The Age of Metternich

Essential Questions

- Who were the key players involved in the Congress of Vienna, and what was the final resolution of their meeting?
- What was the Metternich system?
- How were European nations affected by conservatism in the nineteenth century?
- How were nineteenth-century conservatism and liberalism different? How were they similar?

Keywords

- age of Metternich
- burschenschaften
- conservatism
- liberalism
- nationalism
- Russification
- volksgeist
Set the Stage

The age of Metternich (1815–1848) was the period in European history dominated by the conservative political philosophy of Austria’s foreign minister, Prince Klemens von Metternich. Conservatism is a political philosophy based on tradition and social stability. It stresses established institutions and prefers gradual development to abrupt change. Prior to the age of Metternich, European society and politics had been severely threatened by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. As a result, a new spirit of international spirit of cooperation and a dedicated effort to maintain European peace emerged briefly among the “great powers” of the Austrian Empire, Great Britain, France, Prussia, and Russia. These countries met at the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815) to discuss a variety of political issues meant to restore nations to their traditional form of governments and create a balance of power in Europe that would prevent any single nation from threatening the rest.

Metternich and the Congress of Vienna

On April 4, 1814, a defeated Napoleon abdicated the throne, marking the end of a catastrophic quarter-century of revolution and warfare. The French Revolution (1789–1799) and the Napoleonic Wars (1799–1815) had profoundly shaken Europe and a new atmosphere of international cooperation emerged in response. On May 30, 1814, Europe’s victorious great powers—the Austrian Empire, Prussia, Russia, and Great Britain—signed the first Treaty of Paris, confining France to its pre-Napoleonic era borders. The allied statesmen refused to punish France, imposing no legal or economic reparations, in the hope that the new French government would remain stable. Napoleon was exiled to the island of Elba on the Italian coast, where he was allowed to keep his imperial title and given a yearly income of 2 million francs. The allies restored the Bourbon dynasty to the French throne and began the slow process of restoring and restructuring post-Napoleonic Europe.

In September 1814, representatives from nations throughout Europe met in Vienna to discuss a multitude of political issues. Most Europeans longed for peace and security, and the conservative elite believed that the reestablishment of “legitimate” governments and the suppression of revolutionary movements was the necessary price. The most important concerns were decided by the four great powers. For several months, diplomats argued, schemed, and compromised on issues affecting their own countries, as well as those impacting the entire European political landscape. The victorious allies were rewarded for their efforts in defeating Napoleon, while the vanquished countries were penalized for their collaboration with the would-be world conqueror.

The Congress of Vienna was the first instance in which an international body met together in a single place to discuss the future of Europe. The congress included representatives from more than 200 nations and princely states, along with delegates
from various large cities, religious sects, corporations, and other special interest groups. Despite the large number of participants, the congress never met in plenary sessions. Instead, most discussions occurred in informal face-to-face discussions between the representatives of the four victorious great powers and France. The participation of other delegates was very limited. The dominant figure and host of the Congress of Vienna was Austria’s foreign minister, Prince Klemens von Metternich (1773–1859). Metternich’s influence on the decisions of the Congress of Vienna and his active role in European affairs from 1815 to 1848 was such that this period is called the **age of Metternich** in his honor.

Metternich had served as Austria’s foreign prime minister from 1809 to 1848 and represented the interests of Austrian emperor Francis I (r. 1804–1835) at the Congress of Vienna. During his own lifetime, Metternich was alternately reviled and praised, and his historical reputation remains equally complex. Metternich was a staunch conservative who regarded liberalism and **nationalism** as threats to the survival of the Austrian Empire. As the most multiethnic of the great powers, Austria, Metternich believed, needed to repress nationalism and create a system of collective security to maintain the status quo. To that end, Metternich advocated aggressive intervention in any country that threatened the conservative order. A master at the art of diplomacy, Metternich managed to convince his international colleagues to accept many of his conservative principles. To later liberal historians, Metternich was synonymous with the conservative opposition to change. Yet while his diplomatic style could appear, at times, to be overly moralizing, his phrasing resulted from astute calculations. And though Metternich did oppose the expansion of civil rights associated with the national revolutionary movements, it is equally true that his ministrations helped Europe enjoy a century of relative peace between 1815 and 1914.

After Metternich, the most influential member of the Congress of Vienna was arguably the French diplomat Charles Talleyrand (1754–1838). Despite its military defeat, France wished to retain its status as a great power and so Talleyrand worked closely with Metternich to ensure that French political concessions would not cripple the nation. Talleyrand was Louis XVIII’s foreign minister, and he held the unenviable position of representing the varied interests of his defeated country. He was charged with upholding the liberal agendas of revolutionary-era Napoleonic-era France, as well as the conservative agenda of the restored Bourbon dynasty. Despite the complexity of his position, Talleyrand proved himself a skillful and ingenious diplomat. For example, even though France was initially excluded from any serious participation in the congress, Talleyrand managed to insert himself at the heart of the body’s deliberations by exposing the plans of Prussia and Russia to take over all of Saxony and Poland without consulting the other powers. In response to the Polish-Saxon question, Talleyrand formed an alliance among France, the Austrian Empire, and Great Britain to oppose Prussia and Russia. This alliance effectively split the anti-French coalition and allowed Talleyrand to act as an elder statesman, free to criticize and scheme with diplomats from every corner of Europe.

*age of Metternich*  
a period in European history from 1815 to 1848 that was dominated by the conservative policy of Austria’s prime minister, Prince Klemens von Metternich

*nationalism*  
a sense of national consciousness emphasizing the promotion of a nation’s unique culture and language
Robert Castlereagh (1769–1822), the British foreign secretary from 1812 to 1822 and leader of the House of Commons, represented Great Britain at the Congress of Vienna. Castlereagh was a poor public speaker, but his integrity and consistency set him apart from the vast majority of European diplomats. Modern historians generally consider Castlereagh’s foreign policies astute and ahead of their time. Castlereagh shared Metternich’s conservative views and supported the restoration of the balance of power on the continent. Castlereagh proposed that the great powers meet on a regular basis to debate and resolve European affairs. This proposal was accepted, and over the next decade five European congresses met to resolve disputes. The British diplomat refused, however, to involve the British navy in any sort of international police force meant to crush revolutions. This refusal put Britain at odds with both Russia and the Austrian Empire, but it demonstrated the fact that British citizens generally disliked the congress system and preferred to remain more isolated from continental disputes.

Metternich’s closest ally at the Congress of Vienna was the Prussian representative Prince Karl von Hardenberg (1750–1822), who spoke for Frederick William III of Prussia (r. 1797–1840). Hardenberg shared Metternich’s belief that the great powers needed to collaborate to maintain European peace and civility. Although the least influential of the great powers, Prussia supported Austria, the other German power, and so was a valuable political voice in the congress’s discussions. In addition to establishing a general peace, Prussia hoped to incorporate its longtime enemy, Saxony, as a territory. Forced to compromise, Prussia instead received the economically inferior Rhineland. Despite the original disappointment of this concession, the Rhineland proved rich in iron and coal and would later prove vital to Prussian/German industrialization in the 1840s. Hardenberg, like Talleyrand, was a generation older than Metternich, but unlike the French diplomat, he was frequently outmaneuvered by the Austrian statesman. Hardenberg was considered a charming and amicable diplomat, but he ultimately proved unable to navigate the shifting tides of Russian constitutional reform.

Russia was the largest of the victorious powers and its influence in European politics was growing rapidly. Russia was represented by Tsar Alexander I (r. 1801–1825), who chose to attend the congress personally. Alexander I had begun his reign as a reformer but had grown increasingly conservative and more religious in response to western European revolutions. While the tsar generally agreed with the conservative policies of Metternich, he also pushed for substantial Russian territorial acquisitions, particularly in Poland. Russia eventually received the eastern half of the Polish kingdom, and appeared to accept the creation of a small independent kingdom known as Congress Poland. In reality, Russia ignored any pretense of Polish independence and by 1863 had incorporated the territory into Russia. Alexander I also pushed for the creation of an international body that could intervene, with force if necessary, to protect the status quo and ensure peace. On September 26, 1815, Russia, Prussia, and the Austrian Empire formed the Holy Alliance, supposedly meant to promote the Christian virtues of charity and peace. In practice, however, the Holy Alliance was used as a bastion against revolutionary movements. The Holy Alliance protested democracy, liberalism, and secularism for a decade, until it became essentially defunct after the death of Alexander I.
Despite their personal differences, the representatives at the Congress of Vienna were each guided by three main principles: legitimacy, compensation, and balance of power. The first principle, legitimacy, meant the restoration of “rightful” monarchs to those nations which had experienced revolutions. For France, this meant the coronation of Louis XVIII (r. 1814–1824), brother of the executed Louis XVI (r. 1774–1792). French Bourbon claims in Spain and Naples were likewise recognized. Louis XVIII, like other restored European monarchs, was forced to accept a constitution restricting royal power and expanding parliamentary rule in deference to public opinion. The second principle, compensation, ensured that any nation that had lost territory to Napoleon received some form of reimbursement. The third principle, balance-of-power, attempted to ensure that no one nation grew powerful enough to threaten the rest of Europe.

Each of these principles was subject to long deliberations and arguments in which each nation or defunct nation attempted to sway rival nations in support of various agendas. When the congress finally concluded, the diplomats had altered European political boundaries considerably. The allied states essentially quarantined France behind a series of buffer states in case the specter of revolution reared its head once more. For instance, to the north of France, the historic Dutch Republic, extinct since 1795, was combined with the Austrian Netherlands to create the Kingdom of the Netherlands. It was hoped that this kingdom would be strong enough to discourage France from expanding into the Low Countries. Additionally, the German-held left bank of the Rhine was ceded to Prussia to act as a bulwark against France in the west and Russia in the

The major participants in the Congress of Vienna pursued balance-of-power politics after the Napoleonic Wars.
east. To the south, the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, Italy, was restored and strengthened by the incorporation of the defunct Republic of Genoa, which had ceased to exist by 1797. The Austrian Empire took back Tuscany and Milan, both held before 1796, as well as the defunct Republic of Venice, effectively giving them control of northern Italy for much of the nineteenth century. The congress also recognized the restoration of Pope Pius VII (r. 1800–1823) in the Papal States and the restoration of several former rulers in small duchies. Lastly, the congress confirmed the kings of Bavaria, Wurttemberg, and Saxony, and recognized George III (r. 1760–1820) as the British monarch.

For there to be a true balance of power, strong nations had to be willing to put aside their own territorial desires. For instance, early in the deliberations, it became apparent that Russia hoped to claim the ancient Kingdom of Poland while the Prussians wanted to incorporate the wealthy Kingdom of Saxony. Such territorial acquisitions would have created a dangerous imbalance of power in central Europe and been potentially detrimental to the Austrian Empire and Great Britain. Forced to band together with the defeated France, the three nations signed a secret alliance directed against Russia and Prussia. With the threat of war looming, Russia and Prussia accepted territorial compromises. The Polish-Saxon question allowed France to regain its great-power status and ended its diplomatic isolation, at least briefly.

While the Congress of Vienna deliberated, Napoleon escaped from exile in Elba and reclaimed his position as emperor. With a French army at his back, Napoleon began a determined marched into Belgium. After a whirlwind 100-day campaign, however, Napoleon’s luck changed. On June 18, 1815, an allied force led by Britain’s Duke of Wellington met Napoleon’s army at Waterloo and won a great victory. Napoleon was forced to abdicate for a second time and was again sent into exile. This time, Napoleon was imprisoned on the isolated Atlantic island of St. Helena, 1,240 miles from any landmass, where he remained for the rest of his life. The allied forces restored Louis XVIII to the throne and a new peace treaty was made with France, understandably more severe than the first. The new treaty imposed minor changes to the French frontiers and included a brief army occupation and an indemnity of 700 million francs. Peace restored, the Congress of Vienna continued, with France once more demoted from its status as a great power. Talleyrand was formally excluded from the rest of the congress’s deliberations, and the French foreign minister resigned later that year.

The final resolutions of the Congress of Vienna reflected the traditional diplomacy of the great powers who redrew the map of Europe to meet their own national and imperial goals. After almost nine months of deliberations, and a final war against Napoleon, the great powers completed their work in June 1815. France was forced to relinquish all territory conquered during the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, and the Quadruple Alliance was formed between the Austrian Empire, Great Britain, Prussia, and Russia to ensure peace and stability. During the Congress of Vienna, the Austrian Empire, Prussia, and Russia also formed the Holy Alliance, envisioned by Alexander I as an
international coalition against revolutionary movements. Austria and Prussia additionally joined the German Confederation, a union of 39 states and four free cities that joined together to stabilize central Europe.

Lastly, each of the great powers agreed to meet periodically to discuss issues of mutual concern, especially those related to war and revolution. These meetings were known as the Concert of Europe, or Congress System, and provided a degree of informal security in Europe for the first half of the nineteenth century. In many ways, the Concert of Europe was a primitive version of the modern United Nations, and it acted as an experimental step in the formation of international regulations. The growth of international institutions was blocked, however, by the individual interest of each sovereign state. So while the nations might agree on a subject, the wherewithal to carry out their objectives was often blocked by the needs or desires of individual nations.

The Metternich System
At the Congress of Vienna, Metternich was chiefly responsible for creating the balance of power in Europe. For the next 30 years, the Austrian would dedicate himself to stabilizing and consolidating this balance. The so-called Metternich system ensured stability by censoring political and religious views that threatened the conservative status quo. Several times after the Congress of Vienna, the great powers evoked the Concert of Europe to address international affairs. In reality, these later congresses served mainly as a conservative fronts to suppress revolutionary and nationalistic movements.
The first general postwar assemblage was the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle, which met in 1818 to discuss the status of France, the Atlantic slave trade, and Barbary pirates operating along the coast of North Africa. The members of the Quadruple Alliance decided that France, which had paid its indemnity with a loan from private bankers, should be freed of the army occupation and enjoy equal footing with the other great nations. From this point onward, the Quadruple Alliance was known as the Quintuple Alliance, and France became an important participant in later congresses. It was unanimously agreed that both the slave trade and piracy should be suppressed. But only the British possessed a navy large enough to be useful in these twin aims, and the continental states refused to rely on the British fleet for fear that it would end the freedom of the seas. As for the British, it was unthinkable that their navy could be placed under the authority of an international body. So, despite moral objections, the transatlantic slave trade continued. Indeed, even as nations on both sides of the Atlantic banned the slave trade in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, illegal traffickers continued to ship large numbers of African slaves to the Americas until the 1860s. Meanwhile Barbary pirates looted ships and captured thousands of Europeans and Americans, who were then sold as slaves in North Africa. Great Britain, the United States, France, and the Netherlands each engaged in wars with the Barbary States and various Muslim kingdoms, including those that make up the modern nations of Morocco, Algiers, Tunisia, and Libya. The dangers posed by Barbary pirates were not fully eradicated until Algiers became a colony of France in 1830.

During the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle, Alexander I proposed that the great powers form a permanent European Union with an international military force that could be used to support existing governments against violent revolutions. Castlereagh of Great Britain rejected the tsar’s idea. The British had declared themselves willing to make international commitments in the case of specific contingencies, such as a revival of French military aggression or the return of Napoleon. But the British had no interest in obligating themselves to act upon indefinite future events that might not affect the British Empire. British foreign policies would reserve the right of independent judgment. This marked the first significant break in the accord between the great powers, but it would not be the last.

