler quickly proceeded however to take over the rest of Czechoslovakia; Britain and France, where lack of military preparation had helped force the Munich compromise, began to arm more rapidly, along with the Soviet Union, and of course war broke out when Hitler, just a few months after Munich, went on to invade Poland (along with his brief Soviet allies). The Munich failure long stood as a marker for the dangers of lack of preparedness, the need to confront aggressors, and would play a key role particularly in American military policy during the Cold War.

Regional Wars

After World War II actual military outbreaks involved regional rather than global conflicts. Cold War tensions help prompt significant wars in Korea and Vietnam, where the United States felt obliged to oppose what it saw as the advance of communism (strongly influenced by the Munich analogy). The Soviet Union, whose military policy was in many ways more conservative, went to war in Afghanistan, and of course used military force to repress unrest in east-central Europe until 1989. Otherwise, however, the major wars involved other kinds of regional tension, particularly in the Middle East. Israeli-Arab tensions caused several outbreaks; Iraq-Iran fought a bitter war between 1980-1988, reminiscent in many ways of the all-out struggle of World War I, with hundreds of thousands of casualties; India-Pakistan had several skirmishes; border wars occurred in several African regions, often as states sought to take advantage of political disorder in a neighbor, as in various incursions into the Congo.

Civilian Involvement

A key development in many conflicts involved the blurring of lines between military and civilian. This was linked both to some of the new technologies and also to the bitterness of opposing nationalisms, ethnic loyalties, or other beliefs. Change began in the 1930s. Many civilian centers were deliberately attacked in the Spanish Civil War, by the internal combatants and their external allies: the artist Picasso commemorated a German bombing in his painting Guernica. Deliberate and bloody attacks on civilian centers marked Japanese action in China, Nazi strategies against Britain and then allied retaliation against Germany. The blurring would continue in many subsequent conflicts, with

atrocities on many sides. A related issue, visible in World War I but more important later, involved the flood of refugees that each war created.

Genocides

Deliberate attacks designed to destroy whole ethnic groups or other identifiable groups constituted a vicious extension of the tendency to blur civilian-military lines. Genocides typically involved a combination of mass slaughters and extensive rape or maiming of women and children, though in some cases, like the Holocaust against the Jews, total destruction was the clear ultimate goal. Though the term is new, genocides were not an innovation of the contemporary period. They did become increasingly common in all probability. They reflected new technologies that made mass slaughter easier (though some episodes utilized simpler weapons like machetes). They reflected old tensions that flared up in new ways, but also in some cases new mixings of people or the conflicts associated with trying to build and defend new nations that lacked traditional legitimacy; and they often reflected the mad bent toward violence of individual dictators. Defining genocide is a tricky and contested proposition. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire probably involved several genocidal attacks; European imperialists flirted with genocide in trying to put down some African rebellions early in the 20th century. Hitler's Holocaust, which led to the death of 6 million Jews and which involved active collaboration from many parts of Europe; attacks on ethnic minorities in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge in 1975-9; attacks on Hutus in Rwanda in 1996-7 are the leading instances during the 20th century, but there are many other candidates, including some of the episodes in the 1990s dissolution of Yugoslavia.

Humanitarian Regulations

At the other extreme from many of the features of contemporary war – caused by their excesses, in part – efforts to regulate aspects of war constitute more than a footnote. It was in the alter 19th century that the series of Geneva Conventions began, seeking to assure humane treatment to prisoners and wounded in war; it was then also that the Red Cross and related groups began their work, in war and other disasters, to try to bring humanitarian relief. These currents expanded in the 20th century. Many prisoners were assured reasonably decent treatment as a result – this was true, ironically, of many British or American prisoners in World War II Germany, and of German prisoners in turn. On a broader scale, many contemporary wars and other conflicts involved a complex mix of destruction and humanitarian relief efforts, often supported by charitable contributions from many parts of the world. The result added to the complexity of analyzing the role of war in contemporary world history, and linked as well to some of the new efforts for peace.

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The Dead Hand: The Untold Story of the Cold War Arms Race and Its Dangerous Legacy. By David Hoffman (Anchor, 2010)

Questions

What impact did allied bombing have on urban areas of Germany? How did the strategy of attacking civilians impact the military effort during World War II?

Discuss the changes in the boundaries between civilians and the military in warfare over the past century.

What were the results of the Munich agreement at the time, and in subsequent international relations? How has Munich’s historical legacy changed over time?

What are the main causes of genocides in contemporary world history? What factors have complicated international responses to genocide?

What regions have been most prone to war during the past century, and why?

Chapter 29: Innovations in Peace

Context

It is not surprising that a century marked by major wars also sought to generate new approaches to peace. World War I had shattered widespread optimism about peace, that had developed from 1815 onward. The 19th century was filled with peace movements and organizations, and substantial hope that human progress had wiped out the need for major war. The thinking, as it turned out, was naïve, and it largely ignored the recurrent military actions that expanded Western imperialism. But it did set a basis for efforts to prevent a recurrence of war, and of course the actual horrors of World War I added impetus as well.

