

Debating the
DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

Classroom Debates

World History, 1750–1995



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The Debate Program

***Debating the Documents* Booklets and Eras**

The aim of each *Debating the Documents* booklet is to teach students to handle conflicting historical evidence the way a detective does when solving a mystery. As with the facts in an unsolved crime, the facts of history are open to various interpretations. History is not a single narrative. It is an ongoing dialogue, one that sometimes generates heated debates. The excitement of history is in this dialogue and the sharp debates that keep it going. The essays herein correspond to the following *Debating the Document* booklets.

The First Global Age

What Was Revolutionary about the Scientific Revolution?

Africa's Slaves: The Transatlantic and East African Slave Trades

"Leviathan": Centralized States in the Early Modern Era

The Age of Revolution and Empire

Industrialism: Why Was England First?

Women and the Enlightenment

Political Revolution: What Was It Good For?

Response to the West: China, India, and Japan

Science and Faith in the 19th Century

Europe's Scramble for Africa: Why Did They Do It?

A Global Community and Its Perils

Science and Technology: The Threat and the Promise

The Totalitarian Temptation

Is Population Growth a Crisis?

Women in the Modern World

Decolonization: Dream and Reality

Globalization: Yesterday and Today

Two Contrasting Essays

In this guide we seek to broaden this approach and use it to help your students assess entire eras in world history. Each lesson contains two essays that interpret an era in two very different ways.

The First Global Age

Essay 1: Why Europe Led in Creating the First Global Age: Luck, Accident, and Imperial Aggression

Essay 2: Why Europe Led in Creating the First Global Age: A Unique Culture of Competitive Freedom

The Age of Revolution and Empire

Essay 1: An Age of Liberty, Enlightenment, and Progress

Essay 2: An Imperial Age of Industrialized Oppression

A Global Community and Its Perils

Essay 1: A Dangerous Age of Tyranny and War

Essay 2: A Time of Hope for Liberty and Tolerance

These essays take strongly opposing stands on the overall impact of the historical period. Each essay refers to primary source documents in the *Debating the Documents* booklets. However, the essays take a broad look at the entire sweep of the eras. On pages 5 and 6 there are student instructions for evaluating each essay and preparing for an all-class debate on the two essays. This guide also gives you some suggestions for organizing that debate.

History as a Dialogue

In 2011, the Council of the American Historical Association adopted a revised Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct. It includes these passages:

On History: “Multiple, conflicting perspectives are among the truths of history. No single objective or universal account could ever put an end to this endless creative dialogue within and between the past and the present.”

On Teaching History: “Integrity and teaching means presenting competing interpretations with fairness and intellectual honesty. . . . Furthermore, teachers should be mindful that students and other audience members have the right to disagree with a given interpretation or point of view. Students should be made aware of multiple causes and varying interpretations. Within the bounds of the historical topic being studied, the free expression of legitimate differences of opinion should always be a goal.”

The *Debating the Documents* programs help you teach in the spirit of these principles. Our belief is that students can be inspired by learning history as an ongoing conversation or dialogue. They can be taught to engage in this dialogue vigorously, yet with civility. These materials are designed to help you foster this spirit of dialogue in your classroom.

Debating the Essays

Overview

The plan for these class debates assumes that students are already familiar with most of the *Debating the Documents* booklets from the eras. It further assumes that students have been given copies of both essays and have read each.

The plan is also based on the idea that students will feel less stress playing clearly defined roles that do not necessarily require them to defend their own views. We recommend in particular that students be assigned to the two Defender groups randomly, not according to their own opinions. At the end of the debate, students who wish to take their own stands will be able to do so.

Below are descriptions of three roles students will play. (Students not assigned to one of these roles will have a chance to ask questions at the end of the debate.) The following page of this guide offers a set of rules for conducting the debates. You may want to copy pages 4, 5, and 6 and distribute them to the class.

How Much Time to Allot

Students will need time to read the essays and review other materials on the historical period. Otherwise, you will probably need two to four class periods of 45 minutes to an hour each to plan and conduct each debate.

Student Roles

Two Groups of *Defenders*

Each Defender group should have four or five students. Its task is to defend one of the two essays. Each Defender must first read the appropriate essay and review the *Debating the Documents* primary sources referred to in that essay. Defenders should then put aside their own opinions and work together to plan a defense of the essay. They will make their case in a debate in front of the entire class.

One Group of *Questioners*

This group should also have four or five students. They first discuss outlines prepared by each group of Defenders. Their next task is to develop a list of tough questions to ask each Defender group. The Questioners should look for errors of fact or for arguments that do not seem logical or fair. The Questioners' task, in other words, is to challenge both Defender groups, politely yet firmly.

One Group of *Arbitrators*

This group should also have four or five students. The Arbitrators also first discuss the outlines prepared by each group of Defenders. During the debate, however, the Arbitrators' task is not to challenge the Defenders but to help them refine and improve their case. The Arbitrators should seek to help the Defenders clarify points they make or urge them to listen to the other side's arguments more carefully and respond to them more effectively.

The Debate Rules

1. Each Defender Group Meets

As a Defender, first prepare a page of notes on the essay your group will defend. Then, at your group's first meeting, use your notes to discuss the essay. Choose one student to prepare an outline of the case you will make in the debate. Try to divide up tasks for presenting your case. For example, perhaps each Defender can defend one major point in the essay and discuss the sources on which that point is based.

2. Questioners and Arbitrators Together Meet with Each Defender Group

Each Defender group will give you an outline and briefly summarize its overall case. As Questioners and Arbitrators, you should not challenge the Defenders in any way yet. You should only ask for clarifications in order to understand each case fully.

3. Questioners and Arbitrators Meet in Separate Groups

In these meetings, you will brainstorm key questions to ask each Defender group during the debate. In coming up with your questions, keep in mind your roles as either Questioners or Arbitrators.

4. Hold the Debate

Below are time estimates for a debate held during one ordinary class period. However, providing more time makes it easier to take questions from students who do not have one of the three assigned roles.