In the early 1820s, revolutions broke out in southern Europe. In 1820, a revolutionary-led army forced Ferdinand VII of Spain and Naples (r. 1808, 1814–1833) to rule in accordance with the liberal constitution of 1812, which he had previously ignored. Later that same year, a similar revolution broke out in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, whose absolute ruler Ferdinand I (r. 1816–1825) was forced to accept a constitution. These constitutional limits on royal power were perceived

Alexander I represented Russia at the Congress of Vienna and became the first Russian king of Poland.
by Metternich and his allies as the beginning of revolutionary violence which, if left unchecked, might spread throughout Europe. Metternich urged the other great powers to sign a protocol committing them to a united action. The revolutions of southern Europe were the principal subjects discussed at the congresses of Troppau and Laibach, held in 1820 and 1821, respectively. The Austrian Empire, Russia, and Prussia chose to sign the Protocol of Troppau, which asserted their right to intervene in other countries to oppose revolutions. Great Britain and France objected to the idea of international action against all revolutionaries and refused to sign the protocol. The three conservative powers further distanced themselves from Great Britain during the Congress of Laibach, in which Austria was authorized by the other great powers to suppress the revolution in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

In 1822, the great powers met for a final time at the Congress of Verona to discuss the continued instability of Spain, as well as revolutions in Spain’s Latin American colonies. In both cases, Great Britain strongly objected to an international military response. In the case of Spain, Great Britain’s objections were overruled and a French army was authorized to subdue the threats to the Spanish monarchy and punish the revolutionaries. The French invasion was a complete success, with the majority of Spanish people viewing the foreign army as deliverers bringing peace via the restored Catholic Church and Bourbon king. In the case of the Latin American revolts, Britain’s objections held more sway. Britain hoped to economically exploit the breakup of the Spanish Empire and refused to allow the other great powers to intervene in Latin America. Without the backing of the British fleet, it was impossible for any European armed force to sail to the Americas. Equally important, the United States issued the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, which warned Europeans from further colonial ventures in the American “sphere of influence.”

Throughout the 1820s and 1830s, Metternich continued to battle against liberal political change and revolutions in Europe. Like many other conservatives, Metternich sincerely believed that middle class liberalism stirred the lower class to open revolution, bringing nothing but pain and suffering to all. He therefore dedicated himself to maintaining peace at all costs. In a few cases—the dynastic changeovers of France and Belgium in 1830 and 1831, for example—Metternich was unable to prevent revolutionary movements. But, for the most part, Metternich’s policies successfully repressed revolutionary impulses and thereby prevented the outbreak of war. The Metternich system remained the most active system of governance in central Europe until 1848, and his policies dominated the Austrian Empire, the Italian peninsula, and the entire German Confederation.

The German Confederation comprised dozens of independent German states, including Prussia and the Austria Empire, which met in complicated assemblies on a regular basis. The Austrian Empire was the dominant member, with Prussia acting as its junior partner in the planning and execution of repressive measures following the conservative party line. The most infamous policy issued by the German Confederation was Metternich’s 1819 Carlsbad Decrees. The decrees required that each of the German member states destroy subversive liberal ideas permeating universities and newspapers. They also created a permanent committee whose spies and informers were used to investigate and punish radical organizations. Metternich’s
later tendency toward repressive policies contrasted widely with the moderation he had displayed in the general peace settlement at the Congress of Vienna years before.

**Characteristics and Impact of Conservatism in Europe in the Nineteenth Century**

Conservatives considered themselves the guardians of tradition. During the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, it was optimistically believed that human beings were capable of being governed by reason. But after surviving the chaos of revolution and Napoleon, conservatives pessimistically concluded that passion drives human nature and that, if civilization was to remain intact, institutions needed to change slowly. Most conservatives wanted a return to pre-1789 Europe, a society dominated by a noble blend of monarchy, bureaucracy, and aristocracy. Conservatives were not necessarily opposed to constitutions, but they insisted these documents be based on society’s actual experiences rather than abstract “universal” principles. Conservative philosophy supported the restoration governments of the post-1815 order and influenced political thought in virtually every European nation during the first half of the nineteenth century.

The philosophical basis for conservatism can be found in the writings of the political theorist Edmund Burke (1729–1797). Burke was a member of the English House of Commons and a strong supporter of the American Revolution. He believed that the American colonists wanted nothing more than to protect their traditional form of governance and that their grievances against the German-bred George III were valid. He was similarly supportive during the dawn of the French Revolution, which he saw as a fight for liberty that was akin to the English Civil War (1641–1651). But when the scope of destruction, in terms of both traditional institutions and human life, became clear, Burke came to condemn the French Revolution. Burke’s most famous work, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, published in 1790, was widely read throughout Europe. In it, he proposed a new form of conservatism that encouraged change through adaptation rather than violent revolution. He argued that humans use reason to excuse self-interested actions, while traditions act as a check on selfish passions. Traditions therefore should be carefully guarded. Burke attacked the principles of the rights of man and natural law as fundamentally dangerous to society because they threatened the traditions that underpinned the rights of the elite. Burke knew that change was important for all societies, but he cautioned that large-scale changes should be applied slowly.

On the continent, a more extreme form of conservatism emerged in the writings of Joseph-Marie de Maistre (1753–1821). A lawyer, diplomat, and writer, de Maistre was an émigré during the French Revolution and one of the key intellectual figures in the Counter-Enlightenment working for the return of Catholic supremacy and the restoration of hereditary monarchies. In his numerous works, he described how the French Revolution’s break with its traditions of monarchy, nobility, and the church had caused it to descend into violent chaos. De Maistre encouraged monarchs to be ruthless against any suggestion for political reform, going so far as to say that the “first servant of the Crown should be the executioner.” A strong Catholic, de Maistre hoped to see the return of papal privileges in secular matters
and believed that the church acted as the foundation of society and that all political authority ultimately stemmed from God.

Conservatism was most widely embraced in central and eastern Europe, where it attempted to find a balance between tradition and progress. It was alternately aided and threatened by the rise of nationalism. Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) was the architect of central and eastern European nationalism. His main treatise, *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Humanity*, defined nationalism as bringing together people whose attributes form a common sense of identity, an idea best represented by the term *volksgeist*, or “spirit of the people.” A people’s language, literature, religion, culture, and history were all elements of *volksgeist*. Although Herder’s philosophy generally described cultural nationalism, there were political implications. As each group of people acquired a greater sense of commonality through appreciation of their language and history, they increasingly desired self-governance. In Germany and Italy, nationalism proved to be a unifying force, bringing together numerous small kingdoms and eventually consolidating them into stronger central nations. Nationalism was likewise embraced in imperial Russia as the tsars worked to unite their large mixed population into a single people. In contrast, nationalism threatened the Austrian Empire because, as various ethnic groups acquired their own sense of national consciousness, they longed to secede from the empire to form independent nations.

**Austrian Empire**

Throughout his political career, Metternich strove to maintain the absolute monarchy of the multinational Austrian Empire. In his role as foreign prime minister under Francis I (r. 1804–1835) and Ferdinand I (r. 1835–1848), Metternich defended the principles of conservatism. The Austrian Empire was inhabited by numerous peoples, including Germans, Magyars (Hungarians), Poles, Ruthenians (Ukrainians), Czechs, Slovaks, Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, as well as many others. Metternich was afraid that these groups might begin to form national identities, a development which would inevitably destroy the empire. Metternich strongly opposed parliamentary governments, believing that they provided a forum for national groups to consolidate power and ultimately fight against their Hapsburg rulers. Despite Metternich’s efforts, nationalism was a rising force that could not easily be snuffed out. Nationalism emerged among many of the subject nationalities, including the Czechs in Bohemia and several southern Slavic groups, such as the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.

The rise of Hungarian nationalism posed the greatest threat to Hapsburg imperial power. The Magyars formed one of the most populous and powerful regions in the empire. Between 1825 and 1848, the Magyars struggled to establish several cultural reforms, such as making Hungarian one of the new official imperial languages, replacing the outdated Latin. One of the most important early leaders of Hungarian nationalism was Stephan Széchenyi (1791–1860), a wealthy landowner and modernist. He worked tirelessly to promote Magyar culture and create a strong Hungarian economy. Széchenyi did not, however, actively seek Hungarian independence. That was left to more radical nationalists, such as the fiery journalist Lajos Kossuth (1802–1894), who served as governor-president during the Hungarian Revolution of 1848. Radical nationalists became increasingly vocal in their demand...
for Hungarian independence and eventually forced the Austrian Empire to create the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary (1867–1918).

**German Confederation**

In 1815, the Congress of Vienna created the German Confederation. The Austrian Empire was the largest and most powerful nation in the confederation and the Austrian emperor acted as its permanent president. While each state remained independent in principle, Metternich was able to use the confederation to block the spread of liberal and nationalist ideas throughout the region. The second-largest German state, Prussia, generally accepted its position as junior partner to Austria, but not so in regard to nationalism. Prussia wanted to bring about a commercial integration of the German states. In 1819, Prussia signed numerous treaties that reduced tariffs and other barriers to trade with neighboring German states. That same year, a coalition of German states formed the Zollverein, or German Customs Union, which managed the customs and economic policies of its member states. By 1834, it included almost every German state, with the exception of the Austrian Empire. As the economic strength of the Zollverein grew, it exasperated the political rivalry between Prussia and Austria for dominance in central Europe.

The German Confederation was established by conservatives who hoped to maintain their political policies without any significant opposition. Conservatives soon found themselves threatened by university students inspired by liberal and nationalist ideals. At many German universities, students formed *burschenschaften*, or student associations, which sought to replace provincial loyalties with the liberal notion of a unified German nation. In 1817, a *burschenschaft* at the University of Jana staged a celebration of the 300th anniversary of Martin Luther’s posting of Ninety-five Theses, the event which sparked the Reformation, and the fourth anniversary of the Battle of Leipzig, one of the most decisive defeats suffered by Napoleon. The students met at Wartburg Castle, where Martin Luther had translated the Bible into German, and the celebration included bonfires, songs, and parades. It was attended by more than 500 people. Although the event was wholly peaceful, the gathering unnerved German rulers who were wary of the liberal ideals espoused by the students. In 1819, Karl Sand, a Jana University student and *burschenschaft* member, murdered the conservative dramatist August von Kotzebue for ridiculing the student organization. Sand was tried and executed, instantly becoming a martyr to German nationalists. In response, Metternich and other German princes issued the Carlsbad Decrees, which restricted academic freedom and outlawed the *burschenschaften*. The voices of liberalism and nationalism were suppressed in the German states for a time, but ultimately could not be destroyed. By 1871, the German states had united under the leadership of Prussia, while the fading Austrian Empire became increasingly isolated in central Europe.

**Italy**

In 1800–1814, Napoleon controlled the Italian peninsula. Following the Congress of Vienna, the region became another bastion of Austrian power and influence. The Congress of Vienna had granted Austria the northern Italian kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia, and relatives of the Austrian emperor ruled over Parma, Modena, and Tuscany. In the French Bourbon Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, an Austrian
archduchess reigned as queen and helped spread conservative political policies throughout southern Italy. As elsewhere in Europe, Metternich and later Austrian politicians advocated conservatism and fought against liberal reactionary rule. For many native Italians, however, the Austrian rulers were viewed as little more than foreign dictators.

The only northern Italian state that Austria did not in some way control was the kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont, ruled by the Italian House of Savoy. The kingdom had been conquered by Napoleon in 1796 and the realm reconstituted by the Congress of Vienna. Its ruler, Victor Emmanuel I of Sardinia-Piedmont (r. 1802–1821), was committed to reactionary policies and hostile to everything French. He abolished the reforms passed by Napoleon, including freedom of religion and the Napoleonic civil and criminal codes. His reign was fiercely oppressive, and the king refused to accept any constitutional limits to his power. He was considered a tyrant by many Italians who hoped to form a unified Italian state.

The Italian states harbored several secret societies dedicated to radical ideas. Many Italians had enjoyed the modern French style of government, and were dismayed by the return of the ancient regimes. Some radicals hoped to create a unified Italian peninsula with a liberal constitutional government. One of the most active radical groups was the Carbonari, or charcoal burners, who hoped to free Italy from both the Austrians and the Italian princes. In 1820–1821 and again in 1831, the Carbonari led abortive revolts. The failure of these revolts ultimately discredited the Carbonari and paved the way for the rise of new radical organizations. In 1831, Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872), the leader of a radical group known as Young Italy, became the leading revolutionary in Italy. Mazzini’s goals were the same as those of the Carbonari: to end Austrian dominance in Italian affairs, overthrow Italian tyrants, and unite Italy as a liberal and democratic republic. Mazzini was assisted by many zealous followers, including Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807–1882). Together, they led repeated revolts against the conservative rulers.

**Russia**

At the beginning of his reign, Tsar Alexander I was interested in reforming the outdated centralized systems of the Russian government and gathered together a group of young and enthusiastic liberals to serve as advisers. In 1808, Mikhail Speransky (1772–1839), popularly known as the “father of Russian liberalism,” became the tsar’s closest adviser. Speransky drafted a proposal for a constitutional government that included an elected legislative body. On the surface, Alexander I appeared to approve of Speransky’s reforms, but in reality few changes were put into effect. The reformer-adviser also proposed the gradual abolition of serfdom, a project that ultimately proved too liberal for Alexander I. In the grand tradition of Russian tsars, Alexander I’s reign was spent engaging in the never-ending quest for territorial expansion. In 1801, he conquered part of northwestern Persia and annexed the Caucasus state of Georgia. The tsar also took advantage of European distraction during the Napoleonic Wars to expand into western Europe. In 1809, Russia annexed Finland after a successful war with Sweden. In 1812, Russia took control of a prosperous agricultural region known as Bessarabia, located in modern Romania. The Congress of Vienna confirmed these gains in 1815 and granted Russia additional territory in Poland.
Alexander I died on December 1, 1825, without a direct heir, and so citizens in St. Petersburg proclaimed his brother, the Grand Duke Constantine (1779–1831), the new emperor. His reign was short lived, however, as the duke chose to abdicate the throne in favor of another brother, Nicholas I (r. 1825–1855). As news of the succession became public, reactionaries attempted to persuade regional leaders to refuse to swear allegiance to the new tsar. On December 14, 1825, a group of young liberal army officers staged a revolt in St. Petersburg. The leaders of the Decembrist Revolt called for immediate reforms, including a liberal constitution and the abolition of serfdom. The rebels were defeated two weeks later and their leaders executed or exiled to Siberia. Though their revolt failed, the Decembrists served as an inspiration for later Russian radicals. For the rest of his life, Nicholas I remained utterly terrified of revolutionaries. He established a secret police under his direct control in which to root out revolutionaries and suspected revolutionaries.

An autocracy is a government headed by one person who wields absolute power. Nicholas I was one of the most autocratic rulers of the nineteenth century, as well as one of the most reactionary rulers in Russian history. Although he recognized that economic growth and social improvement required reform, he refused to embrace virtually any change to the status quo. His reactionary tendencies drove him to create a program called Official Nationality, whose slogan was “orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationalism.” Accordingly, the Russian Orthodox Church worked very closely with the secular government to control Russian schools and universities. Young Russians were provided with a strict moral education and expected to shun social mobility. Meanwhile, political propagandists celebrated the autocratic rules of tsars such as Peter the Great (r. 1682–1725) and Catherine the Great (r. 1762–1796) and suggested that it was under autocratic rulers that Russia most prospered. Unlike Metternich, Nicholas I embraced nationalism, seeing it as a way to glorify Russia. Official Nationality programs encouraged Russians to view their religion, language, and customs as distinct from and superior to those of western Europe. Russian nationalism led to discrimination against members of the non-Russian nationalities and led to a policy of **Russification**, which was designed to compel all citizens to adopt a national Russian culture and forget regional differences among different groups.