The Interwar Period

Peace efforts between the wars took two forms, and while they proved abortive, incapable among other things of correcting the deficiencies of the Versailles settlement, they set some interesting precedents. Government leaders interested in peace focused on new arrangements. There was hope that the League of Nations would provide a framework for discussion of disputes, and would extend the opportunity for arbitration that had already emerged before 1914. Indeed, the League did settle some controversies -- 35, to be exact, but it was too weak to deal with big issues, and essentially collapsed amid the aggressions of the 1930s. More promising were the naval conferences which began meeting in 1919, hoping to reduce the kind of arms competition that had contributed to World War I. Britain, Japan and the United States did indeed agree on curtailment, and rivalries in battleship construction actually ended. But of course other kinds of naval activity continued, and growing use of airpower was not yet subject to international discussion. Along with leadership efforts, a host of pacifist movements developed. Pacifist sentiment in the West would be later blamed for encouraging inaction against Nazi aggression, but the range of organizations was impressive. Peace efforts in the Americas led to significant agreements to limit conflict, and the Americas did indeed remain largely free of war. The most impressive contribution to peace thinking came from Gandhi's commitment to nonviolence. Gandhi placed great emphasis on the Buddhist-Hindu principle of *ahimsa*, or non-injury. While Gandhi's efforts focused on India, he knew that his principles could be more widely applied to counter war, and others would pick up on his precedent later as well.

New Structures After 1945

A number of innovations sought to counter the obvious weaknesses in efforts to safeguard peace in the interwar decades, and many of them were steadily extended. The idea of trying leaders for war crimes – applied both to Germany and to Japan – would later be expanded into a new set of international courts (including a new International Criminal Court, in 2002); debate continued about whether this approach helped or hampered peace prospects after conflicts. More important was the structure of the United Nations, which introduced a number of improvements over the League approach, including more regular meetings and greater openness to voices outside the West. The United Nations notoriously failed to prevent some key conflicts, but it did establish peacekeeping operations that resolved a number of bitter disputes or organized buffer zones around combatant states. Between 1988 and 1993 for example, 13 peacekeeping operations were launched, involving 53,000 troops from contributing member states, with major impact in places like the former Yugoslavia or Sierra Leone. Armaments limitation was a third initiative, conducted mainly through great-power negotiations though bolstered by various international peace movements. After considerable disputes, open nuclear testing was outlawed in 1963. A nonproliferation treaty was established in 1968, as many countries (though not all) committed to avoidance of nuclear weaponry; South Africa actually dismantled its arsenal in the 1990s. Soviet-American negotiations led to agreed-upon reduction in weapons levels from 1972 onward. In 1992 the United Nations passed a chemical weapons ban (reprising an effort from the 1920s), which almost all nations quickly signed, and many arsenals were destroyed under the new agreement.

Regional Approaches

In addition to the more global efforts, a number of important regional initiatives emerged. Particularly striking was the demilitarization of Germany and Japan after World War II. Required by the victorious allies, demilitarization marked a huge change for both countries, and in both cases led not only to clear restraint in the subsequent emergence and deployment of defense forces but to a strong current of public opinion that consistently opposed military involvements. Voluntarily, Costa Rica also abolished its army in 1948, and held to the policy thereafter. Other efforts, though less dramatic, clearly centered on peace. The whole effort to build new unity in Europe, revolving particularly on unprecedented collaboration between France and Germany, at least for many decades reversed a long history of recurrent conflict. American nations set up several new organizations to resolve conflict,

sometimes including the United States but in other instances more independently. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, formed in 1963, vowed to promote regional peace and negotiate conflicts, and with the exception of the Vietnam war proved successful; it also committed to keep the region nuclear-free.

Peace Movements

Less formally, a number of important peace movements expanded their operations. The Catholic Church became more firmly committed to peace, in the wake of World War II experience. Buddhist organizations (particularly in Japan) promoted peace activities, as did Quakers and other Protestant groups and some movements within Islam. The 1948 human rights charter included new protections in principle for conscientious objectors to war, another interesting modern current. Peace studies educational programs and research blossomed in many places, with a new Peace University established in Costa Rica in 1980 with some United Nations backing. By 2013 there were over 100 conflict resolution programs in United States universities alone. Many of these groups contributed to regional agreements to promote peace, for example in helping to negotiate anti-genocide agreements in east Africa or new settlements between government and rebels in Sri Lanka. How much all this mattered can be debated, but the range of initiatives, and their global scope, were unprecedented.

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Demilitarization in the Contemporary World. By Peter N. Stearns (University of Illinois Press, 2013).

Questions

What were the causes of pacifist movements in various parts of the world? What impact did they have on policy?

What was the impact of Gandhi's ideas, in India and in the world at large?