- Before the entire class, each group of Defenders makes its case. (Approximately 5–10 minutes per side)
- Questioners direct challenging questions to each Defender group. (Approximately 15 minutes)
- Arbitrators comment on the discussion. They ask Defenders to respond to what has been said and either hold to their views or change them in some way. (Approximately 10 minutes)
- Open the debate to the rest of the class to ask questions.

5. Some Additional Suggestions for ALL participants

- Treat every viewpoint with respect. Don't assume that all "right thinking" people think as you do.
- Look for points of agreement as well as disagreement between the two sides.
- If you challenge a view, be sure you understand it and are not criticizing a simplified "strawman" version of it.
- LISTEN closely! Especially to challenges to YOUR views. Try to hear and respond to these challenges in order to sharpen your own thinking.

Suggestions for the Student

YOUR OVERALL OBJECTIVE

The essays in this guide present two conflicting views of an era in world history. Your task is to read the essays, take notes on them, and prepare to take part in a debate about them in class. Doing this will help you learn something very important about the field of history. History is really an ongoing discussion or dialogue. Facts are important. Truth is important. Many matters can be settled and agreed upon and many are. Yet the really exciting part of history is in the debates that keep it going. These debates are what guide historians in trying to answer the most interesting and important questions about the past.

1. Review any *Debating the Documents* notes you have

The essay pairs in this guide will each mention some of the primary sources in the *Debating the Documents* booklets. To judge each essay, it will help to refresh your memory about the topics and sources used in those lessons.

2. Read both essays

Each essay argues in favor of one overall view of a historical period. The two views of each essay pair are strongly stated and clearly opposed to each other. Each essay states its view right away in its introductory paragraph. The rest of the essay supports this view by discussing specific features of the era. The essays are strongly biased, but they back up their claims with facts and sources. Still, you do NOT have to agree with either essay. You may take a view different from both essays. Your goal should be to read the essays carefully and use them to clarify your own views about history.

3. Take notes on each essay using the Checklist

Your teacher may provide you with a checklist to use while reading the essays. This checklist will help you think through all parts of each essay, and it will help you prepare for your role in the class debate about the essays.

4. Follow your teacher's instructions for holding a class debate

You will have a set task, or role to play. It will be to defend one of the essays, ask questions of the Defenders or try to settle differences between the two groups of Defenders. You will get a chance to state your own views. However, the debate will work best if you also play the role you are assigned.

5. Here are some further rules for taking part in the debate

- Use your notes and other worksheets as guides for the debate.
- Try to reach agreement about the main ideas and the overall meaning of each essay.
- Look for points of agreement as well as disagreement between the two essays.
- Listen closely in the debate to all points of view about each essay.
- Focus on the strengths of each essay, not merely on whether you agree or disagree with it.

Essay Analysis Checklist

Use this checklist to take notes on each essay.

As you read each essay, take a few notes on the topics listed below. Use these when preparing for your role in the debate on the two opposing views. (Use other sheets of paper as needed.)

- ☐ **State the essay's thesis. That is, state its main idea as presented in the first paragraph.**
- ☐ **What key statements of fact best help to back up the essay's thesis, or main idea?**
- ☐ **Do any statements of fact seem false or unlikely to be accurate? List them.**
- ☐ **Which statements are most biased? That is, which are one-sided opinions not based on facts or clear reasons? List some.**
- ☐ **How well are the primary sources used? Which sources are used to most clearly back up the thesis?**
- ☐ **Is the logic of the argument clear? Why or why not?**
- ☐ **Overall, how strong a case does this essay make? Why?**

The First Global Age

1450–1750 CE

Why did Europe lead in creating this first truly global age?



1. Why Europe Led in Creating the First Global Age: Luck, Accident, and Imperial Aggression



Louis XIV et Molière [dining at court, ca. 1670]. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-71551.

In the years 1450–1750, for the first time, adventurers and merchants from Europe explored and mapped the entire world. Europeans settled parts of the Americas, came to dominate trade networks in the Indian Ocean, enslaved millions of Africans and began to establish colonial empires in many places in all major regions of the Earth. In short, they established the pattern of interactions that made this the first fully global age.

Even as of 1400, it was not at all obvious that this would be so. After all, Europe then was not the most advanced civilization on Earth. Before 1400, China, parts of India, and the vast Muslim lands were all mightier and wealthier. Yet soon, Europe would lead the way into the new global age and dominate it. It was not able to control and conquer all other parts of the world. However, its power and influence did begin to shape the new global age more than any other civilization could.

Why was Europe able to do this? Europe achieved its dominance, above all, because of two factors: lucky breaks and an aggressive, all-conquering spirit.

As for luck, first take geography. Eastern Europe in these centuries did face threats

from the Ottoman Empire, until the Ottomans' failed siege of Vienna in 1683. Other than this, however, Europe was distant from other powerful civilizations that might have threatened it. Moreover, it faced out onto the Atlantic. Once exploration and imperial conquest got underway, Europe was perfectly positioned to seize the Americas and reach into Africa to obtain the millions of slaves needed to exploit the New World.

Europe was also lucky to be the beneficiary of the incredible achievements of many other Eurasian civilizations. China for one was vastly superior to the Europeans in the very technological accomplishments Europe used to assert its power around the globe. Francis Bacon, philosopher of experimental science and progress, wrote in 1620 that three inventions accounted for Europe's superiority: the magnetic compass, gunpowder, and the printing press. Yet the Chinese pioneered all three of these inventions. In fact, China used them (including gunpowder in weapons) centuries before Europe knew anything about them.

As for Europe's vaunted ships and navigational skills, China was also far ahead in that department well into the 1400s.

The amazing series of tribute voyages of the eunuch admiral Zheng He were the crowning achievement of several centuries of expanding Chinese trade and ship-building advances. Zheng He's expeditions included huge, nine-masted ships. They would have dwarfed Portugal's carracks had the Chinese ships still been around in 1498 when Portugal blustered into the Indian Ocean. Luck again intervened: after 1433, China turned away from the sea in order to concentrate on agriculture and the defense of its northern borders against powerful nomads.