In a few cases, Nicholas I proved amenable to much needed reforms. In 1833, for instance, he commanded the state finances to be reorganized and authorized Mikhail Speransky to codify Russian law. However, improving the quality of life for serfs was the one reform that Nicholas I refused to consider. Over 90 percent of Russians were serfs, peasants who enjoyed virtually no personal freedom and lived in abject poverty. Cries for the abolishment of serfdom grew increasingly loud, and they resulted in more than 700 serf uprisings during Nicholas I’s reign. Nicholas I’s son and heir, Alexander II (r. 1855–1881), was given the moniker of “the liberator” when he finally agreed to abolish serfdom in 1861.

Russia was shielded from most of the revolutionary turmoil that affected Europe in the 1830s and 1840s, but not all of it. In 1830, Nicholas I sought to intervene in revolutions in France and Belgium, but soon was distracted by a revolt in Poland. Russia had accepted the decision of the Congress of Vienna to create the Congress of Poland, establishing a limited degree of Polish autonomy while installing Nicholas I
as the country’s king. In November 1830, as news of French and Belgian revolutions reached Poland, a small uprising began in Warsaw. Discontent soldiers and idealistic students soon spread the revolt throughout Poland and deposed of Nicholas I as king. In response, the tsar sent Russian troops to quell the uprising and arrest the leaders. In 1832, Nicholas issued the Organic Statute, making Poland an integral part of the Russian Empire, suspending the Polish constitution, and initiating a policy of Russification in Poland. Despite reoccurring serf uprisings, Russia remained sufficiently stable throughout the 1840s to allow Nicholas I to provide assistance to Austria to suppress the Hungarian revolt of 1849.

**Conservatism and Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century**

Between 1815 and 1848, Europe witnessed the rise of several doctrines, many of which remain vibrant movements to this day. The term liberalism was first used in 1818, while radicalism was introduced in 1820. Terms such as socialism, conservatism, individualism, constitutionalism, humanitarianism, feminism, and monarchism all appeared in the 1830s. Nationalism and communism date to the 1840s, and capitalism was first used in the early 1850s. The ideas behind these “isms” often stretched to the far past, but it was only in the first half of the nineteenth century that people began to systematically organize their ideas.

The political rivalry between liberalism and conservatism first began in the early nineteenth century and has continued into the present day. Understanding the origins and original agendas of these two political doctrines is important, both for understanding historical events and for following current ones. In general, conservatives have always valued social stability and sought to moderate the pace of change to preserve that stability. Liberals, on the other hand, have historically been open to more rapid change and have valued the protection of political and civil liberties more than social stability. Surprisingly, however, some classical liberal ideas have been adopted by modern conservatives; limited government intervention, for instance, was initially an idea favored by classical liberals. Likewise, some classical conservative ideas are now championed by modern liberals; for example, the first welfare programs were initiated by classical conservatives in the nineteenth century. Both liberals and conservatives shared deep humanitarian concerns in the nineteenth century, and proponents of both philosophies worked together to help outlaw torture and slavery in that era and to dramatically improve the conditions in prisons, hospitals, asylums, and orphanages.

From 1814 to 1848, conservatives dominated the political scene in most European countries. Conservative political philosophy insisted that a nation’s historical institutions should be subjected to very gradual adaptations and not abandoned in sudden revolution. Most conservatives wanted to protect upper class institutions, such as the monarchy, the church, and the aristocracy, and opposed the representative governments sought by liberal groups. However, the concerns voiced by continental conservatives were occasionally opposed by Great Britain, whose representative government was already well-established. Despite some interest among conservatives in creating a permanent international body of government,
national interests remained critical political forces. Economically, conservatives advocated laissez-faire policies, which discourage government intervention. In most other areas, conservatives embraced the occasional use of government intervention to preserve the traditions and mores within each society.

Classical liberalism was based on the philosophies of the Enlightenment, which promoted reason, progress, and individual rights. Its primarily supporters were middle class property owners. Politically, liberals favored the social contract theory of limited government advocated by John Locke and the French revolutionaries. They supported constitutions and the formation of parliamentary bodies. Liberalism was a critical component during the early stages of the original French Revolution and can be seen in the establishment of the constitutional monarchy and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, which serves as its basic foundational document. Liberals hoped that a more limited government would lead to religious tolerance, allowing each individual to follow his or her own belief system without discrimination. Liberals also promoted the expansion of individual rights, such as the right to life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness. Their constitutions included such provisions as the freedom of speech and the press, equality under the law, and freedom from arbitrary arrest and imprisonment. Liberals were not necessarily democrats, however, and many opposed universal male suffrage because they feared the excesses of mob rule. They generally disapproved of labor unions and were strongly in favor of protecting private property. Economically, liberals favored policies in line with Adam Smith’s newly created theory of capitalism.

The European government that liberals most admired was the British system of constitutional monarchy. In this system, the power of the monarchy was limited, and the prime minister and other cabinet ministers were responsible to Parliament. Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), one of the most important British champions of liberalism, articulated what he viewed as the potential value of the British system by developing a philosophy known as utilitarianism. In this philosophy, “good” was defined as that which provides pleasure and “evil” as that which causes pain. According to Bentham, the purpose of government was to promote the “greatest good for the greatest number,” and he felt the British system was best-suited to do that. Bentham supported the separation of church and state, women’s rights, and an end to slavery.

Utilitarianism was also the philosophy behind the works of John Stuart Mill (1806–1873). His most famous treatise, On Liberty, published in 1859, remains one of the most elegant defenses of freedom of expression and the dangers of the “tyranny of the majority” ever written. Like Bentham, Mill was an early supporter of feminism. Mill collaborated with his wife, Harriet Taylor, to write important works on the social, legal, and political inequalities faced by women in European society. Their most famous collaboration, The Subjugation of Women, was published in 1869 and the couple appeared before Parliament to promote female suffrage. As the decades passed, many of these social agendas would be promoted and accepted by conservatives and liberals alike.

Extensions
- Read Metternich’s speech “Of the Necessity of the Censorship of the Press.” Provide three justifications that he gives for limiting freedom of expression and the press.
**Summary**

The age of Metternich (1815–1848) was a period in European history dominated by the conservative political philosophy of leaders like the Austrian foreign minister Klemens von Metternich, Russian tsars Alexander I and Nicholas I, Prussian prince Karl von Hardenburg, British foreign secretary Robert Castlereagh, and many others. These leaders believed that European society required the reestablishment of “legitimate” governments and attempted to subdue violent revolutionary movements. Europe’s “great nations” agreed to meet on a regular basis to discuss issues of mutual concern. Ultimately, however, the growth of international institutions was blocked by the individual interests of each sovereign state. Throughout the nineteenth century, conservatism would battle against liberal ideas, particularly nationalism. In states such as Germany, Italy, and Russia, nationalism was believed to be a useful policy for uniting people under a common cause. In the Austrian Empire, by contrast, nationalism was fiercely repressed as a dangerous threat to imperial power.

**Looking Ahead**

While the conservative elite dominated European politics in the first half of the nineteenth century, European writers, painters, and musicians ushered in a complex artistic movement known as romanticism. The Romantic movement was an artistic reaction against the scientific rationalization of nature that had characterized the Enlightenment. The champions of romanticism emphasized emotion, untamed nature, and spontaneity. Visual arts typically included natural landscapes and emotion-provoking images, incorporating both medieval and contemporary scenes. Its writers, which included the poet John Keats and the novelist Victor Hugo, worked diligently to both evoke and criticize the past. Perhaps the most well known and enduring products of the Romantic movement are the musical compositions of classical composers, such as Beethoven, Brahms, and Chopin, whose masterpieces continue to be played by symphony orchestras around the world.

**SELF-CHECK ANSWERS**

1. During the Congress of Vienna, Prussia and Russia secretly planned to take all of Saxony and Poland without consulting the other nations. The plan was exposed by the representative Talleyrand, who formed an alliance with Great Britain and the Austrian Empire.

2. Napoleon escaped from Elba, re-proclaimed himself emperor, gathered a French army, and marched on Belgium. His campaign ended at Waterloo; he was then exiled to the remote island of St. Helena, where he spent his final days.

3. The great powers wanted piracy suppressed, but only the British possessed a large enough fleet. Continental nations refused to use the British navy, fearing it would threaten the freedom of the seas. Britain refused to allow its navy to be used by an international body.

4. Edmund Burke

5. Karl Sand

6. St. Petersburg, Russia

7. The British constitutional monarchy
The Romantic Movement

Essential Questions

• How did the Romantic movement differ from classicism?
• Who were the primary Romantic writers, painters, and composers?
Set the Stage

In the first half of the nineteenth century, art experienced profound changes that corresponded with the many political and social upheavals of the period. The Romantic movement challenged the established standards of classicism, which called for order and restraint in art. In contrast, the Romantics believed that art based upon emotion and a deep appreciation of the natural world could help individuals reach their full potential. The Romantic movement revolutionized music, literature, and painting, and its influence was felt for generations. New literary voices like Goethe’s, Wordsworth’s, and Hugo’s offered unrestrained, passionate dramas, stories, and poems, while Delacroix, Constable, and Goya moved patrons with their dynamic use of the paintbrush. Music saw the unbridled enthusiasm of such masters as Beethoven, Wagner, and Verdi. All of these artists, and many more, rejected the old classicist forms and adopted dynamic, fiery modes of expression that resonated throughout Europe and the world.

The Romantic Movement

Just as dynamic political change swept across Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century, radical new ideas in literature and the arts also emerged on the continent. The Romantic movement strongly influenced European culture and left its impression upon artists and writers for decades to come. The creative energy of Europe was galvanized in its rejection of the order and restraint associated with the Enlightenment and its embrace of passion, emotion, faith, and spontaneity. The movement was already half a century old when the word romanticism first appeared in England in the 1840s.

Classicism had acted as the artistic component of rationalist Enlightenment thinking. From the Enlightenment’s emphasis on reason, restraint, and order came artistic standards based upon the supposedly perfected art forms of ancient Rome and Greece. These ancient artists, so the classicists said, had discovered everlasting valid aesthetic standards that modern artists should emulate. Classicists dominated the academies and courts of early nineteenth-century Europe and were able to insist on this mode of artistic expression.

By contrast, emotional exuberance characterized romanticism. Romantic writers, artists, and composers rejected reason and order and looked for inspiration in feelings and intuition, belief, and imagination. Early German Romantics in the 1770s and 1780s called themselves Sturm und Drang (“Storm and Stress”) artists. Powerful, often transitory emotions dictated their decisions and dominated their worldview. These Romantic artists led passionate, intense lives that were often punctuated with tragedy. Suicide, duels to the death, strange sicknesses, and madness were not uncommon. In rejection of social mores, Romantic artists often wore their hair long and unkempt rather than wearing traditional powdered wigs. They preferred the squalor of cold garrets to the opulence of
drawing rooms as a way of rejecting materialism, and they viewed art as a way to embrace spiritual truths that money or status could not offer.

To the Romantics, the development of one’s own potential was the paramount goal of life. At the same time, many Romantics rejected the optimistic, Enlightenment notion that humans and human society could be perfected. The Romantics also stressed each person’s value and the importance of personal freedom. Romantic artists shared Rousseau’s belief that emotions—feeling and passion—gave birth to the creative process. They rejected the analytical study of nature that was the hallmark of philosophy and instead embraced intuition, which drew instead upon the wonders and mystery of the natural world. The political concept of nationalism resonated with the Romantics, as it represented both positive future change and a sense of continuity with the past. Religion found a natural ally in the Romantic movement. A religious revival coincided with the rise of romanticism, and the emphasis of both on mysticism, faith, and emotion found many common adherents. Rather than the Enlightenment’s stress on collective human achievement, Romantics lauded the unique individual. They championed men like Napoleon and Beethoven, powerful figures who shook the world with their genius and talent. There was a universe of limitless possibilities that drove the Romantics. They yearned to discern those things on the distant horizons of knowledge, and they believed that the quest to understand was itself a powerful reward.

Classicism’s rigid rules of artistic expression stifled Romantic notions of creativity. Romanticism’s rebellion against classicism’s inflexibility is underlined by their differing conceptions of the natural world. Classicists tended to see nature as beautiful and chaste, but mostly irrelevant to larger human questions. Samuel Johnson, an English writer of the classicist school, offered, “A blade of grass is always a blade of grass; men and women are my subjects of inquiry.” In contrast, the Romantics viewed nature as wondrous and enchanting. Théodore Géricault’s painting *The Raft of the Medusa* illustrates shipwrecked survivors desperately clinging to their raft amid a violent sea. The painting portrays nature as awesome and passionate, itself a character of the study. Nature served also as a source of inspiration and spiritual motivation for the Romantics. John Constable, the famed English landscape artist, stated, “Nature is Spirit visible.”

The growth of industry was troubling to most Romantics, who saw its spread as an attack upon both adored nature and human individualism. Areas as yet untouched by industry were venerated and visited. Romantics, for instance,
treasured the serene Lake District of northern England and the hauntingly strange wilds of North Africa. Similarly, the Middle Ages became idealized for its close community with nature. At the same time, some Romantics found industrialization itself exotic, the vast and powerful movement of the industrial landscape resonating in the creative breast. The great fires generated by ironworks echoed those of hell, and the entire industrial machine seemed a human incarnation of a satanic system. John Martin’s 1850 painting, *The Great Day of His Wrath*, dramatically presents the Last Judgment from the Book of Revelations. The painting presents the modern world being destroyed through some unknown disaster. Great black clouds swirl over a sea of fire while unfortunate souls prepare for judgment in the foreground. Martin’s’ nighttime visit through the “black country” of England’s industrial midlands inspired his Romantic masterpiece.

The Romantic movement had a healthy respect for the past and for the emotional bonds that linked generations. While the eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers viewed history as emotionless and inert, for the Romantics, history represented the art of social and technological change over the centuries. Romantics therefore thought of history as dynamic, exciting, and attractive. Particularly interesting and present in their works was the Middle Ages, with its emphasis on faith, religion, and the courage of the individual.
Many experiences a virtual golden age during the late eighteenth century. Two of the greatest writers of the period were Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) and Friedrich von Schiller (1759–1805). The ideals of romanticism permeated their works. Born in Frankfurt, Goethe settled in Weimar, a major cultural mecca in Germany during the Sturm und Drang period, in 1775. Lost love and suicide constitute the major themes of his 1774 novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. *Faust*, Goethe's masterpiece, retold the time-honored German story of a man who sold his soul to Satan for temporal delights. Goethe published part one of *Faust* in 1790 and completed the work in 1831, only a year before his death.

Schiller, Goethe's friend and rival, made Weimar his home, as well. Schiller's idealism and faith in human freedom found their greatest expression in his dramatic works. His 1781 work *Die Räuber* (*The Robbers*) was a scathing attack against tyrannical government. Mary, Queen of Scots, Joan of Arc, General Wallenstein of the Thirty Years' War, and Swiss freedom fighter William Tell also featured prominently as the heroes of Schiller's work.