Discuss the evolution of Catholic approaches to peace during the past century.

Are women more interested in peace by nature, or are there other reasons for the service of women in peace movements over the past century?

What role have NGOs had in international peace movements in East Asia? Why did these global movements reach East Asia relatively late?

Since World War II, what regions of the world have been particularly peaceful, and why?

Chapter 30: Decline of War?

The Data

By the first decade of the 21st century a number of experts contended that warfare was on the decline, and some saw structural reasons to believe this might be a durable trend. They pointed to a 60% drop in formal armed conflicts between 1990 and 2010. By 2010 only 13% of all nations were experiencing any serious kind of collective violence (war or political violence), down from 30% in 1992. Military expenditures were also plummeting, with some regions coming close to demilitarization. Most southern African states, for example, followed the example of post-Apartheid South Africa in dropping expenditures to under 2%. These low levels had long been the norm in Latin America. Many western Europe states joined the trend, obviously benefiting from the end of the Cold War. Internationally, 7% of total Gross Domestic Product had been devoted to military expenditures in the 1950s; this had dropped to 5% in the 1990s, and to 1.7% in 2012. The change was striking.

The Argument

Several trends seemed to bolster the idea that war levels were changing, and while they can certainly be debated they do touch base with some of the larger themes in contemporary world history. 1. The realization that the key contemporary weapon, the nuclear bomb, cannot be used. Efforts to avoid a nuclear option or accident play into larger programs to keep war within bounds. 2. The existence of the United Nations and other apparatus, plus the unprecedented number of skilled conflict operatives and peace organizations provide real opportunities to avoid or limit war, that had not existed in the past. The U.N. success in settling many conflicts, particularly after Cold War paralysis ended, plays into this argument. 3. Larger economic and consumer trends argue against major war. Mutual economic dependence between the United States and China should, rationally at least, keep military competition within bounds, to take one example. Efforts to use economic sanctions instead of war, to deal with problem situations for example with Iran, are further illustrations. A broader argument – catchily summarized as “no two countries with McDonalds have ever gone to war against each other – sees consumer societies as to pleasurable preoccupied with living standards improvements, that their citizens will never tolerate a commitment to major conflict. 4. A related optimistic argument sees the spread of democracy as a safeguard against war. Wars are often decreed by selfish dictators, but these are (the argument goes) now in decline, and ordinary people will use their votes to protect the peace.

The Flaws

A number of counterpoints can be offered, including the fact that the decline of war is fairly recent and untested. Not all regions and nations fully participate in the trend toward reductions in military expenditures. Many Middle Eastern nations, like Saudi Arabia, expend well over 6% of GDP; the United States (which accounts for 40% of world military spending overall, more than the 10 next nations together) and Russia hover around 4.5%. As against the consumerism argument: some nations like the United States have learned how to conduct significant regional wars, like the invasion of Iraq, without major disruption of consumer pleasures back home, and with minimal national casualties. As against democracy: not all governments are democratic, and public opinions can be inflamed for war even in democracies – there are several recent examples of each possibility in action. Finally and most important, at least for the moment: while formal wars really do seem to have declined, and while this just might constitute a trend, the leading problem in collective violence since 1990 has shifted to non-state actors. Violent bands in failed states in Africa, the contending parties in Syria or Libya or Iraq since 2012 have not, for the most part, been formal governments, but they have conducted war often amid great bloodshed. The activities of formal terrorist groups, though to date never successful, fall into this category as well. Some people are clearly trying to conduct war on a new organizational basis, and this may doom the optimistic predictions. Real change has occurred. But as with other key contemporary historical findings, debate must continue as well

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Questions

What is the basic argument about war among democracies? Is it valid? Are there any empirical or theoretical problems with the assessment?

What major regional differences in military spending have developed since World War II? Since 1989? What accounts for the major differences?

How, and to what extent, did the United States emerge as the “world’s policeman”? Has the role been useful for the world? For the United States?

Why are “non-state actors” gaining importance as sources of conflict, as opposed to conventional states?

What are the main factors emphasized in the arguments that posit declining global violence?

Final Questions for Course

Pick one major region, and discuss the interaction between global and regional trends in describing the history of the past century.

How have changes in the roles of women affected other aspects of world history over the past century?

Compare changes in the nature of war, over the past century, with changes in the promotion of peace.

Using examples from contemporary world history, discuss the issue of cultural change: does it occur more slowly than other forms of change? And if so, why? Are there important examples of rapid cultural change?

Compare the trends that run through the past century overall, with key developments specific to a particular subperiod (like the interwar decades or the Cold War). Which seem more important in organization contemporary world history, the subperiods or the larger trends?

Which is more accurate in conveying contemporary world history: a “short” 20th century, 1914-89, or a “long” century, late 1800s to the early 21st century and counting?

Is the relative decline of the West and the “rise of the rest of the world” the most important single development over the past hundred years?