True, the key scientific breakthroughs of the 16th and 17th centuries were made in Europe, by Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, and others. Yet until the 14th century, Europe did not stand out in its mastery of astronomy, mathematics, geography, biology, human anatomy, or other fields of knowledge that we now call "science." India, China, and the Islamic societies had their own scientific traditions, and in many cases, they were ahead of Europe's. European thinkers were aware of this. As they began to look outward from the 11th century on, they turned to Muslim philosophers, medical writers, and mathematicians. Islamic scholars had preserved and commented on the works of ancient Greek thinkers, including Ptolemy, whose earth-centered view of the universe was still the most advanced thinking on the subject. Muslims did not slavishly copy the Greeks; they added to knowledge in many fields. Muslim astronomers even began to raise questions about Ptolemy's complex planetary system, although they did not make the full break with the earth-centered view before the Europeans did.

At first, the new science did not directly contribute much to Europe's growing technological strength. However, it did add to Europe's sense of superiority and of its right to impose its will without regard for or understanding of the rest of the world's peoples.

These centuries saw a growth in the military and bureaucratic power of the

state everywhere, not just in Europe. The Ottomans, Safavid Persians, and Mughals in India—the so-called "gunpowder empires"—all had powerful military forces equipped with cannons, muskets, and tens or hundreds of thousands of conscripts. The centralized control of the state grew also in Ming and Qing China and in Japan under the Tokugawa Shogunate. Yet only Europe used its growing national power to sail the world, dominate others, and enslave millions for profit. Its unique spirit of aggressiveness and superiority are what enabled it to use its growing power in this way.

For centuries, a vast Indian Ocean trading network connected many civilizations. Arab, Persian, and Indian merchants dominated trade west of Indonesia. To the east, Chinese, Malay, Javanese, and other merchants prevailed. Muslims carried spices from the east back through the Red Sea to Cairo and other places where they sold them to Venetian and other European merchants. Muslim control of this trade irritated Christian Europe. To counter it and to monopolize the spice trade for themselves, the Portuguese in the early 1500s disarmed Arab and other Muslim traders in the Indian Ocean. The age of armed trade had arrived. When the Dutch and English showed up in the 1600s, Europe's disruption and domination of the Indian Ocean networks only deepened.

As Europeans conquered and colonized the Americas, they expected the Christian story and message to be as attractive to native peoples there as it was to them. They soon discovered that other societies had their own systems of belief, arts and technologies, achievements, and limitations. In seeing this, Europeans usually reacted with contempt. Cortez's destruction of the great Aztec civilization is only one example of this contempt. Millions of natives in the Americas died because of diseases Europeans often unknowingly carried. Warfare and enslavement took the lives of many others. As the natives died off, acute labor shortages in the New World had to be met some other way.

1. Luck, Accident, and Imperial Aggression

They would be met by one of the worst crimes in human history—the Atlantic slave trade, by which 10–12 million Africans or more were ripped from their homes and brought to labor in mines and plantations in the Americas.

Europe's domineering spirit was summed up by Thomas Hobbes, who saw all humans in a natural state as contemptible barbarians engaged in constant strife. To “civilize” them, a single all-powerful government was needed, a “great Leviathan”—a sovereign over all subjects, able to “reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will.” This dominating and aggressive spirit of control, along with Europe's great good luck, go far to explain

how and why it was able to lead and conquer as humanity launched this early phase of the global age we live in still.



The Execution of the Inca / A.B. Greene.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division,
LC-USZ62-104355.

2. Why Europe Led in Creating the First Global Age: A Unique Culture of Competitive Freedom



Invention of printing: Gutenberg taking the first proof.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-65195.

Between 1450 and 1750, the entire world came to be linked in meaningful ways for the first time. Europe led the way in forging these links. The rise of Europe can even be said to have made this global age possible. Why Europe?

The short answer is that aggressive inter-group rivalry combined with a powerful spirit of individualism to thrust Europe into the lead over all other civilizations. The formula for Europe's triumph was competition and freedom.

In these centuries, some trends were common to all major civilizations. The power of the territorial state was growing everywhere. Similar commercial, technological, and military developments fueled this growth in many parts of the world. Examples of this were the large kingdoms in Africa, the Muslim “gunpowder empires” (the Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals), the vast realms of Ming and Qing China, and the absolute monarchies of Louis XIV or Russia's Peter the Great. Cannons, muskets, huge armies of conscripts, systems of bureaucratic control and taxation, printing and money, and much else favored strong centralized states. Only powerful states could afford such things,

and so smaller-scale principalities and landed aristocrats were often weakened.

One region soared beyond the others in wealth, power, and cultural leadership. That region was Europe. What is telling is that, in Europe, the growth of the state did not undermine the spread of multiple centers of religious, political, social, and economic power. Within a rich mix of states, all sorts of independent guilds, cities, monasteries, religious orders, universities, merchant associations, and other corporate bodies thrived. With the Renaissance, individualism arose as an ideal. With the Reformation, the single Catholic religious authority split into many competing spiritual creeds and communities. All this made it hard for kings and queens actually to rule as the absolute monarchs they claimed to be.

In fact in some states, such as England or the Dutch Republic, monarchies were hemmed in by constitutional limits. The idea of separation of powers, individual civil liberties, and elected representation finally emerged out of the English Civil War that so terrified Thomas Hobbes. His *Leviathan*, in other words, could be controlled by empowered citizens, even as it continued to grow.

Europe's ability to encourage freedom even as its ruling elites grew in power was due to its unique openness to ideas of all sorts. It is often pointed out that Europe borrowed enormously from others. It is true: without Islamic science and philosophy, Chinese technology, and Indian mathematics, Europe might well have remained mired in backwardness. Yet this constant borrowing was itself due to an intense curiosity and openness. This openness led to revolutionary upheavals and triumphs within Europe in these centuries.

One of these upheavals was the scientific revolution. Muslim scholars had preserved the work of the second-century (CE) Greek scientist Ptolemy, whose view of the universe held sway for centuries. His complex planetary system placed the earth at the center of the universe. All heavenly movements around it were seen as exact circles—a “perfect” form of motion for a supposedly pure, spiritual, heavenly realm.