Jacob (1785–1863) and Wilhelm (1786–1859) Grimm mined Germany's past for folktales. They collected and wrote these cultural stories in the Romantic tradition and published them as *Grimm's Fairy Tales* (1812–1815). This collection highlighted Germany's fanciful tales and included early versions of “Snow White” and “Rumpelstiltskin.” Another influential German writer of the period was Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), an important figure of the Young Germany movement. The young and experimental German writers of this movement generally considered themselves apolitical, but their works were banned in certain areas for being too nationalistic. The Romantic belief in the essential value of individual human experiences played a central role in Heine's lyrical poetry, which included the 1827 *Buch der Lieder* (*Book of Songs*), one of many collections of his poetry.

Britain also played a leading part in romanticism's literary development as British poets and writers of prose became towering figures whose influence spread across the continent. One such figure was William Wordsworth (1770–1850), who traveled to France after his graduation from Cambridge. While there he studied the works of Rousseau and the radical ideas of early French revolutionary thinkers, fell in love with a French woman, and became a father. The French Revolution and subsequent wars drove Wordsworth to hold more conservative views as time passed, and he moved back to England, where, with his sister Dorothy, he soon made a home in the English countryside. Nearby lived his friend and collaborator, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834), and together the poets published their *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. The collection included Wordsworth's famous poem "Tintern Abbey" and became one of the most influential works in English literary history. The poets' abandonment of extravagant poetic conventions and their embrace of common everyday speech marked their groundbreaking style. They presented subjects such as leaves or the wind as majestic. Critics first ignored and then denounced Wordsworth's and Coleridge's rejection of classical poetic rules.
By 1830, however, the style was accepted and the poets lauded. Wordsworth’s “Daffodils” is a striking example of the poet’s literary genius and an expression of Romantic values:

I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o’er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine  
And twinkle on the Milky Way,  
They stretched in never-ending line  
Along the margin of a bay;  
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,  
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced, but they  
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:  
A poet could not but be gay,  
In such a jocund company:  
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought  
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.

The simplicity of the piece helps focus reader attention on the speaker’s fondness for nature. Wordsworth casts nature as a character that can inspire, instruct, elevate, and influence. This powerful view of nature was rooted in Romantic principles. Wordsworth conceived of poetry as overpowering emotion later recalled from a position of serenity. The last stanza demonstrates this view.

Just as Wordsworth was inspired by nature, Coleridge found inspiration from the exotic and mysterious. Coleridge’s major contribution to Lyrical Ballads was his *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. In this solemn story, a sailor labors under a curse brought about by the murder of an albatross. Similar mystical themes permeate Coleridge’s later poetry, in works such as *Christabel* and *Kubla Kahn*.

Three other English poets of the Romantic period created brilliant, emotional poetry during their brief lives. Lord Byron (1788–1824), Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), and John Keats (1795–1821) all wrote stunning and powerful literary works that profoundly shaped the course of romanticism. Byron was the most popular English poet from the period, and his works include *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1812–1818), *The Prisoner of Chillon* (1816), and *Don Juan* (1819–1824).
Aeschylus’s “Prometheus Bound” proved the inspiration for Shelley’s play *Prometheus Unbound* (1820). In this excerpt, the speaker, Prometheus, a symbol of man’s goodness, battles Jupiter, a representation of evil and oppression:

*I hear a sound of voices: not the voice*  
*Which I gave forth. Mother, thy sons and thou*  
*Scorn him, without whose all-enduring will*  
*Beneath the fierce omnipotence of Jove,*  
*Both they and thou had vanished, like thin mist*  
*Unrolled on the morning wind. Know ye not me,*  
*The Titan? He who made his agony*  
*The barrier to your else all-conquering foe?*  
*Oh, rock-embosomed lawns, and snow-fed streams,*  
*Now seen athwart frore vapours, deep below,*  
*Through whose o’ershadowing woods I wandered once*  
*With Asia, drinking life from her loved eyes;*  
*Why scorns the spirit which informs ye, now*  
*To commune with me? me alone, who checked,*  
*As one who checks a fiend-drawn charioteer,*  
*The falsehood and the force of him who reigns*  
*Supreme, and with the groans of pining slaves*  
*Fills your dim glens and liquid wildernesses:*  
*Why answer ye not, still? Brethren!*

Keats’s poems are among the most beautiful in the English language. In 1820, he published *The Eve of St. Agnes* and “Ode on a Grecian Urn.” His “Ode to a Nightingale,” also published in 1820, conjures the themes of imagination and reality, immortality and mortality, and death and the fullness of life:

*My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains*  
*My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,*  
*Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains*  
*One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:*  
*‘Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,*  
*But being too happy in thine happiness,—*  
*That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,*  
*In some melodious plot*  
*Of beechen green and shadows numberless,*  
*Singest of summer in full-throated ease.*

*O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been*  
*Cool’d a long age in the deep-delved earth,*  
*Tasting of Flora and the country green,*  
*Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!*
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee! tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Cluster’d around by all her starry Fays;
But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets cover’d up in leaves;
And mid-May’s eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call’d him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad.
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

William Blake (1775–1827) was a skillful English painter, engraver, and poet of the period. His poems “The Tyger,” “The Lamb,” and “The Mental Traveler” all display his unique power of imagination and feeling coupled with a profound sense of the mystical. Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809–1892) and Robert Browning (1812–1889) are poets generally associated with the Victorian period, although their work is infused with Romantic elements. Tennyson’s 1859 work *Idylls of the King* illustrates the author’s attraction to the Middle Ages with a masterful rendition of the King Arthur tale. The Italian Renaissance is the setting for Robert Browning’s “My Last Duchess” (1842), one of his many dramatic monologues and verse dramas. Walter Scott (1771–1832) is perhaps the greatest British novelist of the Romantic period. His interest in the Middle Ages and his love for his native Scotland provided inspiration for over 30 historical novels, while Goethe and the German Romantic movement also influenced his work considerably. Scott’s stories admirably recreated the atmosphere of ages past and the excitement of pivotal events in history, with Scotland often serving as the centerpiece. Set in the twelfth century, his most popular novel, *Ivanhoe* (1820), tells the story of a Saxon knight whose loyalty is to King Richard the Lionhearted at the end of the Third Crusade.

French literature flourished during the Romantic period, as well. Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850) started out writing of the Middle Ages but soon found inspiration in the world around him. Many of his works deal with the lives of the French bourgeoisie in a gritty, realistic style. An expansive view of human character is
at the heart of his almost 100 novels and stories, collectively called *The Human Comedy*. Alexandre Dumas (1802–1870), whose father served as one of Napoleon’s generals, wrote swashbuckling tales, such as *The Three Musketeers* (1844) and *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1845). Victor Hugo, also the son of a general, developed a wide-ranging poetic style that blended language, imagery, and rhythm. Larger-than-life characters, exotic locations, and human passions are the hallmarks of Hugo’s compelling novels and stories, which echo the larger fascinations of the Romantic movement. A deformed bell ringer emerges as the protagonist in Hugo’s 1831 work *Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Perched atop the cathedral, Hugo describes Quasimodo as a “human gargoyle” who spies the people of fifteenth-century Paris below. Hugo’s rejection of his previous political conservatism and his embrace of literary, political, and social freedom was marked with his work *Hermani* (1830), in which he deliberately broke established dramatic convention. Hugo embraced realism for his 1862 novel *Les Misérables*, which told the gripping story of France’s poor and disenfranchised during the Paris student uprisings of 1830. Interestingly, where Wordsworth’s youthful radicalism evolved into a more mature caution, Hugo’s early conservatisn gave way to a middle age filled with liberal ideals.

In Russia, writers such as Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837) and Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852) had a profound impact on the Romantic movement, as well. Until Pushkin, most Russian writers wrote not in their native language but in Slavonic, the tongue of the Russian Orthodox Church. Pushkin’s great-grandfather had been a general under Tsar Peter the Great, and it was in Russia’s past that Pushkin found inspiration. Grand figures from Russian history served as the basis for his novels *Eugen Onegin* (1825–1831) and *Boris Godunov* (1831). Hailed as the father of realism in Russia, Gogol first gained acclaim by publishing stories of his Ukrainian childhood in the 1830s. His 1836 satirical play, *The Inspector-General*, became a source of controversy as it portrayed stupidity and corruption in the tsar’s government. After settling in Italy, Gogol wrote his scathing indictment of serfdom, *Dead Souls* (1842), which remains his most popular work.

**Painting**

Classicism dominated the early years of the nineteenth century and only gradually gave way to romanticism. The French painter Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825) rose to fame during the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era. His style was rooted in classicism, and he remained a central figure of that school even as younger, more dynamic Romantic artists appeared. Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863) channeled light and color in new ways to achieve strikingly bold effects. While classicism called for order and discipline, Delacroix’s works were flamboyant and unrestrained. His *The Massacre of Chios* illustrated Turkish brutality in the midst of the Greek war for independence. His *Liberty Leading the People* dramatically commemorated the 1830 French revolution in grand Romantic fashion. Liberty is portrayed by Marianne, the traditional symbol of France, as she leads fighters from all social classes in the cause of freedom.

Landscape artists offered unique new perspectives on the world and nature. France saw the rise of Camille Corot (1796–1875) and others from the Barbizon school, whose artists painted dramatic, romantic landscapes from around 1830 to 1870. J.M.W. Turner (1775–1851) and John Constable (1776–1837), two notable English Romantic painters,
found inspiration in the natural world and offered differing interpretations of nature. Their contrasting views of the environment highlighted the remarkable artistic variety within romanticism. Turner painted the forces of nature in all of their terror and beauty. His favorite studies usually dealt with shipwrecks and tumultuous storms. In contrast, Constable preferred the gentle landscapes of Wordsworth for his works, creations that depicted the comfort and peace of rural England. The Spanish painter Francisco Goya (1746–1828) made his mark in works depicting French violence during the Napoleonic occupation of Spain and with unflattering portraits of the corrupt Spanish Bourbons. His painting *The Third of May, 1808*, vividly portrays the horrors of the Peninsular War. We see only the backs of the dark, regimented French soldiers as they prepare to fire upon a group of helpless Spaniards. Several bodies lay slumped in the foreground with blood running red, while the central figure, clad in white and arms outstretched, is presented as Christ-like in his martyrdom.

**Music**

Perhaps the greatest outlet for the free expression and passionate intensity that the Romantics so valued was the era’s music. Like other artists, eighteenth-century composers were mired in highly structured and well-defined mediums, such as
the classical symphony. Calling upon a host of different musical forms, the Romantics created a striking new musical landscape that unleashed powerful emotions in listeners. To realize their grand dramatic vision, Romantic composers often required more and greater sound. Thus the size of the small classical orchestra was increased threefold by the Romantics, as wind and percussion instruments were added to augmented sections of strings and brass. Frédéric Chopin’s “revolutionary” étude used crashing chords to suggest the rush of the masses; Beethoven’s Third Symphony offered the unrelenting desolation of loss in its funeral march; Schumann’s Rhenish Symphony evoked the sober magnificence of religious traditions and events. Genuine human feeling was the product of these composers’ musical labors, and the striking new power and range of music elevated its importance in society and turned composers into celebrated artists. Traditionally, music had been for church services, and musicians were occasionally hired to play for the wealthy at meals. The achievements of the Romantics led to music being enjoyed in its own right as an art form comparable to painting and literature. Indeed, many soon considered music to be the greatest art form precisely because of its power to evoke the strongest emotions. Music was welcome in the grandest concert halls, and a great virtuoso who could command his listener to the heights or depths of human emotion was hailed as a cultural hero.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) was an important figure in the shift from classicism to romanticism. Beethoven expanded and shattered classical forms and created dramatic conflict in his music with contrasting tones and opposing themes. In this method, Beethoven was never surpassed. Born in Bonn, Germany, Beethoven made Vienna, Austria, his home from 1792 until his death. A variety of piano concertos, violin and piano sonatas, and string quartets; nine symphonies; one opera, Fidelio (1803–1805); and one mass, the Missa Solemnis (1818–1823), make up the body of his work. Germany produced several Romantic composers after Beethoven. Carl Maria von Weber (1786–1826) is generally recognized as the father of German Romantic opera. Der Freischutz (1821) and Oberon (1826) are the most popular of his 10 operas. Franz Schubert (1797–1828) combined the piano with voice to create more than 600 lieder, poems read with musical accompaniment. Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847) composed chamber and choral music, as well as various works for the piano and violin. Three of his five symphonies, the Scottish (1890–42), the Italian (1833), and the Reformation (1830–1832), stand out as his best-known works. Robert Schuman (1810–1856) likewise composed piano concertos and symphonies in the Romantic style. The works of Richard Wagner (1813–1883) represented the culmination of the
German Romantic movement in music. A passionate German nationalist and fiery anti-Semite, Wagner looked to German historical epics for inspiration. *The Ring of the Nibelung* encompassed four Wagnerian operas—*Das Rheingold, Die Walküre* (The Valkyries), *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung* (The Twilight of the Gods). These works premiered in Bayreuth, Germany, in 1876.

France’s greatest Romantic composer, Hector Berlioz (1803–1869), wrote the emotionally charged *Symphonie Fantastique*, which premiered upon the Paris stage in 1830. Italy provided two dynamic Romantic composers in the figures of Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901) and Giacomo Puccini (1858–1924). A prolific opera composer, Verdi’s best-known works are *Rigoletto* (1851), *La Traviata* (1853), *Il Trovatore* (1853), and *Aida* (1871). Puccini’s most popular work is *La Bohème* (1896). Many of his contemporaries considered Hungarian Franz Liszt (1811–1886) to be Europe’s greatest concert pianist. A prolific piano composer, Liszt looked to the folk musical traditions of Hungary for inspiration. Folk music also inspired Russian composer Mikhail Glinka (1804–1857) and the Polish Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849). Glinka, the first Russian composer from the nationalist school, is perhaps best known for his operas *A Little Life for the Czar* (1836) and *Russian and Ludmilla* (1842), the latter based on a Pushkin poem. Chopin’s artful piano compositions include the E minor (1833) and F minor (1836) concertos.

**Extensions**

- Read Percy Bysshe Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind” (1819). How does the author characterize forces of nature?
- View Francisco Goya’s *Yard with Lunatics* (1794). How does the painter use light and darkness to accentuate the impression of suffering and sadism?
- Listen to Richard Wagner’s “Ride of the Valkyries” (1870). How does the composer use strings and brass to creation an impression of awe and majesty?

**Summary**

Rejecting established classicist standards of artistic expression, the Romantics struck out in new and dynamic ways. This led to the creation of gripping poetry, stirring paintings, and inspiring compositions. The Romantic movement was nothing less than a revolution in the world of art that intensely influenced writers, painters, and musicians for decades to come.

The Romantics believed that emotion, not reason, was the key to the human experience. To this end, grand sensations, deep passions, and a general awareness of human feeling permeated their work. Beethoven did not seek to lift the intellect, but to assault the heart of the listener. Keats did not wish to studiously educate the reader in the science of plant life; he wished to stir the soul with visions of delicate flowers and majestic trees. Western culture owes a great debt to the Romantics and their view of an exciting, fearful, and emotive world.
Looking Ahead
The fires of nationalism and liberalism continued to spread throughout the hearts of Europeans as the nineteenth century progressed. German writers and philosophers, including Herder and Hegel, worked to refine their ideas of cultural nationalism with an eye toward eventual German unification. At the same time, Italian agitators like Mazzini and Garibaldi sought to throw off tyranny from Vienna and unite Italy. Spain experienced its own liberal and nationalist revolution when its restored king failed to live up to his constitutional pledges. Greece’s war of independence against the Ottoman Empire inspired Romantic artists and captured the imagination of Europe. The forces of liberalism and nationalism increasingly challenged the conservative status quo and offered both perils and promise for the people of Europe.

