Old and New Imperialism

Essential Questions

- What were the motivations, the time period, and the patterns of old imperialism?
- What were the motivations, the time period, and the patterns of new imperialism?
- What technologies made new imperialism possible?
- What were the key features of social Darwinism?
- What ideologies are evident in the brown and white man’s burdens? What are their justifications for and against imperialism?

Keywords

“God, gold, and glory”
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Set the Stage

After the dust from the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars began to settle in the mid-nineteenth century, Europe experienced profound industrial and technological expansions as part of the Industrial Revolution. During this time, European citizens began to demand more freedoms and rights for themselves, as well as take more pride in their own nations. They concentrated on strengthening themselves from within and developing new tools, products, and ideas. Soon, Europe needed more money to fund the new factories and places of industry developing within its states, as well as more natural materials to fuel its factories. Instead of invading each other, however, when Europe’s countries needed more resources to support their new technology and industry they began to look elsewhere: to Africa and to Asia.

The Rise of Old Imperialism: How and Why

For many European countries, the desire to increase their lands and holdings beyond their own borders—and beyond their own continent—had been felt and explored since 1096. At that time, members of Christian nations went on the Crusades to the Holy Land to spread their religious ideals. During the Middle Ages, European nations continually attempted to increase their influence outside their domestic boundaries. This continued increase can be seen in Spain’s reconquista, in which Muslim Spaniards were driven from the continent; in the idea that Marco Polo should travel to and report back on China; even in Portugal’s initial explorations of Africa’s coast. People in Europe wanted to know what else the wide world consisted of.

Today, scholars wonder why, exactly, so many European nations became even more drawn to journeys of discovery in the 1400s and 1500s—what was it about that time period that made people so interested in adventure and seeking out knowledge? Traditionally, scholars refer to the description of “God, gold, and glory.” Indeed, these three words explain likely and possible motivations for explorers to go on journeys of discovery and for nations to sponsor them. God refers to the idea that both individual Europeans and European nations wanted to spread and share their religious ideals with people they saw as uneducated, at best, and infidels, at worst. Gold refers to the vast financial rewards that could accrue to an adventurer and to the nation that sponsored him should his dangerous journey to unknown lands prove profitable. Glory represents the fame and political power that a fortunate discovery could bring to the explorer and his country, respectively. However, “God, gold, and glory” were not the only reasons for this era’s surge in discovery. Advances in technology and industry made leaving one’s own nation for long periods of time, traveling vast distances, and returning home safely possible, as well. Taken together, these factors help explain why European nations devoted so many resources to jostling with one another for positions of supremacy with regard to discoveries made in the world beyond Europe.
By the fourteenth century, thanks to habits formed over the course of several hundred years, people in Europe greatly desired the special products that came from the eastern part of the world. These products included, among many others, spices, silk, and perfumes. Part of what made these products so special, however, was that the Europeans’ access to them had been limited. Arab and Ottoman brokers would move between Europe and the Far East, trading and transporting the exotic products, but Europeans were not been able to get those products for themselves. And since they could not buy the products directly, Europeans had been paying a premium on them. In the hopes of avoiding the high brokers’ fees that were heaped on top of the prices of already-expensive Eastern products, Europeans looked for ways to buy everything from silk and porcelain china; to spice mixtures and sugars; to valuable jewels, minerals, and other fine metals straight from the source. By going to the source, European customers would be able to both lower their own costs and give themselves more consistent access to the products they wanted.

The Middle Ages saw the rise of more urban centers in Europe and a subsequent increase in trade and business. Both the salespeople and tradesmen, as well as the governing regimes of these growing nations, began looking to trade and imperial expansion as a means of greatly expanding their wealth. Meanwhile, many Christians believed that it was their religious duty to evangelize the nations of the Far East. For some, missionary work was simply an excuse to propel adventurous journeys to unknown lands, but others did honestly and truly believe in spreading and sharing their beliefs. Of course, many Christian missionaries neither understood nor honored the non-Christian religions of the region. So by the time the Middle Ages had given way to the Reformation, members of churches and organizations, such as the Jesuits, for example, were wholly invested in using colonial expansion as a means of dispersing the words and ideas of their faith. Again, between “God, gold, and glory,” Europeans of this time had all the compelling reasons they needed for expanding their influence and power. What they needed next were the ways to make their imperial desires a reality.