By the 1400s, some Muslim scientists had begun to question Ptolemy. However, it was Copernicus whose sun-centered theory fully launched the scientific revolution. Europeans took up Copernicus's challenge and led the way in science throughout this era. They set in motion an ongoing dialogue about science as well. The Catholic Church at times opposed the new science, yet this never stopped the dialogue, and in some ways even pushed it along.

That's because the Church was facing its own revolt, the Protestant Reformation. With passionate religious competition came intense debate and inquiry about everything. Europe's technological genius then enabled a larger public to take part in this debate. The new printing press made Reformation controversies, scientific discoveries, and accounts of explorers much more available to a mass audience. Luther, Calvin, Erasmus, Descartes, and Newton no longer spoke only to a tiny university-educated elite. As John Foxe put it, the Catholic Church had kept the written word of God hidden from the people, but printing allowed

the Scriptures to be “plainly laid before their eyes in their mother tongue that they might see the meaning of the text.”

As for the accounts of the explorers, these make clear how dramatic Europe's globalizing role was. Here, critics of European history have plenty of ammunition on their side. There is no question that European arrogance and cruelty were on full display. Portugal disrupted ages-old trade networks in the Indian Ocean, for example, as it fought to take over port cities and actively tried to drive Muslim merchants from the seas. The Dutch and English who followed also sought monopoly power over trade there and did not hesitate to use violence to get their ways. Yet the fact that these small nations so far from home were able to control so much of the Indian Ocean network also dramatically illustrates their technological superiority and their creative and organizational skill.

In the Americas, Europe can't really be blamed for the diseases that they unknowingly spread and that would wipe out millions of native peoples. After all, they hoped to harness native labor for their mines and plantations. Surely, they did not want it all wiped out. Nevertheless, they did destroy those who got in their way on a massive scale. Once Indian populations dwindled, European conquerors turned to an even worse form of oppression, the enslavement of millions of Africans.

Europeans clearly had the technical ability to inflict such horrors on a massive scale. Yet were they unique in their cruelty? Hardly. Along with European slave traders, Africans also participated in the Atlantic slave trade as middlemen. Meanwhile, across the Sahara, the Red Sea and to the port cities of East Africa, a centuries-old Arab slave trade was every bit as cruel. In fact, no society before the 1700s undertook any truly organized and effective stand against slavery. What was unique about Europe was not its slavery, but the rise of an organized opposition to slavery based on fundamental religious and philosophical principles. In the

2. A Unique Culture of Competitive Freedom

end, it was this opposition—not slavery itself—that triumphed.

The European encounter with the Americas led to huge tragedies. Yet it was driven by more than “God, glory, and greed,” as one saying has it. It also expressed a drive to explore and understand. Far from demonizing other cultures, Europeans usually tried hard to learn as much as they could about them. Racist reactions to Africans and native Americans scarred Europe for centuries. Yet Europe also produced sharp critics of these evils, such as Anton Montecino and Bartolomé de Las Casas—to say nothing of the determined religious dissenters who in time brought about the abolition of the slave trade and slavery itself.

Europe’s slave systems and imperial conquests were massive, but not new in world history. What was new was Europe’s capacity to criticize and reform itself in continual stages that kept pushing the dialogue forward. In the modern era, a growing concern for human rights, reason, and tolerance is still one of the legacies of Europe’s vibrant, competitive, and freedom-asserting restlessness, and its great success from 1450 to 1750 in launching the first global age.



A view of Quebec from the southeast, 1777.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division,
LC-USZ62-46047.

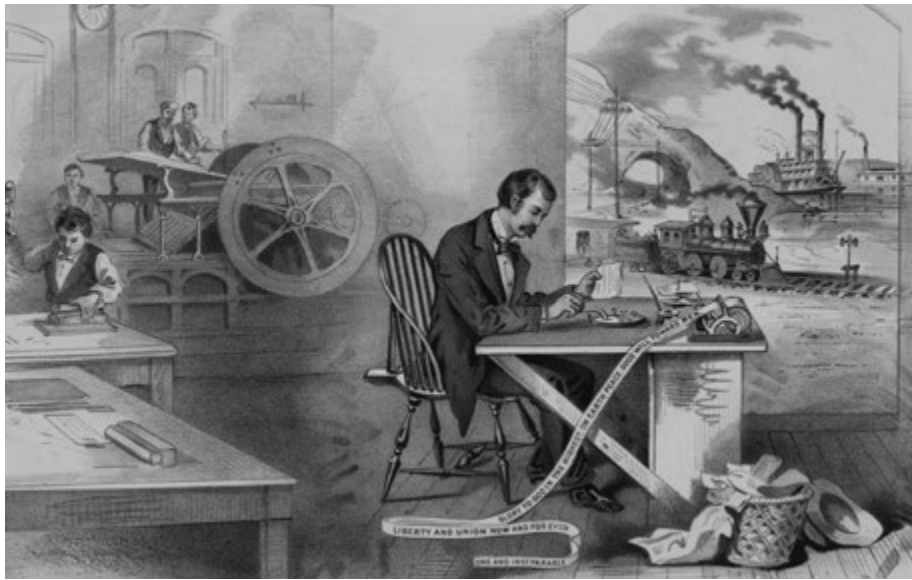
The Age of Revolution & Empire

1750–1914 CE

Was it an age of liberty, enlightenment, and progress, or an imperial age of industrialized oppression?



1. An Age of Liberty, Enlightenment, and Progress



"Progress of the Century." A lithograph published by Currier & Ives, c.1876.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-ppmsca-17563.

James Watt completed his improved steam engine in 1769. A few years later, in 1776, the American Declaration of Independence was issued. That same year, Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* explained the workings of a market economy and argued its central idea: that giving people freedom is the best way to make societies prosperous. In 1783, British Quakers organized the first abolitionist society in what would become a massive campaign to end slavery. In 1789, at the start of the French Revolution, France issued its Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen.

These events marked the world's passage into a new age of enlightened liberty and progress. Human civilization, it is true, remained deeply flawed, often terribly cruel. Nevertheless, the era from 1750 to 1914 has to be seen as a time of unbelievable triumph, a triumph for which humanity should indeed be grateful.