SELF-CHECK ANSWERS

1. A product of the Enlightenment, classicism advocated a precise, reasoned approach to the arts that was rooted in the ancient world and enforced by leaders of society in courts and the academies. The Romantic movement shattered this ideal with its emphasis on emotion, spontaneity, and individualism.

2. For his masterpiece Faust, Goethe looked back to a traditional German folktale. Schiller found inspiration in history, and some of his protagonists were major historical figures, such as Joan of Arc and Mary, Queen of Scots.

3. Though he initially held radical views and sympathized with the leaders of the French Revolution, William Wordsworth later found solace in the English countryside and adopted a more conservative outlook. By contrast, Victor Hugo started out as a conservative writer, but later equated artistic freedom with political freedom and became a radical.

4. Emerging from the eighteenth-century school of composition, Beethoven’s work became more and more emotive over time, shifting music away from classicism and securing his position as an early Romantic composer.
Nationalism and Revolution

Essential Questions
- How did nationalism spark revolutions in Greece, Spain, and Italy?
- How was the Spanish revolution tied to liberal aims?
- How were Romantic artists of the period affected by political turmoil?

Keywords
- Cortes
- pan-Slavism
- reactionary policies
- Young Italy
Set the Stage

Revolution proved to be the engine of nationalism in the nineteenth century and led to many European conflicts. The concept of the volksgeist, the cultural nationalism advocated by Herder, became increasingly politicized as Germans sought a politically unified nation based upon their language, history, and culture. Meanwhile, Greece sought independence from the Ottoman Empire, and a brutal war ensued. Some Romantic artists were so moved by the struggle of the Greeks that they quickly took up action. For instance, the poet Byron fought in the war, while the painter Delacroix offered a stunning masterwork commemorating an Ottoman massacre of the Greeks. The Italian states also agitated for unity and freedom from Austrian domination and found leaders in Mazzini and Garibaldi. Finally, Spanish liberals fought their reactionary king for constitutional liberties, but the intervention of foreign powers put an end to their hopes.

Nationalism and Revolution

Nationalism profoundly shaped nineteenth-century Europe, and its consequences are still felt today. An understanding of this combustible ideology is necessary to comprehend the vast turmoil and often explosive events that marked the century.

Nationalism is rooted in the concept that an individual’s primary loyalty is to one’s own nation because a person’s very identity is defined by his or her nationality. This belief existed to some extent for years before the beginning of the nineteenth century, and it found new and powerful support during the French Revolution. This period saw France’s levée en masse, a national scheme that called for the mass conscription of young men, and the subordination of all individuals and industry to the needs of France during wartime. This idea meant replacing older views that the village, the town, or the province was the primary object of an individual’s allegiance. Now it was the nation that trumped all other loyalties.

Cultural revival and the observance of tradition marked the starting point for most nationalist movements. Polyglot Germany, which consisted of many small polities, experienced an intense surge of cultural nationalism during the Napoleonic Wars. The Germans’ desire to see their traditional lands free of French occupation ignited a spark, a uniting purpose that greatly aided in the creation of a national identity. Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) coined the term volksgeist, or “spirit of the people” to help define his concept of the nation. Stressing German culture, Herder replaced the traditional idea of the state, understood until then as mainly a political and judicial entity, with the notion of a culturally organic nation centered on people and their artistic and linguistic traditions. Culturally, the German people celebrated their heritage through artists such as Beethoven and the Grimm brothers. Relying on emotion and spontaneity in his art, Beethoven created stirring symphonies and majestic
tones, while the Grimm brothers mined folklore and standardized historic Germanic tales. Nationalism would not be limited merely to cultural spheres, however, and it soon took on significant political implications. German philosopher Georg Hegel (1770–1831) celebrated the concept of the nation-state as the German peoples’ historic destiny. According to the concept of the dialectic, which Hegel promoted, one culturally or politically accepted idea represented a thesis when another opposing idea, or antithesis, appeared. Out of the clash of these two ideas, a third idea, or synthesis, emerged. For Hegel the whole process of human history was based upon this system and created a social evolution from slavery and despotism to liberal free government. Hegel’s concept convinced him that eventual German political unification was inevitable.

Secret nationalist societies were not uncommon in the conservative political atmosphere of reaction and repression following 1815. In Italy, nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872) joined the underground Carbonari movement, which sought to rid the Italian peninsula of Hapsburg influence. In 1831, he formed his own movement, Young Italy, aimed at creating a united Italian state. Young Italy influenced the creation of Young Europe in 1835, a more international organization that promoted the unification of nation-states and the independence of territories vying for greater autonomy. Mazzini also supported Young Germany, Young Poland, and Young Switzerland movements.

Nationalist traditions also flowered in eastern Europe. Slavic peoples such as the Serbs, Czechs, Poles, Croats, Slovaks, and others saw much in the idea of a united Slav state. Slavic intellectuals pointed to similarities in language and culture to justify this notion of nationalism. Between 1815 and 1850, various Slavic peoples revolted against imperial power and promoted the idea of pan-Slavism, but repeated failures against the Hapsburg and Ottoman Empires demonstrated their inability to achieve such a goal without help. Many pan-Slavs began looking to Russia for patronage, and soon Russia became known as the “protector of the Slavs.” Nationalists and liberals had much in common in the first half of the nineteenth century. Both placed emphasis on political equality and individual freedom, which both saw as concepts that were central pillars of any state.

The Young Europe Movement began in the 1830s and supported the unification or independence of European countries. Members called for “liberty, equality, and fraternity” for all mankind.

**Young Italy** a leading Italian nationalist group that was created by Mazzini in the aftermath of failed Carbonari revolts

**pan-Slavism** the belief that a large, united nation consisting of all the Slavic peoples throughout eastern Europe should exist
Nationalism gave rise to revolutions in the 1820s and 1830s in Greece, Portugal, Spain, and Sardinia. In 1821, Greece revolted against the Ottoman Empire in the hopes of gaining independence. Since ancient Greece had been the birthplace of democracy, this conflict captured the imagination of Europe’s liberals. Liberals regarded the contributions of the ancient Greeks in the progress of Western civilization with a sacred reverence and many acted upon their feelings. Lord Byron (1788–1824), the English Romantic poet, traveled to Greece to offer aid against the Ottomans. He died during the war, though it was a fever, not a bullet, that took his life.

In spite of centuries of foreign domination, the Greeks had remained a unified people thanks to their common language and the influence of the Greek Orthodox Church. This sense of national unity led to the creation of secret nationalist societies in the years leading up to the revolt in 1821. These movements found a passionate leader of Greek patriotism in a Russian army general of Greek origin, Alexander Ypsilanti. The Ottoman Turks proved ruthless in putting down this revolt, and by 1825 it looked as though they had almost completely crushed the rebels. By 1827, however, the European powers saw it in their interest to intervene, and Britain, France, and Russia organized a coordinated fleet to assist the revolutionaries by sea. In 1828, the Russians attacked Turkey over land. Finally, 1832 witnessed the birth of an independent Greece, but the new nation failed to live up to the high hopes of Europe’s liberals. Instead of an idealized liberal republic, Greece emerged as a monarchy with a Bavarian prince invited to rule. The Greek war for independence highlighted the “eastern question,” a major concern for European leaders: how would the increasing weakness and atrophy of the Ottoman Empire affect the balance of power in Europe? About the same time that Greece proclaimed its new state, the Ottomans granted independence to Serbia, which had strong ties to Russia. As the largest Slav state, Russia was seen to be the protector of all Slavic peoples throughout eastern Europe and championed the new Serbian nation. Russian power increased as the Ottoman Empire’s declined.

Rebellion fired up on the other side of the Mediterranean Sea as well. Following the French withdrawal from Spain in 1814, Ferdinand VII had been restored to
the throne. In 1812, the Cortes, the Spanish parliament, had created a liberal constitution while meeting in the unoccupied Spanish town of Cadiz. At the time of the restoration, Ferdinand agreed to recognize and follow this constitution. Yet soon after his restoration, Ferdinand tore up the document, harassed its liberal framers, and dissolved the Cortes. In 1820, as rebellions sprang up in Spain’s South American colonies, Ferdinand called upon the army to put them down. Soon, units within the army itself began to rebel against the monarch and were joined by Spain’s small but influential middle class. Fearing for his throne, Ferdinand agreed to reinstate the constitution to satisfy the rebels and end the conflict. The conservative powers of Europe, however, decided to intervene. Austria, Prussia, Russia, and France feared that successful revolution in Spain would breed similar movements in their own countries. Britain did not agree with such an interventionist policy. Content with their concept of “splendid isolation” from the continent, Britain was unwilling to commit its military to police actions. The 1822 Congress of Verona, a meeting between representatives from Austria, Russia, Prussia, and France, approved the intervention of a French army to support Ferdinand. With the backing of the French military, Ferdinand restored his absolute rule of Spain. Just next door, Portugal experienced a similar but less bloody rebellion as army officers sought to create a constitutional monarchy. John VI had escaped to Brazil during the Napoleonic Wars, and his absence offered Portuguese liberals hope for greater political gains. When John returned to Lisbon in 1821, he swore fidelity to the new constitution.

Italy remained in the control of the Austrian Hapsburgs in the years following 1815. Under Metternich, Austria’s policy in the region was conservative and reactionary, eager to root out any semblance of Italian nationalist sentiment. Imperial relatives ruled the Italian states of Parma, Modena, and Tuscany. The wife of the Bourbon king of the Two Sicilies was an Austrian archduchess. The Austrian Empire considered regions such as Lombardy and Venetia in northern Italy critical provinces, and Sardinia-Piedmont, a northern Italian kingdom, was ruled by Victor Emmanuel I (r. 1802–1821). Although not technically a part of the Austrian Empire, the House of Savoy shared and employed Metternich’s reactionary policies. Victor Emmanuel hated all things French and repealed reforms created during the French occupation of the kingdom. Freedom of religion, the Napoleonic code, and the criminal code were all abolished. Despite the reactionary policies of the regime, liberals and nationalists continued agitating for their political aims. The most dynamic group during the period following 1815 was the Carbonari (charcoal burners). A secret society committed to Italian unification, the Carbonari saw throwing off the Austrian yoke as essential to their aim. To this end, the Carbonari launched unsuccessful rebellions in 1820–1821 and in 1831.

The Carbonari lost their credibility after these failed uprisings and soon faded from the political scene. Picking up where the Carbonari left off, however,
Giuseppe Mazzini founded Young Italy in 1831 and appealed to those still hoping to see a united Italy. Mazzini soon became the central figure of the Italian nationalist movement and reiterated the main goals of the Carbonari: expel the Austrians from the peninsula, depose the Italian tyrants, and create a unified and liberal Italian republic. One of Mazzini’s best known supporters was Giuseppe Garibaldi. Together the two men led several abortive rebellions throughout Italy against the Austrians and the Italian princes.

The revolutions sweeping the continent had a profound influence on many Romantic artists. Eugene Delacroix’s outrage over the news of brutal Turkish repression against the Greeks on the island of Chios led to one of his best known and most striking works. The Massacre of Chios brilliantly portrays the horrors of April 1822, when the Turks murdered nearly 20,000 Greeks. The painting shows a barren, war-torn landscape surrounding a group of prisoners who wait fearfully for their execution. Though some critics responded adversely to the work, depictions like Delacroix’s inspired Romantic youth throughout Europe. After viewing John Constable’s The Hay Wain at the Salon of 1824, Delacroix actually reworked his painting, making the landscape background more vibrant and alive. The Massacre of Chios demonstrates Delacroix’s disgust at the slaughter perpetrated by the Sublime Porte, the Western diplomatic term for the Ottoman Empire, and serves as a denunciation of such genocide. With its bold use of light and vibrant colors, Delacroix’s work commented impressively upon the political landscape of the day, and it helped change the course of painting in the nineteenth century. Just over a century later, another artist and Delacroix admirer, sickened by a massacre committed during the Spanish Civil War, would offer the world his own artistic denunciation of mass slaughter. Pablo Picasso’s Guernica stands beside Delacroix’s The Massacre of Chios as a powerful reminder of mankind’s capacity for cruelty during wartime.

**Extensions**
- Read Herder’s Materials for the Philosophy of the History of Mankind. How does Herder define a nation?

**Summary**
Nationalism continued to have intense power throughout Europe in the decades after 1815, prompting conservatives throughout the continent into more and greater reactionary moves. In Germany, great minds like Herder and Hegel predicted the political condensation of their beloved fatherland, while in Italy Mazzini and Garibaldi led numerous unsuccessful revolutions aimed at Italian unification. Their movement, Young Italy, came into being only after the Carbonari proved themselves incapable of bringing about liberal and nationalist change. Spain saw its restored king, Ferdinand VII, reject a liberal constitution and face his own nationalist uprising. Only the intervention of the powers of Europe after the Congress of Verona allowed Ferdinand to crush the rebels and retain his throne. The Greek war for independence stirred Romantic artists with news of valiant Greek freedom
Herder’s concept of volksgeist called for German cultural unity, while Hegel saw in his dialectic model the certainty of German political unification.

Austria, France, Russia, and Prussia believed that a successful revolution in any European state could lead to more revolutions. Their intervention was designed to crush the revolution and secure the conservative order.

**Looking Ahead**

With the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, France was reestablished as a conservative monarchy determined to keep the forces of political and social opposition at bay. Napoleon’s downfall did not mark the total termination of revolutionary sentiment in France, however. For three decades, the fires of liberalism and nationalism continued to burn and occasionally exploded into revolutionary action. In 1830 and again in 1848, Parisians took to the barricades with the hope that their actions would create a more just and fair society. These revolutions would have far-reaching consequences, profoundly upset Europe’s conservative order, and see the emergence of new and dynamic figures committed to creating a better world.

**SELF-CHECK ANSWERS**

1. Herder’s concept of volksgeist called for German cultural unity, while Hegel saw in his dialectic model the certainty of German political unification.

2. Austria, France, Russia, and Prussia believed that a successful revolution in any European state could lead to more revolutions. Their intervention was designed to crush the revolution and secure the conservative order.
Essential Questions

• What were the hopes of the returning French aristocracy, and how were they at odds with gains made by the bourgeoisie?

• What factors led to the establishment of the July Monarchy, and why did this regime ultimately fail?

• How and why was the Second Republic created, and what were the primary political factions that dominated it?
**Set the Stage**

The French revolutionary and Napoleonic periods had completely reordered French society. By 1848, France had been without a king for nearly a quarter of a century, had experimented with various republican systems, and had even endured the military dictatorship of Napoleon Bonaparte. The Congress of Vienna had restored the Bourbon line to the throne of France and created a new conservative order dedicated to stamping out revolutionary sentiment throughout Europe. However, underneath the veneer of European order lurked profound unrest and dangerous new ideologies. In France, liberal sentiments were never completely crushed and lingered on in the hearts of the newly empowered bourgeoisie and working classes. The new French monarchy would have to deal with political issues only vaguely present during the reign of Louis XVI before the explosion of revolution.