So how were these great voyages funded and undertaken? The simplest answer is: technology. The 1400s were a crowning technological era, a time when, after decades, scholars and navigators had finally made the kinds of advances—how to navigate long distances, for instance—that enabled explorers to travel to such far-off lands. In truth, Europeans were not the first to make these discoveries. Early in the century, people from China had sailed successfully to other countries, making it to both the southern Indian Ocean and to Africa. Yet the Chinese did not pursue these potential colonial relationships. Unlike European countries, China had no desire to conquer outside lands as a means of increasing their own power and commercial authority. The Chinese believed their country already had the most advanced financial and social systems, anyway, and that incorporating ideas from other nations would not strengthen theirs. China’s reluctance to engage in more aggressive imperial expansion opened the door for European nations to do just that.

Indeed, European explorers used a variety of new tools, including those developed by the advanced Chinese, to navigate the world’s high seas. For example, two tools that served Christopher Columbus and other explorers especially well—the
compass and axial rudder—both came from China to Europe. These tools allowed sailors to travel exceedingly long distances. Two other important tools helped adventurers figure out where they stood on the globe in terms of latitude: both the basic quadrant and the complex astrolabe worked to gauge at what incline the Pole Star stood, which in turn allowed sailors and explorers to determine their latitude. To these tools, explorers added innovative guides and ship plans. Guides or navigational maps known as portolani provided adventurers with more knowledge and facts than others had previously about promontories and coastline shapes. They also described potential routes for adventurers. The portolani’s knowledge did not, unfortunately, extend to the wide sea. Yet innovative kinds of ships that used the lateen sail, so called because of its triangular shape and which was rigged differently from earlier square sails, could sail into the wind, so no destination was out of reach.

As if these advances were not innovative and impressive enough, two more important kinds of scholarship contributed to the Europeans’ ability to leave their homelands and travel so widely. An astronomer of Grecian extraction from the second century c.e., Ptolemy, had written a work called the Geographica, which helped people calculate distances on maps. Ptolemy’s work had fallen out of popular knowledge but the explorers of the 1400s brought it back into popularity. Explorers used it, along with new techniques from the field of perspective geometry, to construct the grids or foundations for their maps. A similar technique is still used today. It is worth noting, however, that in his Geographica Ptolemy calculated Asia to be much larger than it actually was. Ptolemy’s miscalculation had important consequences on the both the goals and results of Columbus’s explorations.

People across Europe had heard of or witnessed these new tools and techniques. But knowledge alone was not enough to spur imperial conquest. To become an imperial power, a nation had to first firmly establish its authority and control over domestic matters. In later years, both France and Britain explored and settled their people in different areas of the North American continent because both enjoyed relative stability in Europe. Without a hardy home base to move out from, however, conquerors were not be able to hold on to many of the new lands they claimed. One reason Portugal and Spain took an early lead in global exploration was that they were able to consolidate their respective countries into single entities led by monarchs. In addition, Portugal and Spain took on this role, in part, because of their location on the European continent, which afforded them excellent access to the sea. Their proximity to water had led Portugal and Spain to invest heavily in their navies and in seafaring technology. This investment eventually served them well in the larger context of exploration. Under the monarchs’ authority, Portugal and Spain were able to provide their explorers with stable home bases and with the funds to enable long-term travel outside of the continent.

Successful exploration did not simply mean reaching a new and undiscovered land. To establish and manage imperial territory in new places, aspiring imperial powers needed to have money and time, established diplomatic traditions, and long-standing governmental power. Without these things, a nation could not succeed in achieving overseas control, even if it had many great adventurers within its borders. To illustrate this point, consider the fact that
several of the most distinguished adventurers from early in the 1400s and early 1500s, including the Cabots, Verrazano, Vespucci, and Columbus, all claimed Italian roots. These men had to find funding for their trips overseas elsewhere because Italy did not have the domestic stability, authority, and wealth to promote its own imperial growth. At that point in time, Italy stood not as a single, amalgamated nation with a sole ruler and overarching government, but as a connecting series of autonomous regions and city-states. The disjointed nature of Italy at the time meant that Italians had to worry about another foreign power occupying them on their own turf, not expanding their boundaries.

The countries stable enough to undertake imperial expansion had another advantage, as well. Those with stable ruling regimes were militarily superior, both in comparison to the less powerful nations of Europe and to the natives in far-off lands. This meant that their representatives had more sophisticated ways and means of fighting battles than the indigenous peoples of the countries they invaded had. Europeans could defend themselves with arms made of steel and protective armor made of plate. They could launch assaults on their enemies with the newly developed cannon. The indigenous peoples of countries across the ocean found no match to these weapons in their own arsenals.