The modern age was born in the brilliance of the 18th-century Enlightenment. This vast and complex movement of ideas put forth one central and radical notion: Human reason alone should be the sole authority both for what is true about the world and

for what is moral and best for society. Another way to put this might be to say the Enlightenment promoted two types of reason: "practical reason" and "philosophic reason."

Practical reason has to do with the effort to apply the results of the scientific revolution of the 17th century to everyday life. In this era (1750–1914), the discoveries of Galileo, Newton, Boyle, and others increasingly led directly to technical breakthroughs in the effort to produce wealth and master the natural world.

Whether it was Watt's steam engine, the great breakthroughs in textile production by people like John Kay or Edmund Cartwright, the work of Michael Faraday with electricity, or Louis Pasteur's germ theory, science in this era began to guide engineers, entrepreneurs, medical professionals, mechanics, and tinkerers much more directly than it had in the past. Science generated at an ever more rapid pace one technological breakthrough after another.

These breakthroughs were the basis for a vast "Industrial Revolution." Everywhere this revolution spread, it brought with it coal and steam power, iron machinery, canals

and railroads, factory organization, growing cities, and mass produced goods.

It also brought with it horrible factory working conditions, polluted slums, dangerously unsanitary cities, exploitation of children and female wage earners, and bitter class conflict. Of course, many who flocked to the cities were fleeing even worse conditions in the countryside.

More importantly, this early phase of industrialism did not last. In England, France, Germany, and the U.S. especially, a well-off middle class began to grow in size. Unions and social reformers fought for and began to win a shorter working day, better working conditions, social insurance programs, and more sanitary cities. Consumer goods, comfort and leisure began to make life tolerable even for many in the working class.

In time, these benefits of the age of industry and science would spread to other lands, Western and non-Western alike.

Meanwhile, that other aspect of Enlightenment reason, “philosophic reason,” was also altering life in major ways. Enlightenment thinkers like John Locke and Montesquieu, for example, provided the language we still use today to talk about liberty, individual rights, and limited government based on the consent of the governed. Voltaire and others battled for religious toleration and an opposition to all forms of tyranny and injustice. Rousseau called for greater equality and a state that would reduce social divisions and promote a more cooperative way of life. The great political revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries expressed goals and transformed societies by using the language of the Enlightenment and the ideas of the aforementioned Enlightenment thinkers in particular.

Of course, as with the Industrial Revolution, the Enlightenment was not without flaws or failures to live up to all of its promises.

In the case of women, the Enlightenment did give some upper-class women a prominent if only supportive role. A few ran

artistic and literary salons; however, men were the main participants. Some queens of European nations supported Enlightenment thinkers. More importantly, women such as Mary Astell, or the mysterious “Sophia,” or Mary Wollstonecraft with her “Vindication of the Rights of Women,” actually used Enlightenment ideas to prod prominent male Enlightenment thinkers to apply their own concepts of reason and equality to gender issues. In fact, the modern women’s-rights movement is hard to imagine without the language of rights, liberty, and equality that the Enlightenment brought to this era in history.

The same could be said of slavery as well. Into the 1800s, it was an ongoing horror all over the world, with the “enlightened” West’s slave systems among the worst. Yet building on Enlightenment values, the West also saw the rise of the world’s first massive, organized, and ultimately successful movement to abolish slavery. The movement put an end first to the slave trade and then to slavery itself.

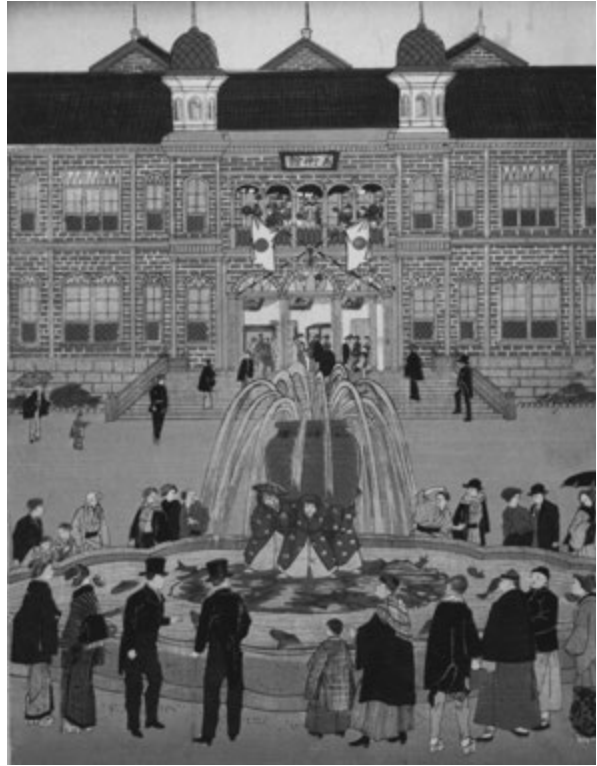
In this sense, even Europe’s 19th-century imperial conquests were not the completely dark chapter of human history they are often made out to be. Along with greed and power politics, a genuine missionary spirit and desire to end the slave trade motivated Britain and other nations in seeking to extend their control over many parts of the world in the late 1800s. Moreover, colonization also exposed many societies to the West’s Enlightenment ideals and industrial triumphs. In time, these would sow the seeds of discontent, protest, and a struggle for independence and social renewal in many of the colonial lands. As powerful as the European empires appeared in 1900, the dynamic ideals of the age in fact made those empires unstable and unsustainable. By the mid-20th century, they would be well on their way to extinction.

Starting in the 19th century, science and industry also provoked a deep crisis of faith for many. In particular, Darwin’s theory of evolution challenged religious beliefs as

1. An Age of Liberty, Enlightenment, and Progress

perhaps no other scientific theory ever had. Marxist and other forms of materialistic or deterministic thinking also frightened many. These systems of thinking seemed to undermine the view of the individual as free to act, or the idea that there could be any spiritual or religious basis for moral choice.