**Revolutions in France**

Following the 1814 Treaty of Fontainebleau and Napoleon’s abdication as France’s emperor, the Bourbon dynasty was restored. This restoration period continued until 1830 and saw two kings sit upon the French throne: Louis XVIII and Charles X. Louis XVI, who had lost his head to the guillotine during the French Revolution, was the elder brother of both of these restoration monarchs. The murdered king’s son was regarded by Bourbon supporters as Louis XVII, although the young prince died in captivity in 1795, before he had a chance to assume the throne. The first restoration monarch, Louis XVIII (r. 1814–1824), recognized that the Old Regime could not be reconstituted exactly as it had existed before the French Revolution, and therefore advocated a moderate political course. France’s nobility had fled during the Revolution and now returned expecting the full restoration of their pre-Revolution rights and property. The middle class liberal bourgeoisie, which had benefited greatly from revolutionary and Napoleonic reforms, jealously guarded their new freedoms and prerogatives. In this political minefield the new king sought balance for all parties.

The post-Napoleonic constitution, the Charter of 1814, established a bicameral legislature. The upper house, the Chamber of Peers, was made up of monarchical appointees, while the lower house, the Chamber of Deputies, consisted of representatives who were elected based upon property qualifications. The charter recognized individual rights and freedoms. Although Roman Catholicism was recognized as the official state religion, freedom of religion was guaranteed by the charter. Not wishing a radical reorganization of law and society, the Napoleonic Code remained the basic law of France. Additionally, property redistribution, including land taken from the nobility and the church, was confirmed. The returning aristocracy, the reactionary ultraroyalists or émigrés, were naturally unhappy over being denied the return of their property and the generally moderate political stance of the charter. The king’s brother, the Count of Artois, led a particularly reactionary faction of émigrés that came to be

**aristocracy** the landed nobility that returned to France after Napoleon’s fall and wished restoration of their property

**émigré** French word for those aristocratic nobles that fled France during the French Revolution and returned after the fall of Napoleon
known simply as the ultras. The 1820 elections saw a major victory for the ultras in the Chamber of Deputies, and they began restricting civil liberties, limiting voting rights, and introducing severe censorship.

Obese and ill, Louis XVIII died in September 1824. As the king had no heirs, his brother, the Count of Artois, was crowned King Charles X (r. 1824–1830). The king soon became unpopular with the bourgeoisie for his meddling with government bonds. The middle classes held many bonds and expected large returns. Seeking money for aristocratic compensation for their confiscated lands, Charles reduced interest rates on the bonds from 5 percent to 3 percent. Additionally, the National Guard, which had been staffed largely by the bourgeoisie, was disbanded. In the elections of 1827, liberals and moderates won back the Chamber of Deputies and the king initially tried to work with them. By 1829, however, it was obvious their political goals were irreconcilable, and Charles X appointed Auguste-Jules-Armand-Marie de Polignac (1780–1847) as the new French premier. The liberals were enraged and won a clear majority in the Chamber of Deputies in the elections of May 1830. In fear of popular resentment and growing liberal political power, the king and Polignac issued the Four Ordinances. These decrees increased censorship of the press, disbanded the Chamber of Deputies, called for new elections, and further limited the electorate in the hopes of weakening the political opposition.

In reaction to these harsh and one-sided laws, the artisans and merchants of Paris, prompted by the bourgeoisie, struck out in open insurrection against the king. Fearing a repeat of the 1790s Reign of Terror, Charles X abdicated and fled to safety in Britain. The revolutionaries were torn as to what form of government they should create. Some believed that a republic should be established, while many liberals in the Chamber of Deputies called for a constitutional monarchy based on the British model. Charles Talleyrand (1754–1838), Adolphe Thiers (1797–1877), and François Guizot (1787–1874) were among the constitutional monarchists who quickly proclaimed the duke of Orléans, Louis Philippe, as France’s new king. Louis Philippe (r. 1830–1848) was often referred to as the “citizen king” and his reign as the “July Monarchy” after the month of his ascension to the throne. A cousin of Charles X, the new king was the son of Philippe Égalité, an aristocratic figure who initially embraced the French Revolution, though he was sent to the guillotine nevertheless. One of the reasons for Louis Philippe’s popularity was his carefully cultivated image as a friendly bourgeois figure. Rather than accepting the title “king of France,” Louis Philippe styled himself “king of the French,” an important distinction that further boosted his standing among France’s middle class populace. The white and gold colors of the Bourbon flag were replaced with the revolutionary tricolor of blue, white, and red. Roman Catholicism remained the overwhelming majority religion of France, but it ceased to be recognized as the state religion. The Charter of 1814 was tinkered with to expand the electorate, but high voter property qualifications remained, which continued to limit the number of parliament selected.

**Self-Check**

According to the Charter of 1814, how were the upper and lower houses of parliament selected?
of eligible voters. The primary goals of Louis Philippe and his government were to encourage prosperity, protect private property, and secure peace at home and abroad. In the 1830s, the historian Adolphe Thiers played a key role in government, often serving as prime minister to the king.

France continued its policy of high foreign tariffs under Louis Philippe. This was done to protect industrialists and factory owners from growing competition abroad. Great Britain was in the full flower of its industrial revolution at this time and offered an array of manufactured goods that threatened French industry. Additionally, tariffs on imported grain ensured protection for French farmers. Yet while the needs of the factory owners and farmers were looked after, poverty still reigned in France’s cities, though it elicited little notice from the king and his ministers. The years 1840 to 1848 saw the conservative François Guizot, the most prominent figure in the government, easing out Thiers. Abandoning Thiers’ moderation, Guizot’s policies tended to be much more arbitrary and autocratic. This prompted greater opposition to the July Monarchy, which only increased following a bad grain harvest in 1846 and an economic depression centered on industry the following year. So bad did the situation become that revolution broke out in February 1848. The revolutionaries overthrew Louis Philippe and established the Second Republic.

The causes for the 1848 revolution were many. Discontent lay in the shadows of a Europe seemingly tranquil under the post-1814 conservative order. Economic setbacks in the 1840s brought much of that discontent to the foreground. The lingering effects of the 1837 depression still haunted European industry well into the next decade, and the 1840s became known “the hungry forties.” Poor harvests increased the misery and discontent of Europe’s poor, and urban workers continued to experience poverty and back-breaking labor with little reward. It was not the workers and peasants who played the leading role in the revolution of 1848, however. Rather, middle class liberals from the cities were the dominating figures. Like liberals throughout the continent, the French revolutionaries agitated for a written constitution that would limit the power of the king, provide for truly representative elected parliaments, and assure clearly defined civil liberties. The Enlightenment and the French Revolution had popularized these ideals, and they pervaded liberal circles throughout Europe in the mid-nineteenth century. By 1848, French liberals were unique in their desire to completely rid themselves of the monarchy and establish a republic. Their experiments with constitutional monarchy, based upon the British model, had given way to even more radical change. French liberals were also unique in their call for universal male suffrage, which would do away with the practice of limiting the vote to property-qualified members of the middle class. Elsewhere in Europe, in places such as Germany, Austria, and Italy, the liberal cause was tied with the nationalist cause. Many Germans and Italians hoped to unify their respective nations under a liberal constitution. In the

Known as the July Monarch, Louis Philippe served as the last French king.
Austrian Empire, subject peoples like the Magyars of Hungary hoped to throw off the chains of Austrian domination and create their own independent and sovereign nations. France was already a sovereign nation, so French liberals did not share these concerns.

By early 1848, French discontent with Louis Philippe’s arbitrary rule approached the boiling point. Middle class opponents of the king and Guizot prepared to hold a large banquet on February 22. Fearing this event could generate further popular opposition to the regime, the government attempted to forbid the event. Spontaneous rioting followed and soon Paris was ablaze with revolution. The next day liberals demanded that Louis Philippe dismiss Guizot, and the king reluctantly agreed. The rioting continued to grow worse until February 24, when Louis Philippe abdicated the crown in the hopes of ending the violence. He fled to Great Britain. The Chamber of Deputies acted quickly to fill in the power vacuum left by the king’s abdication. They created a provisional government that soon established the Second Republic. Working to make the new republic a practical French government, two factions emerged within the provisional government. The first faction was made up of moderate republicans who saw the new government as a workable political instrument in and of itself. It was led by poet and politician Alphonse de Lamartine (1790–1869). The second faction was made up of socialists who saw the new republic as the means to an end—a true socialist society. This faction was led by Louis Blanc (1811–1882). Knowing that Blanc had considerable credibility among Parisian socialists and workers, the provisional government offered Blanc a key post to quell the unrest. Blanc was tasked with creating an organization of national workshops throughout France to combat unemployment. This system ultimately became a form of relief for the poor, rather than a true socialist scheme to put the power of industry in the hands of the workers.

Socialists and other radicals tended to dominate France’s cities, particularly Paris, Lyons, and Marseilles, while the French countryside and smaller towns remained fundamentally conservative in their political and economic outlook. A national assembly was required to draft a constitution for the new republic and elections were scheduled for April. The moderate republicans became the majority faction in a landslide vote. With a clear mandate from the French people and wary of socialist designs, the national republicans called for the termination of the national workshops. Workers in Paris did not take kindly to the notion of imminent unemployment, and once again riots broke out. The June Days Revolt, as it came to be known, lasted from June 23 to June 26 and saw bitter class fighting between radicals and the army under General Louis Cavaignac (1802–1857), who had been dispatched by the provisional government to put down the insurrection. The violent disturbance resulted in 10,000 radicals being killed and ensured the establishment of a moderate, not radical, republic.

By November 1848, the French National Assembly had finished its constitutional draft for the Second Republic. The constitution called for a president and a unicameral legislature. Property qualifications for voters were tossed out and universal male suffrage became the law of France, which widely expanded...
the electorate. The following month, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, the nephew of the French emperor, gained over 5 million votes and became the president of the Second Republic. For years, Louis Napoleon had been on the fringe of French politics, a somewhat comical, if well-meaning, figure. Yet the disturbances of 1848 and the promise of a new government led many to associate him with the grandeur, glory, and stability of France under his uncle. Easily forgotten were the privation, death, and misery of the Napoleonic Wars. Louis Napoleon’s opponents in the race included Lamartine, Cavaignac, and the socialist Alexandre Ledru-Rollin (1807–1876). Combined, they won fewer than 2 million votes. While Louis Napoleon had been elected president of the Second Republic, he secretly desired to recreate the imperial dictatorship of his uncle and began laying the groundwork for the Second French Empire.

Extensions
- Read Victor Hugo’s Les Misérables (1862). How does Hugo describe the revolutionary sentiments and actions of his protagonists in 1830?
- Read Jules Michelet’s Le Peuple (1846). What is the role of the French people in history, and how does he view the impact of the French Revolution?

Summary
After the abdication of Napoleon in 1814, the Bourbon dynasty was restored to the throne of France. Louis XVIII accepted the Napoleonic Code and the redistribution of land under the revolutionary and Napoleonic regimes. This angered many of the returning aristocrats, who had hoped to regain the property they lost during the French Revolution. After Louis XVIII’s death in 1824, his younger brother was crowned Charles X. Charles X lowered interest rates on government bonds and disbanded the National Guard, moves which alienated the French bourgeoisie. When Charles X issued unpopular and repressive legislation against liberals, Paris exploded into revolution. The revolution of 1830 saw the abdication of Charles X and the crowning of his cousin, Louis Philippe. In what came to be known as the July Monarchy, the new king ruled for 18 years and, although initially popular, eventually engaged in repressive measures. In 1848, after a decade of tough economic times, another revolution rocked the French capital. A provisional government was set up to create a new French republic. Moderate republicans and socialists both vied for leadership of the new government, with the moderate republicans eventually gaining a mandate from the French people. The year 1848 also saw the election of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, nephew of the emperor, as the new French president. Louis Napoleon soon set about laying the groundwork for his own dictatorship.

Looking Ahead
The 1848 revolution did not end on the streets of Paris. Insurrectionary movements soon appeared throughout the cities of Europe. Taking their cue from Paris, liberals and nationalists violently agitated against the conservative status quo and sought their own political aims. German liberals and nationalists gathered in
Frankfurt to create the basis for German unification. Vienna's revolution forced the emperor to abdicate and soon spread to inflame nationalists in Budapest, Prague, and throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Russia, curiously free from revolutionary outbreaks, offered military assistance to Austria. Italy also experienced a short-lived Roman Republic, which was crushed by France's Louis Napoleon Bonaparte.

**SELF-CHECK ANSWERS**

1. The upper house, the Chamber of Peers, was made up of representatives appointed by the king. The lower house, the Chamber of Deputies, was made up of representatives elected by property qualified voters.

2. High tariffs protected French industry and agriculture from cheaper, foreign manufactured goods and grain.

3. Within the French provisional government of 1848, the socialists, led by Louis Blanc, called for the creation of national workshops to combat unemployment. The system of national workshops ultimately became a form of relief for the poor rather than a system of empowering the working classes.
The Revolutions of 1848

**Essential Questions**

- What were the effects of the 1848 revolutions throughout the Austrian Empire, and how did the imperial government deal with the disturbances?
- How did the national assembly in Frankfurt seek to realize German nationalist ideals?
- How was Russia able to avert similar revolutions in its cities?

**Keywords**

- Congress System
- Junker
- robot
The Hungarians increasingly saw themselves as having their own unique national identity, and they were just one people among many in the polyglot empire who believed that they deserved to be able to form their own autonomous governments. In Germany, liberals and nationalists agitated for a united German nation that would recognize German language, culture, and history as its foundation. Throughout Europe, these forces waited for their moment to take bold action and achieve their aims. That moment arrived in early 1848.

The Revolutions of 1848
The year 1848 saw revolutions unleashed throughout Europe. Many of these attacks upon the established order failed to achieve their stated goals; nevertheless, the consequences of the revolutionaries’ actions cast long shadows over the continent for decades to come. This unprecedented outburst of revolution can be traced to three chief causes. First, liberals, who had been agitating for greater political freedom for years, felt that no significant gains had been made through legal or underground methods. Second, after the Congress of Vienna brusquely rejected the idea of national self-determination, nationalist thinkers and groups stepped up their efforts to overturn the conservative order. Finally, the urban working class and rural peasants experienced hard times in the years leading up to 1848. Agricultural productivity suffered so greatly that the decade was referred to as the “hungry ‘40s.” At the same time, industrialization meant factories required less manual labor and jobs became scarce. Each of these factors contributed to the violence that erupted in 1848.

The Austrian Empire, long the conservative watchdog of Europe, experienced its own revolution in that fateful year. The Austrian emperor, Ferdinand I (r. 1835–1848) had severe health and mental problems. Along with Klemens von Metternich, a triumvirate of Austrian notables ran the day-to-day business of the empire. As the Austrian foreign minister, Metternich had oversee the Congress of Vienna and the subsequent Congress System of the succeeding decades, yet this cooperation of conservative representatives of Europe’s monarchs proved unable to withstand the violent upheavals of 1848. When word arrived in Vienna of the February Revolution in France, the Austrian capital exploded into insurrection. March 13 saw students and workers lead rioting mobs in the streets. Fearing the wrath of the revolutionary rabble, Metternich
was forced to step down as foreign minister. He spent much of the next decade in exile in England and Belgium before returning to Austria to die in 1859. After Metternich’s dismissal, an Austrian constituent assembly convened and took up the task of drafting a constitution in July 1848. Perhaps the most significant act of the assembly was its elimination of the *robot*, the feudal system of serfdom and compulsory peasant labor. This led to the end of peasant revolutionary activity among the empire’s peasants. As the revolutionary furor began to burn itself out and instances of violence decreased, the Austrian government regained its confidence. By late October, imperial army units retook Vienna and began to reestablish the emperor’s control. Within a few weeks, a major figure of the government, Felix Schwarzenberg (1800–1852) negotiated the abdication of Ferdinand I. Ferdinand’s nephew, the 18-year-old Franz Joseph I (r. 1848–1916), was chosen to be his successor. Hoping for a clean break with conservative traditions and revolutionary events, the government stated that all of Ferdinand’s commitments were not binding upon the new emperor. Still hoping to reorganize the empire and accommodate nationalist sentiments, the constituent assembly called for decentralization of imperial authority and more autonomy for regions within the empire. It was hoped that this compromise might appeal to the empire’s nationalists and soften their desire for full independence. Schwarzenberg rejected the idea and instead offered his own blueprint for a more centralized Austrian system. Schwarzenberg’s constitution never went into effect, however. In the years immediately following the 1848 revolution, it was decided that Franz Joseph should have no checks to his rule, and therefore Schwarzenberg’s constitution was temporarily set aside before it could be implemented. By 1851, the constitution was officially and permanently suspended. Liberal and nationalist hopes were dashed as the pre-1848 system of imperial rule was restored and Vienna once again became the centralized powerhouse of the empire.

Austria dealt with significant unrest outside of Vienna, as well. Both Hungary and Bohemia (the western portion of today’s Czech Republic) experienced revolutions in 1848. Louis Kossuth (1802–1894), an extreme Magyar nationalist, demanded regional autonomy for Hungary on March 3, 1848. Inspired by the revolution in Paris, the Hungarian Diet had proclaimed Magyar liberty and
within a few weeks passed the March Laws. This new Hungarian legislation abolished serfdom and created a democratic parliament to replace the diet. With revolution in Vienna, the imperial government had no choice but to go along with the March Laws. In effect, this meant that Hungary was now only nominally part of the empire and acted, internally at least, more like a sovereign, independent nation. Revolution soon spread to Prague, the capital of Czech Bohemia, and soon the Austrian government began the process of mollifying radicals there. To that end, on April 8, 1848, the imperial government pledged a constituent assembly to serve the Czech people in the Kingdom of Bohemia. Additionally, the empire saw outbreaks of liberal and nationalist revolutionary action in Galicia, Moravia, Dalmatia, and Transylvania. Early June saw the meeting of the first Pan-Slav Congress in Prague. This assembly promoted Slav solidarity in the face of Austrian imperialism and called for independence for the empire’s subject peoples. On June 17, Field Marshal Alfred von Windisschgrätz (1787–1862), commanding units of the imperial military, violently put down the Czech rebellion and instituted military governorship of Bohemia. By autumn, the imperial military moved against the Hungarian revolutionaries, too. In a brilliant defense born of desperation, Kossuth led thousands of volunteers in a newly created Home Defense Army. This force was able to drive most of the Austrian army from Hungary. By April 1849, the Hungarian Diet was willing to make a total break with Vienna. The body declared Hungarian independence and established a republic. Kossuth was soon elected as the new nation’s first president. Fearing the far-reaching results of revolutionary successes, Tsar Nicholas I of Russia offered to reinforce the Austrian army. In June 1849, Emperor Franz Joseph I accepted the aid of his fellow monarch, and soon 10,000 Russian troops poured into Hungary. The combined Russo-Austrian force defeated the Hungarians at the Battle of Temesvar on August 9, 1849. Kossuth escaped to the Ottoman Empire and lived the rest of his life in exile.

By February 1848, revolution had also swept into the German states. Inspired by the revolution in Paris, Prussian liberals rioted in Berlin, in what came to be known as the March Days. The Prussian monarch Frederick William IV (r. 1840–1861) had consistently resisted reform or any form of power sharing with a democratic body. The riots compelled him to offer concessions like the elimination of censorship. The rioters pressed further, demanding a written constitution, and soon the king called for an assembly to begin drafting one. This assembly convened in May and continued to deliberate well into the fall. For

1

SELF-CHECK

What were the primary causes for the revolutions of 1848?

Louis Kossuth appears as the heroic revolutionary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848.
many German nationalists, the time had come to finally unify Germany into one state. In March, liberal nationalists from all over Germany decided to create a preliminary assembly specifically charged with working out the problems of German unification. The assembly, or Vorparlament, then called for a national assembly tasked with creating a constitution for a united Germany. On May 18, 1848, the German National Assembly, elected through universal male suffrage, met in Frankfurt. One major issue dealt with Austria: should German Austria be included in the new and united German state? Many German nationalists were loath to include Vienna’s polyglot empire of varying nationalities into their new Germany, and Austria was not about to part with the source of his strength. On the other side, many conservatives to the assembly favored not only including Austria, but inviting its emperor to be the new state’s monarch, as well. Liberals feared that the Hapsburgs would never accept a liberal constitution. This debate over a “small” vs. “large” Germany dragged on for some time, and it allowed conservatives the chance to reassert their influence after the revolutions. Ultimately, however, the anti-Austrian faction prevailed.

As the revolutionary fervor began to die out, Frederick William IV reasserted his own authority and actively suppressed radical sentiments in Prussia. Backed by his army, he dissolved Prussia’s constitutional assembly in December. He then declared a royal Prussian constitution that functioned until Germany’s collapse in 1918. This royal constitution provided for a bicameral parliament known as the Reichstag. The Prussian Junkers, an aristocratic land-owning class, dominated the upper house, while a complicated system of property requirement limited the numbers of people who could vote for representatives to serve in the lower house. A three-class voting regulation ensured that only the wealthiest 20 percent of voters elected two-thirds of the lower house representatives. Royal authority continued to be safeguarded as the king held veto power over any legislation and the authority to rule by decree and suspend civil liberties in times of crisis. The German National Assembly completed the drafting of a united German constitution in Frankfurt in March 1849. Having rejected the Austrian emperor as a suitable monarch, the representatives voted to offer the king of Prussia the imperial German crown. Frederick William IV, while willing to entertain the idea of being crowned emperor by his fellow German monarchs, soundly rejected the notion when it came from nationalists and liberals. In his words, he would not accept a “crown from the gutter.” Instead of imperial authority throughout Germany, Prussia looked to create a north German political federation that looked to Berlin for leadership. Fearing growing Prussian power, in November 1850, the Austrians forced Berlin to give up this project in what came to be known as the Humiliation of Olmütz. With this feather in their cap, the Austrians then worked to reconstruct the defunct German Confederation.

Italy was not spared profound revolutionary disturbances in 1848. These uprisings were directed against both the Italian princes and the Austrian domination. In February, Ferdinand II (r. 1830–1859), the Bourbon sovereign of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, was compelled to accept a constitution by liberal revolutionaries. Metternich’s fall from power in Vienna on March 13 sparked revolutionary rioting in Milan, Lombardy, which had been annexed to the
Austrian Empire along with Venetia at the Congress of Vienna. The revolt in Milan came to be known as the Five Days (March 18–22). Venice also saw the creation of a government hostile to Austria that was led by Daniele Manin (1804–1857). On March 4, Charles Albert (r. 1831–1849), the Savoy monarch of Sardinia-Piedmont, granted a liberal constitution known as the Statuto of 1848 to his subjects. Charles himself soon took up the banner of Italian liberal nationalism. In many regions of Italy, however, these gains were short lived. Conservative forces within the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies acted quickly so that by May 1848, the revolution there had been completely suppressed. Similarly, an Austrian force under the command of General Joseph Radetzky (1766–1858) defeated a Piedmont army in the Battle of Custozza in July, opening the way for a restoration of Austrian control over the region. Further south, though, the Italian revolutions continued. Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872) and Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807–1882) proclaimed a Roman Republic in February 1849. The revolutionaries had forced Pope Pius IX to flee the papal states because of his rejection of modernism. Mazzini and Garibaldi declared their new state to fill the political vacuum in Rome after the pope’s exile. March 1849 also saw a resumption of the war between Piedmont and Austria, though, on March 23, the forces of Piedmont were once again defeated in the battle of Novara. This second crushing defeat forced Charles Albert to abdicate. His son, Victor Emmanuel II (r. 1849–1878), was crowned king. The French soon interfered in Italy as Louis Napoleon Bonaparte sent troops to fight the new Roman Republic in April 1849. His motivation was to secure his position among France’s many Catholics, who resented the infant republic’s treatment of the pope. By the end of June, Rome fell to the French army. Further north, Austria continued the process of suppressing revolutions, and Austrian forces crushed uprisings in Tuscany in May and Venetia in August.

While revolution spread rapidly throughout many European cities during 1848, Russia remained calm. Nicholas I was neither ignorant nor a blind reactionary fanatic, yet his regime ultimately represented nineteenth-century autocracy in its most extreme and repressive form. Nicholas knew that reform was the key to transforming and modernizing Russian society and economy. At the same time, he greatly feared the consequences of change. He stated before his state council in 1842, “There is no doubt that serfdom, in its present form, is a flagrant evil which everyone realizes, yet to attempt to remedy it now would be, of course, an evil more disastrous.”

Russia’s nobility believed its power rested upon serfdom; therefore, any move to abolish serfdom might undermine aristocratic loyalty to the tsar. With this in mind, Nicholas I was content to accept Russia’s status quo and table any serious talk of reform. His reign saw a far-reaching expansion of secret

2

SELF-CHECK
Why did Frederick William IV refer to the national assembly’s offer as a “crown from the gutter”?

Nicholas I of Russia crushed the Decembrist Revolt and supported, yet did not secure, the demise of serfdom in his land.
police activities, including surveillance and censorship. Russia’s imperial administration remained largely inefficient and often corrupt. The only significant movement toward reform under Nicholas was the Russian codification of law in 1833. This firmly established system of political repression and governmental power ensured that the revolutions igniting Europe in 1848 completely passed over Russia. So stalwart did Russia seem in its ability to protect the conservative ideal that it soon offered troops to put down liberal and nationalist uprisings throughout Europe.

**Extensions**
- Read the preface to *Memories of My Exile* by Louis Kossuth. According to Kossuth, what are the Hungarians’ grievances? What are the duties of Hungarians according to the author? How does he connect the plight of Hungarians in the Austrian Empire to larger European and international events?

**Summary**
Following the example of Paris, many European cities broke out into revolution in 1848 and profoundly disturbed the continent’s conservative order. The polyglot Austrian Empire experienced tremendous upheaval as liberal and nationalist movements in Hungary, Bohemia, and elsewhere challenged imperial control. At the same time, Vienna itself exploded with potentially disastrous results for the ruling clique. Revolution in the German states brought about a national assembly in Frankfurt tasked with creating a united German state. As conservative forces reasserted themselves in the following months, this nationalist dream was crushed. Italian uprisings brought liberals and nationalists closer to their goals, as well, but they ultimately faltered under the impact of French intervention. This period of revolutionary turmoil left Russia unaffected, and the tsar’s troops soon intervened to restore order to a continent shaken by uncertainty.

**Looking Ahead**
While most of continental Europe exploded in revolution in 1848, Britain followed a different path. With its parliamentary system of consensual government firmly in place, Britain was better able to weather the storm of nationalist and liberal forces than its counterparts on the continent. Occasional seditious plots and violent repression—such as the Peterloo Massacre—sometimes threatened to ignite general insurrection, but there was no comparable outbreak of
revolution in London in 1848. The mass working class movement known as Chartism offered a safer, though still potentially dangerous, road to reform. Chartism proved a democratic safety valve, which the many states that had exploded into revolution lacked.

**SELF-CHECK ANSWERS**

1. Liberals had become increasingly frustrated with their lack of progress for their political goals. Nationalists stepped up their agitation after it was clear that the conservative powers of Europe entirely rejected their position at the Congress of Vienna. Finally, the 1840s were particularly hard on Europe’s peasants and working classes as agricultural production fell drastically.

2. Frederick William IV viewed the national assembly at Frankfurt as a collection of nationalists and liberals whose ideologies he found particularly repugnant and detrimental to the conservative order.
Reform in England

Essential Questions

• How did Britain expand its political participation to the lower classes without resorting to revolution?
• Why were the Corn Laws so odious to Britain’s lower classes, and how were they eventually repealed?
• What were the causes and results of famine in Ireland?
• What was the Chartist movement, and what were its demands upon the government?

Keywords

Chartists
demagogues
electorate
franchise
habeas corpus
pocket boroughs
rotten boroughs
subsistence
economy
suffrage
Tory
Whig
The three-decade long struggle among Europe’s conservative, liberal, and nationalist forces finally exploded into general revolution throughout the continent in 1848. Chaos and disorder threatened to tear apart the Austrian Empire, while German nationalists agitated and organized in the hope of creating a liberal and constitutional German state. France, Italy, and Spain all likewise suffered revolutionary turmoil in that fateful year. In Russia, however, the storm of revolution failed to strike, and the tsar helped restore the conservative order of Europe through military force. On the other flank of Europe, Great Britain also avoided revolution, but not reform.

Reform in England

The excesses of the French Revolution remained a fearful specter in the minds of most Englishmen after 1815. British upper classes recoiled at the thought of a guillotine in Piccadilly Circus and a revolutionary rabble proclaiming decrees from Whitehall. This fear of a British Revolution grew acute when Britain entered a postwar economic recession that saw rising unemployment and increasing poverty among the nation’s lower classes. The Tory Party acted as the political voice and instrument of Britain’s landed aristocracy and was characterized at this time by its profound distrust and hostility to radical movements both in Britain and on the continent. The noted Tory Robert Castlereagh had served as foreign secretary and worked diligently with Metternich at the Congress of Vienna. Their work represented the conservative desire to nip revolutionary movements in the bud, before they could cause the kind of chaos that Paris experienced. And as Castlereagh labored to institutionalize conservatism abroad, the Tory prime minister, Robert Jenkinson, the Earl of Liverpool (1770–1828), fought for it in London. Serving as prime minister from 1812 to 1827 and backed by a like-minded cabinet, Liverpool jealously guarded the status quo with reactionary fervor and initially opposed all attempts at reform. Voices of discontent, seen as the harbingers of revolution, were quickly stifled.

The 1815 revision of Britain’s Corn Laws strengthened conservatism considerably. After 1815, previously unused land in England began to be cultivated. This significantly enriched the aristocracy, who saw a bonanza of rents from new tenant farmers. With the end of the war against Napoleon, importation of grain could resume. Most middle and lower class people rejoiced at this prospect, as it would mean lower prices for wheat and bread. Fearing that the lower prices would drive their new tenants out of business—which would result in the loss of rent revenue—the aristocracy acted through the Tory Party to change the Corn Laws. Under the new law, grain importation was prohibited unless the price of grain in Britain exceeded 80 shillings per quarter-ton. As this level hadn’t been reached since before 1790, and then only in times of harvest disasters, the law amounted to a virtual ban on foreign grain importation. In effect, Britain’s landed aristocracy
had legislated selfishly for their own economic interests and at the expense of the lower classes. In August 1819, a crowd gathered at St. Peter’s Fields in Manchester to listen to speakers preach reform of Parliament and repeal of the Corn Laws. Charged with keeping an eye on the perceived rabble, British soldiers engaged the crowd and ultimately fired into it, killing 11 people. In a play on words recalling Wellington’s historic victory at Waterloo four years earlier, the event in Manchester came to be known as the “Peterloo Massacre.” For British radicals and reactionaries alike, the Peterloo Massacre stood for government repression and extreme conservatism in the face of reform and agitation.