Yet in fact these forces did not undermine morality or spiritual searching. They challenged many to rethink traditional beliefs, it is true. For the most part, however, this only inspired people to strive all the harder to progressively improve in many ways what was already an amazing age of progress, advancing freedom and renewal.



A panel of an 1881 Japanese triptych print shows people gathered at Ueno Park, some in traditional dress, others in Western-style clothing. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZC4-10436.

2. An Imperial Age of Industrialized Oppression



In this cartoon, the owner of a factory into which cold air is blowing through open windows on employees, says to a visitor, "That's all right! You see, we put a label on all our goods guaranteeing that they aren't made in a sweat-shop." Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-90210.

James Watt and others did indeed transform the world when they applied coal and steam to machinery and launched the Industrial Revolution. The age of iron and steel that followed promised an endless stream of new products and undreamed-of wealth. Writers like Adam Smith in his *Wealth of Nations* insisted that unrestrained individuals, each pursuing his own selfish ends, would somehow benefit all of society and usher in a new age of progress and plenty.

Unfortunately, this did not happen. What this vaunted age of progress and freedom brought instead was misery, exploitation, and a deeper division of social classes, of nations, and of entire regions of the world than had ever existed before.

The era from 1750 to 1914 can be thought of in terms of great promises and great failures—four in particular: the promise and failure of science and industrialism, of political revolution and social reform, of Western civilization, and of the Enlightenment itself. Each is explored below.

The promise and failure of science and industrialism: There is no question that the scientific breakthroughs of the 17th century engendered great hope. Watt's

steam engine, Cartwright's power loom, Trevithick's locomotive, Pasteur's germ theory, or Edison's many applications of electricity—all were amazing achievements that could have made for an age of continuing progress and improvement in material well-being for all. The Industrial Revolution did add enormously to England's national wealth, to its canals and railroads, to its burgeoning cities. And in the 1800s, a few other nations in Europe and North America also grew in the same way due to industry.

However, the vast majority of humanity did not benefit. Workers in the new factories labored 12 hours or more per day in the most oppressive and unhealthy conditions imaginable. Their pay was so low that all members of a family, wives and young children included, often had to work in the factories or mines. These families lived in polluted, disorderly, crime-infested slums so unsanitary that the new industrial cities came to be seen as death traps. These urban centers needed a constant supply of new migrants simply to replace those swept away by epidemics, fires, and death at an early age.

It is true that by the end of the 19th century, some of the worst excesses of

industrialism were being checked. This was certainly not due to the kindness of the rapacious capitalist entrepreneurs in charge. It was a result of hard fought battles by unions, socialists, and other reformers. A small middle class also began to grow and prosper. Yet by 1914, class divisions were wider than ever. Kings and aristocrats still ruled in most places. The wealthiest industrialists joined these tiny groups of elites. Even in the few parliamentary democracies, the growing wealth of the upper classes enabled them to continue to control political life. This fact suggests the second way in which this age should be seen as one of promise and failure.

The promise and failure of political revolution and social reform: The American and French Revolutions announced the start of a new age with many wonderful words, such as “We hold these truths to be self-evident” (from the U.S. Declaration of Independence), or the equally inspiring phrases of France’s Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen.

Political revolution held out the hope of a radical transformation of life. Society would be restructured so as to realize the principles of liberty and equality. Yet within a few years, the French Revolution set a pattern in which idealism turned into fanaticism. When society could not be transformed, when heaven on earth could not be achieved, revolutionaries turned to violence to enforce their utopian dreams, as Robespierre did in 1793. Then in 1799, Napoleon completed the French Revolution’s journey from freedom to tyranny.

This pattern would repeat itself often in the decades to come. By the end of the 19th century, even in many societies with elected legislatures, full civil rights were still restricted mainly to males who held property. Government was in the hands of the rich and powerful. In the dominant societies of the West, cultural life also reflected this state of affairs. It glorified fabulous material wealth

and excused greed as “survival of the fittest.” It promoted aggressive nationalist sentiments, jingoist militarism, and an arrogant, racist sense of superiority. This points to the third great promise and failure of the age.

The promise and failure of Western civilization: Western imperialism reached its height in this era. China was still strong enough to limit the Western powers to mere “spheres of influence,” not outright colonies. India, nearly all of Africa, most of Southeast Asia, and parts of Central Asia (colonized internally by the Russians) were not as lucky. Most of the Middle East remained out of Europe’s hands only due to the continued existence of another imperialist power, the Ottoman Empire.

Europeans justified these conquests with nice-sounding phrases about a “civilizing mission” to the rest of the world. Some may even have meant it—the campaign against the slave trade was surely admirable. However, it was also used to justify colonial expansion that cost tens or hundreds of thousands of lives. The colonial subjects who survived often faced uprooting and economic exploitation that were only slightly less oppressive than slavery itself.

Some tried to justify imperial expansion by claiming it brought the West’s Enlightenment ideals to others. Sadly, this calls attention to the fourth of the promises and failures.

The promise and failure of the Enlightenment itself: To begin with, the Enlightenment’s ideals of reason, liberty, and equality were never realized fully. Women would have to wait until the 20th century to win the most elemental political rights in most societies. Slavery was abolished, it is true, but only as industrial elites realized that a workforce of “free labor” could be as easily exploited. The expanded power of the nation-state undercut the promise of limited government by the consent of the governed.

Meanwhile, in many ways, the 19th century turned away from these Enlightenment ideals themselves. The spirit of reason

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and the belief in universal human equality gave way to nationalist fervor, a romantic glorifying of the past, and a new and highly destructive scientific form of racism. “Social Darwinists” who used Darwinian evolution to justify permanent inequality. Marxism also espoused a form of social Darwinism. One class would clash with and triumph over all others according to rigid materialist laws that left no room for individual reason, ethical choice, or peaceful accommodation.

Lacking intellectual or spiritual moorings, therefore, the world careened toward 1914 and the catastrophe of World War I—a fitting end to an age of terrible flaws and failed promises.