In the wake of the Peterloo Massacre, Parliament passed tough, reactionary legislation in December 1819. The Six Acts, as they were called, restricted many freedoms that English people had long taken for granted. Freedom of speech and assembly were abridged, and new taxes were placed upon newspapers in the hopes of bankrupting the radical press. Large fines could be levied for supposed seditious libel, while police powers increased dramatically. Homes could be searched with a minimum of judicial oversight. Speedy trials with severe sentences also typified the new laws. Armed military training of any kind, other than that constituted by the state, was forbidden. In January 1820, the 81-year-old George III died and his long-waiting son, the prince regent, was finally crowned George IV (r. 1820–1830). The next month a conspiracy to murder government ministers within the cabinet came to light. The conspirators viewed the government as tyrants because of the Peterloo Massacre and the Six Acts, and they sought to take advantage of the disorder following George III’s death. It was hoped that a violent, sudden statement would plunge the government into anarchy and give the lower classes the opportunity to reorder British society to their advantage. The primary target was Lord Liverpool, the prime minister, whom many blamed for the massacre and subsequent repressive measures. Having met regularly in an apartment on Cato Street, the affair was soon dubbed the Cato Street Conspiracy. Its leaders were soon arrested, and after the trial four of them were sentenced to death.

As these events were playing out in London, unrest grew in Britain’s closest domain, Ireland. Although the northern counties of Ulster tended to be Presbyterian, most of Ireland’s population was made up of Catholic peasant farmers. They rented their lands from a small minority group of Church of England Protestants. Many of these landlords did not live in Ireland, but rather in England. Over the course
of the nineteenth century, these landowners had increasingly exploited the Irish farmers, even as the latter’s population grew rapidly. Irish peasants were sustained by the potato crop and came to depend upon its harvest for their survival. This harvest varied significantly from one year to the next, which added an element of uncertainty to the lives of the peasants. Unlike with other crops, potato farmers could not detect early failures and thus plant others in time, nor could potatoes be stockpiled for any great length of time against potential disaster. This *subsistence economy* in Ireland, which lacked the good roads and infrastructure to transport and distribute other foodstuffs in times of crisis, meant that the potential for famine was ever present. The year 1845 saw a disastrous potato failure, which ensured food shortages and left those in the Irish countryside vulnerable to starvation. The years 1846, 1848, and 1851 saw a repeat of the bad harvest and further troubles. Moreover, Europe at large experienced similar potato crop failures.

For Ireland, the Great Famine was characterized by devastating food shortages, which led to high food prices, widespread starvation and sickness, and frequent social disturbances. Blight, a fungus, attacked crops and rotted the tubers. Weakened by lack of nutrition, many peasants succumbed to fever, which soon manifested itself in widespread epidemics. The net result was a huge population decrease in Ireland. Between 1845 and 1851, roughly one million emigrants left Ireland. Most made their way to the United States or Great Britain. Meanwhile, as many as

This rural woman and her children live with the devastating consequences of a poor potato harvest in 1845. The Irish refer to this period of famine and misery as the Great Hunger.
1.5 million people died as result of the famine. Some people in Britain attempted to mitigate the effects of the disaster with relief aid, but the British government ultimately did little to stop the suffering. As though Irish starvation and sickness wasn’t enough, the British Parliament continually backed the landowners against the tenants in any dispute, often with armed force. When rents went unpaid, landowners evicted their tenants and burned their homes. Such treatment made it clear that, to Britain, Ireland remained little more than a conquered territory of the British Empire. Ireland’s poor farmers gained little from the liberal experiments and reforms of London or from the British Industrial Revolution. Indeed, to a large extent, Britain’s empire was being built upon the backs of Ireland’s peasants.

In Britain, the Corn Laws remained a controversial piece of legislation that threatened to spark unrest among the lower classes. Through the agency of the Tory Party, Britain’s landowner aristocrats had created the Corn Laws to maintain high prices for British grain (corn) by creating import duties against cheaper, foreign grain. The Corn Laws were typical of a new legislative trend that saw the end of Britain’s aristocracy acting as a paternalistic protector of the lower classes. This new attitude from above, coupled with the post-war economic meltdown, led many of Britain’s poor to question the wisdom of the nation’s leaders and to seriously call for political reform. Soon mass meetings were held with parliamentary reform the chief topic, and reform clubs began to appear. William Cobbett’s Political Registrar and like-minded radical newspapers added their voices to the chorus of reformers. Britain’s ruling elites viewed industrial workers and agricultural peasants as domestic versions of France’s dreaded Sans-culottes. They feared these potential revolutionaries were waiting for their chance to begin executing the aristocracy with as much fervor as their earlier French ideological cousins. Many in the government viewed William Cobbett (1763–1835) and other leading radical agitators like Major John Cartwright (1740–1824) and Henry “Orator” Hunt (1773–1835) as virtual demagogues who planned to seduce Britain’s lower classes away from the natural order of British society. Repression became the tool that the government used to combat these radicals. In December 1816, an unruly meeting of radicals near London at Spa Fields provided Parliament with a pretext for repressive legislation. Passed in March 1817, the Coercion Acts allowed for the temporary suspension of habeas corpus and strengthened prior legislation that allowed crackdowns on gatherings deemed seditious. The Six Acts of December 1819 followed the Peterloo Massacre and further strengthened the government. The acts were designed to empower the government to combat radical sentiment wherever it was found. Radical leaders were prevented from agitating in public and found it no longer cost-effective to print.

The British Parliament of the early nineteenth century was not a democratic institution in the modern sense of the word, and was certainly not a truly representative body. Parliament operated with two houses—an upper house, the House of Lords, and a lower house, the House of Commons. The House of Lords was made up entirely of hereditary nobility and bishops in the Church of England. Occasionally, the British monarch would invoke the right to create a new nobleman, who was then allowed to sit in the House of Lords. The House of Lords held
veto power over legislation proposed by the House of Commons. Wealthy country gentlemen, also known as the gentry, as well as successful businessmen and urban professionals, made up the House of Commons. Property qualifications for voting ensured that only a small portion of adult males in Britain enjoyed suffrage. Several other practices made certain that Parliament was not truly representative. Rotten boroughs were small towns whose people were frequently bribed and influenced to select certain candidates. Pocket boroughs were towns where the representative was not chosen by the citizens but by the local noble landowner. The new industrial centers with their booming populations enjoyed little or no representation in Parliament. The victor of Waterloo, Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington (1769–1852), served as prime minister from 1828 to 1830. Although widely hailed and respected for his martial qualities against Napoleon, Wellington was a committed Tory whose reactionary policies brooked no compromise with the reformers. In 1830, after a bitter contested general election, the Whigs came to power. The following year, Charles, the second Earl Grey (1764–1845), the Whig prime minister, succeeded in securing a bill for parliamentary reform. This bill was quickly vetoed by the House of Lords. Later that year the process was repeated as the Commons passed another bill and the Lords rejected it again. Grey found sympathy with the new king, William IV (r. 1830–1837). The king agreed to create new peers to sit in the House of Lords and nullify their reform veto. With the threat of having their ranks infused with sympathetic reformers, the House of Lords agreed to withhold their veto when the Commons passed a third reform bill in 1832. Dramatic change marked the political landscape after the passage of the 1832 Reform Bill. One hundred eleven seats in the House of Commons were eliminated after their 56 rotten and pocket boroughs were reformed. Thirty-two other boroughs, which by size only warranted one seat in the House of Commons, lost their second seat. In total, 143 seats were reorganized to better represent the voters of Great Britain. Additionally, virtually all middle class males were awarded the right to vote, although working class men generally still fell shy of property qualifications. Despite its failure to enfranchise all British citizens, the Reform Bill of 1832 set the British political system on a new course. No longer would government be dominated by a narrow few who looked to their own interests first and the nation’s second. Rather, greater political participation by the middle class ensured that reform was just beginning.

Indeed, reform begat reform. Agitators soon appeared who wanted further concessions from the government and greater political participation for the lower classes. This new sentiment gave rise to the Chartist movement. The Chartists called for true political democracy in Britain and the rule of the people, believing this to be the best possible system for just society. In 1838, several working class reformers created a document they called the People’s Charter, which insisted upon six demands:

- Universal suffrage for all British males
- A secret ballot rather than public voting in meetings to prohibit voter intimidation
- The elimination of property requirements to sit in the House of Commons
• Salaries for members of Parliament, to ensure that middle and working class citizens could serve and still provide for their families
• Equalization of electoral districts, which meant that each member of the House of Commons should represent roughly the same number of citizens
• Annual elections to the House of Commons

Intellectual reformers and urban workers alike supported the aims of the Chartists. The cause of universal male suffrage was furthered by widespread petition signing that garnered hundreds of thousands of names. In 1839, the Chartists laid before the government their demands, confident in the support of the lower classes. Parliament ultimately ignored the petition as the newly enfranchised middle classes were skeptical of the ability of the lower classes to effectively participate in the political process. The Chartists again presented petitions before Parliament in 1842 and 1848, and again they were ignored. Eventually, all of the Chartists demands were enacted by Parliament with the exception of annual elections. The Chartist movement proved an important lesson and precedent for Britain’s workers in the field of mass politics.

Chartists gathered to advocate reform for the working and middle classes. They fought for universal male suffrage and the abolition of property qualifications for members of the British Parliament.
With its new power, the middle class sought to repeal the hated Corn Laws and the struggle highlighted their increasing influence. The Anti-Corn Law League was established in 1839 and actively campaigned against the Corn Laws. Although the repeal of this legislation was its chief cause, this group also widely campaigned for the liberal ideal of free trade. Britain’s large landowners had much to lose by the efforts of the Anti-Corn Law League, as the law protected their market and ensured their wealth. Still, many prominent voices stepped forward to fight this injustice that kept grain prices artificially high. Leaders of the league included Richard Cobden (1804–1865) and John Bright (1811–1889). These two men agitated unceasingly among the working classes and used their fiery speeches to dramatize the issue and win converts to the cause. Central to their cause was the idea that the lowering of food prices would lead to a rise in the standard of living for Britain’s poor. Also, they argued, lower raw material costs would increase industrial profitability. Finally, in an appeal to Britain’s burgeoning industrialists, they stated that lower food prices meant that the factory owners could pay their workers less.

The winter of 1845–1846 hit Ireland particularly hard, and the failure of the potato crop ensured a horrific famine. Typhus and cholera added to a death toll already monstrously high because of starvation. With approximately one million Irish people dead and more than one million Irish men, women, and children emigrating in search of new lives abroad, most notably in the United States, the famine in Ireland served as a dramatic example to Britain of the need for low food prices. In 1846, the Tory prime minister, Robert Peel (1788–1850), extended an olive branch to the Whigs and together the two parties repealed the Corn Laws. Urban dwellers now constituted the majority of the British population and saw in the repeal of the Corn Laws a major victory. Over the next few years, Britain voted to strike down trade barriers and embrace a policy of free trade. The Tories also sought to win support among Britain’s working classes. To this end, they passed the Ten Hours Act of 1847, legislation that limited women to 10-hour workdays in factories. Children between the ages of 13 and 18 had their workdays limited to 10 hours on weekdays and eight hours on Saturday. By considerably cutting back on the time women and children could be expected to work, the laws allowed families more time together. The factory had long competed for its workers’ time against the needs of family, and this law was intended to foster the domestic family unit. By the mid-1840s, the male role as family breadwinner was firmly established in the British factory system. Reformers’ concerns for women’s working conditions in factories and mines coincided with a growing general belief among the British that a woman’s place was in the home, not in industrial or agricultural work. Reverting to their former role as paternalistic protectors of the poor, Tory aristocrats continued to call for reforms in the industrial workplace. This played against the backdrop of their competition with the newly enfranchised middle classes for lower class support. This political competition between the still dynamic aristocracy and the increasingly powerful middle class proved to be one of the key elements in Britain’s peaceful political evolution. For their part, the working class could play the two off of each other with temporary support to meet their demands.
While the Great Reform Bill offered more political participation than ever before and greatly enlarged the British electorate, it was not at its heart a truly democratic move. Despite the fact that over 200,000 citizens were given the vote, nearly 50 percent of the pre-bill total, rigid property qualifications and the unspoken gender qualification remained in place. In some rare cases, working class citizens who had enjoyed long-standing franchise rights for years actually lost them with the passage of reform laws. And though cities were also given a greater voice in Parliament as new urban boroughs were created, the passage of reform did not necessarily constitute a victory for Britain’s middle classes. Even as new urban voting districts appeared, so did an equal number of rural voting districts. Those new rural voting districts were dominated by the traditional aristocracy and their commitment to conservative values. Ultimately, the bill enabled a larger diversity of propertied interests to gain representation in Parliament. This meant that property owners in cities were now on equal political footing with property owners in the country. Commercial policy, the church, and municipal government would all benefit eventually from the system of orderly reform established at this time. When more citizens were allowed to vote, they were given a stake in the political process, and radical forces began to see revolution as unnecessary. Instead, by opening up Parliament to a greater number of citizens, people began to see that change was possible through orderly means, which ensured the continuity of governmental institutions even as more people had a say in them.

**Extensions**

- Read Richard Cobden’s pamphlet *England, Ireland and America, by a Manchester Manufacturer*. How does Cobden argue that free trade will promote peace and prosperity?
- Read Liam O’Flaherty’s 1937 novel *Famine*. How does O’Flaherty portray the relationship between the wealthy landlords and the poverty-stricken farmers?

**Summary**

Britain was spared the horrors of revolution that swept the continent in 1848. This largely resulted from Britain’s ability to reform its own corrupt system and expand political participation throughout the nation. Created to ensure protected markets for wealthy landowners, the Corn Laws were widely unpopular, and eventually the laws were overturned through peaceful legislation. Unfair election practices like rotten boroughs and pocket boroughs were likewise legislated out of existence. Reform, not revolution, created much needed change in Great Britain. At the same time, famine plagued Ireland’s countryside. Successive potato crop failures and British neglect resulted in little food for the island’s population, and soon starvation and disease were claiming lives on a wide scale. The majority of those who did not die left Ireland to seek their fortunes in America and elsewhere. All told, Ireland’s population fell by more than 2 million people because of the Great
Famine. Meanwhile, as political reform continued in London, the major political parties began to compete for the support of the nation’s working classes. This competition ensured a greater standard of living and greater political participation for Britain’s poor.

**Looking Ahead**

As Europe continued to industrialize, cities became much denser. As a result, living conditions grew worse and more unsanitary. By the 1870s, scientists were beginning to understand that microscopic organisms carried disease. Scientists like Louis Pasteur, Robert Koch, and Joseph Lister all contributed greatly to this “Bacterial Revolution.” At the same time, Georges-Eugène Haussmann embarked on a great renovation of Paris under Louis Napoleon Bonaparte with an eye to beautifying the city, while also making street revolution less practical. Family life also evolved in this period as men saw greater economic opportunities, while expectations for women correspondingly diminished.

**SELF-CHECK ANSWERS**

1. The Peterloo Massacre motivated parliament to pass the Six Acts. These laws punished people who gathered for training or drilling purposes, strengthened the power of local governments to search private property for weapons, and instituted strict punishments for newspapers with seditious content. Those who promoted the legislation hoped that these regulations along with other stipulations in the acts would preclude the rise of radical and potentially revolutionary groups.

2. The system was mired in corruption because of unethical boroughs. Pocket boroughs were voting districts in small towns where the local landowner, not the citizens, chose the representative to Parliament. Rotten boroughs were small voting districts where the voting citizens were easily bribed or influenced to vote a certain way.

3. The Tory Party, made up of the aristocracy, passed the Ten Hours Act, which stated that women and children could not work more than 10 hours a day, which allowed families to spend more time together. It was hoped that this would bolster support for the Tories among the poor at the expense of the middle class Whig Party.