A British cartoon depicts a meek Chinese ambassador just after China had signed a peace treaty with Great Britain to end the First Opium War (1842). Cartoon by *Punch*.

A Global Community & Its Perils

1914–21st Century

Has this globalizing age offered more hope for liberty and tolerance, or more danger of tyranny and war?



1. A Dangerous Age of Tyranny and War



The entrance to Auschwitz, the largest of the Nazi extermination camps, where more than one million people were put to death. The sign over the entrance reads, "Work will set you free." Aaron Wood, Shutterstock Inc.

The 20th century was a mind-boggling, disorienting, roller-coaster ride. On the surface, it gave us wonders undreamed of in any previous age. Television, penicillin, airplanes, plastics, kidney dialysis machines, mass-produced automobiles, hundreds of household appliances, rockets to the moon, personal computers and the Internet, DNA, genetically engineered crops, organ transplants, and thousands of miracle drugs. This technological prowess is the 20th century's greatest claim to fame. Let's give it its due.

Yet even this vaunted realm of science and technology has also given us the tank, the submarine, the long-range bomber, the atomic bomb, the hydrogen bomb, intercontinental ballistic missiles, and all the other weapons of mass destruction. Moreover, with genetic engineering, we are much closer to the terrifying moment C. S. Lewis imagined in 1947 when he said, "Human nature will be the last part of Nature to surrender to Man. . . . The battle will indeed be won. But who, precisely, will have won it? For the power of Man to make himself what he pleases means, as we have seen, the power of some men to make other men what they please."

In other words, science and technology placed in the hands of "some men" the ability to wreak vast destruction unimagined in previous ages. It also gave those same

powerful elites vast and unimagined powers of control over others. These evils are in fact what much of humanity experienced in the 20th century. That century was indeed an age of war and tyranny.

Technological progress has, it is true, given us improved nutrition, greater education, new medical knowledge, safer food, and public health measures that have made life better and more secure. As a result, however, population soared. The world's population reached its first billion only by the early 1800s. Today, it is over six billion. UN estimates show it soaring to as high as ten billion by 2050. We face a huge and growing demand for natural resources that may ultimately be impossible to satisfy. Overpopulation threatens worldwide environmental degradation as well. Wars over resources from oil to water may await us. Poverty adds enormously to this problem. Lower infant mortality rates in the poorer nations do not mean that general health has improved. But given the much higher fertility rates in those nations, populations in Asia, Africa, and elsewhere have soared. The resulting misery affects hundreds of millions.

In addition to fueling overpopulation, science and technology have placed immense power in the hands of the state. In the 20th century, the most terrifying examples of this enhanced power were the

“totalitarian” regimes in Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, Mao’s China, and in several other smaller nations.

The term “dictatorship” does not do justice to the absolute control such regimes sought over all aspects of life. The term “totalitarianism” came into use for states in which a single party ruled completely and used state power and a cult of personality centered on its leader to control the economy, the military, education, cultural institutions, neighborhood, family, even individual consciousness and conscience. Such regimes combined police-state tactics and mass terror with propaganda and the suppression of all dissent to maintain popular support. One side effect of this was the demonization and attempted destruction of whole classes of people or ethnic groups, the genocide against the Jews in the Holocaust being only the best known and most horrific. This collective blame and slaughter destroyed the very idea of individual accountability and responsibility, to say nothing of liberty and life itself.

Especially during times of deep stress and change, totalitarian propaganda worked because people longed for the peace, order, and harmony it promised. George Orwell’s novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* demonstrated how such states, even though based on scientific and technological power, could also promote deeply irrational modes of thinking. Modern science, after all, is increasingly specialized and mysterious to all but a very few highly trained experts. While knowledge has expanded rapidly, few of us have any real understanding of most of what we use daily. Modern technology appears to us almost as a sort of magic. Totalitarianism proved that advanced science and technology do not prevent a society from giving in to the most irrational and vicious prejudices and violence.

After World War II, one positive development was the collapse of the European colonial empires. In India, Mohandas Gandhi inspired millions with his philosophy of nonviolent resistance. Hopes were high that

a new order of independence, freedom, and development was at hand for the poorest regions of the world. Yet as the former colonies were pulled by the political rivalry of the Cold War, many terrible problems soon disappointed these hopes. Long-suppressed ethnic and tribal loyalties resurfaced. Corrupt dictators such as Idi Amin or Robert Mugabe all too often rose to power and looted government treasuries. Warfare, terrorism, and civil strife have been constants in the underdeveloped world. Even in India, amidst massive Hindu-Muslim violence in 1948, a Hindu fanatic assassinated Gandhi for cooperating with the newly created Muslim state of Pakistan.

One important source of ongoing tension in these parts of the world is the unsettled issue of women’s rights. In the modernized industrial nations, it is true, women have made enormous strides. Yet even in those societies, discrimination persists. In the poorer nations of Africa, the Middle East, parts of Asia, and South and Central America, the story is far more depressing. Some elite women have won leadership roles. Yet as many UN reports have stressed, access to education and political rights is still limited for most ordinary women, while grim practices such as female genital mutilation, female infanticide, “honor killings,” sweatshop labor, and trafficking in girls for the commercial sex trade remain widespread.

To speak of sweatshops is also to point to another myth, the over-hyped promise of “globalization.” Since World War II, and especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, trade agreements, large corporations, and international organizations have facilitated a huge increase in economic, social, and cultural exchanges of all sorts. A new age of global harmony and sharing is upon us, we are told. Yet in fact trade policies largely favor huge multinational corporations and undercut local farmers and small businesses in the developing world. Globalization has fueled a huge income gap between rich and poor

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nations. It has also meant spreading cultural uniformity, the undercutting of all tradition and custom, and the weakening of the nation-states that newly decolonized people need to provide development, security, and social support. Globalization means ultra-modern ways of life for a few, huge disparities in income, bewildering cultural tensions, and ongoing violent conflict throughout the world—a fitting legacy of the 20th century as it bequeaths its problems to all of us in the 21st century.



Many postcolonial societies today have pockets of modern, urban industrial life amidst ongoing general poverty, as in the case of this poor man sleeping in the streets in Bangladesh.
Kazi Mah-dee Hasan, Shutterstock Inc.

2. A Time of Hope for Liberty and Tolerance



In orbit around the Earth, the Hubble space telescope has revolutionized our understanding of the universe. Neo Edmund, Shutterstock Inc.

It's easy to find fault with the 20th century. The list of its disasters is long and easy to compile: Two world wars, with an economic catastrophe in between; Hitler, Stalin, and other totalitarian monsters and their genocidal slaughters; a Cold War rivalry that immobilized the world and fueled a terrifying nuclear arms race; huge income gaps between the richest and poorest nations; ongoing environmental and population problems; AIDS in Africa, Mideast terrorism; dictatorships and human rights violations.

It would be wrong to ignore these large and dismal themes in the history of the world since 1914. Yet it is hardly likely that we do need to be reminded of them. History Channel documentaries, magazine reports, Hollywood films, and history textbooks alike all stress the century's two world wars, the Holocaust, the Great Depression, nuclear weapons, the U.S.-Soviet rivalry, and the threat of global environmental catastrophe.

What is not stressed nearly as much is the incredible expansion of prosperity, liberty, tolerance, and mutual respect among the peoples of the world. These, too, are a legacy of the 20th century. While ignored in the headlines, they are in the long run the triumphs this era will be remembered for most, and remembered with humble thanks.

First, prosperity: This was fueled by unbelievable breakthroughs in science and technology—and by the free economic and political institutions that encouraged the personal risk, investment, research, and innovation which the creation of wealth requires. As a result, mass-produced goods, nearly universal schooling, safe and abundant food, miracle drugs, central heating and refrigeration, magazines, clinics, public libraries, television, the Internet, cell phones, and a thousand other vital goods, services, and conveniences have enhanced our lives. Hundreds of millions in the growing middle classes worldwide, and even many of the poor, now live at a level of comfort and cultural richness that kings and queens could hardly have imagined as recently as the early 1800s.

Of course, this prosperity is not shared equally across the globe. In fact, for the first half of the 20th century, the explosion of productivity and innovation boosted average incomes in the advanced industrialized nations far more rapidly than it did elsewhere. An enormous gulf opened between rich nations and poor.

Yet consider this: Better nutrition, more education, new medicines, and public health measures such as sanitation systems and clean drinking water helped bring about

a worldwide revolution in life expectancy. In 1900, global life expectancy was about 47 years. Today it is about 67 years, according to UN statistics. In the wealthiest nations, average life expectancy is more than 80 years for women and in the high 70s for men. Yet life expectancy has even risen dramatically in most of the world's poorer nations. Fueling this rise are dramatic declines in infant mortality rates, which have plummeted just about everywhere.

Of course, this has meant soaring populations, especially in the poorest nations, where fertility rates remain very high. Pressure on food and energy resources due to increased population has definitely worked against economic growth in some areas. Environmental damage has been severe in some cases. Overpopulation is definitely a big problem.

Nevertheless, it is not an unmanageable problem. Predictions of a world-destroying crisis, such as those made by Paul Ehrlich in 1969, have proved laughably wrong. Most resources are not disappearing. Many nations with huge populations are prospering. And UN projections show population leveling off after 2050, perhaps even sooner. In some places, a "birth dearth"—a decline in population—is already replacing fears of overpopulation. Humanity's ever-growing capacity to produce more with less is likely to keep us ahead of the curve in coping with population growth.

Another mark against the 20th century was its descent into new and hideous forms of modern, mechanized barbarism. The names Hitler and Stalin are almost enough by themselves to evoke all the horrors of totalitarianism, war, and 20th-century genocide. These are indeed the great and tragic catastrophes of the era. They could well have led to a new dark age for all of humanity for many generations to come. What is remarkable about the age, however, is not these powerful forms of human destructiveness, but the world's heroic resistance to them. In the end, this resistance won out.

As it did also in putting an end to the European age of imperialism. Well into the century, Europe's colonial systems seemed solid and likely to last a long time. Yet within two decades of World War II, these empires were gone. Most of them ended in peaceful transfers of power. In many cases, decolonization has not been smooth or happy. Yet today, progress can be detected in many poor nations. As a result, the income gap that widened enormously earlier in the century, has since the 1970s begun to close.

In the context of decolonization, a worldwide concern for human rights and cultural tolerance also took hold. America's own civil rights revolution was a part of this transformation in thinking. So also was the UN's *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. The culturally ethnocentric and racist thinking of the imperial past is today shunned nearly everywhere.

For women as well, the 20th century has brought about a true revolution. It began in the 19th century with the efforts of small groups of women in Western industrialized democracies. Susan B. Anthony, Frances Willard, Emmeline Pankhurst, and many others waged a long battle for greater female respect, property rights, and the right to vote. As they won this fight, vast cultural and economic changes also began to give women increasing freedom in their personal lives. As a result, women today sit in parliaments, rule as heads of state, manage businesses, work as professionals, perform in the arts and in sports, and participate fully in all other aspects of life in their societies.

All these new roles are also open to women now in many poor nations in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and the Americas. Too many women there still suffer in truly dismal subordination, it is true. Yet at the UN and for most governments, women's rights are on the agenda. Most poor nations realize that empowering women is a key to overall advancement. As Takiwaa Manuh of Ghana says, "African women's fundamental contributions in their households, food

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production systems, and national economies are increasingly acknowledged, within Africa and by the international community.”

What this statement also reflects is the power of globalization. Liberating cultural forces are increasingly carried around the world along with burgeoning global trade and economic integration. Since the end of the Cold War in 1991, new technologies such as the Internet have vastly increased the speed and scale of communication, financial transactions, and planning across all national boundaries. As Thomas Friedman sees it, globalization is “enabling individuals, corporations, and nation-states to reach round the world farther, faster, deeper, and cheaper than ever before.” This

trend is a key legacy of the 20th century, which will be remembered as a time when liberty and tolerance became the norm and set the agenda for the world’s future.



A Muslim woman wearing a traditional head scarf works at a computer in a modern office. Anyka, Shutterstock Inc.