**Expansion from Four Nations: Portugal, Spain, England, and France**

Portugal and Spain had the best position and earliest start in looking beyond their own borders to build imperial colonies. The Portuguese set their sights on lands in Africa and Asia. One of Portugal’s ruling scions, Prince Henry (1394–1460), also known as Henry the Navigator, found himself increasingly drawn to the potential wealth of Africa. First, he helped create an institution for the study of navigation. After that, Henry began organizing and directing exploratory groups that investigated Africa’s western coast. In each region, the Portuguese were guided by their interest in a particular cultivated product. First, in the Madeira Islands, which the Portuguese came to in 1420, they started making wine, also known as “Madeira.” Second, in the Azores, which they arrived in between 1427 and 1431, the Portuguese created a business around the process of fishing. Third, by 1460, the Portuguese had taken their journeys all the way to the Cape Verde Islands, where they began investing in the sugar trade. Meanwhile, the Portuguese explorers continued to travel farther along Africa’s western coast, where they invested in ebony, ivory, gold, and slaves.

Just as they looked for goods in Africa, the Portuguese searched for products in Asia. Their first explorer to make it around the Cape of Good Hope at the bottom of Africa, Bartholomew Diaz, did so in 1488. Ten years later, another explorer,
Vasco da Gama, made it all the way to the Indian border. Two years after da Gama reached India, another adventurer, Cabral, reached Brazil. Portugal declared its ownership of Brazil in 1500. Meanwhile, near Goa, the Portuguese pressed on with their expansion in India, and in the East Indies, their holdings comprised both the Spice Islands and the Malay Peninsula. In each of these regions, the Portuguese created an outpost for their ships and soldiers, as well as a nexus for trade and industry. Within another hundred years, their explorers would travel as far as Canton, China, and to the edge of Japan.

Spain’s imperial achievements were equally impressive. One of the country’s early explorers, Columbus, traveled all the way to the Americas in 1492. As Spain’s representative, Columbus asserted that the Virgin Islands, Trinidad, Hispaniola, and some other islands in the Caribbean were Spain’s property. In 1493, Pope Alexander VI created the Line of Demarcation, helping distinguish imperial properties of Spain and Portugal from one another. The pope’s creation of this line stood as part of a larger agreement he would mandate between the two countries in 1494 called the Treaty of Tordesillas. The Line of Demarcation ran north to south, crossing the Cape Verde Islands and the Azores. According to the pope, when explorers found new territories to the west of the line, those territories would go to Spain; new territories found to the east would go to Portugal.

Meanwhile, Spain made great strides in the Americas. It asserted its dominance over Florida, through the explorer Ponce de León; Panama, through the explorer Balboa; the Aztec empire (now Mexico), through the explorer Hernando Cortés; and the Incan empire (now Peru), through the explorer Pizarro. Another adventurer, Coronado, mapped out other sections of what today make up the southwestern part of the United States on Spain’s behalf, as well. Yet another explorer, Magellan, captured more honors for Spain when he became the first person to circumnavigate the globe. Magellan claimed one group of islands for Spain and named them the Philippines as a tribute to the Spanish king, Philip II.

Finally, France and England turned their attention to the northern part of North America. On England’s behalf, the adventurer John Cabot, along with his son, staked out North America’s northeastern coastal line. On France’s behalf, two explorers went to work. Like Cabot, Verrazano staked out the coastline, and he examined the natural harbor of what would become New York. Jacques Cartier explored a pathway along the St. Lawrence River, reaching as far as Canada and establishing French claims on this new land.

**Movement from the Old to the New Imperialism**

Old imperialism, then, began in approximately 1096, and its effects reverberated through the mid-nineteenth century. The principal players of the movement were Portugal, Spain,
France, and England. Each of these countries relied on new seafaring and map-making technologies to cross greater distances and reach new shores for the first time. The three motivating factors of this period, “God, gold, and glory,” gave imperial nations three key reasons for expanding their global reach and setting up colonies to rule over indigenous peoples in settled lands. Many of these lands were in North and South America. Thanks to superior military technology and weapons like cannons, the European settlers were able to subjugate indigenous peoples, occupy their land, and claim it for European powers across the sea.

New imperialism began properly in the late 1870s, due in part to the aftereffects of industrialization and the new, broader unification of individual European countries. Because of industrialization, countries needed more raw materials to keep their technologies going; because of unification, individual countries felt a domestic stability that allowed the process of expansion to begin once again. European nations striving for imperial conquest now had the benefit of even newer military and communicative technologies, including better rifles and telegrams, to aid them. The most aggressive European countries during this period of expansion included Britain, France, and Belgium, all participants in the rush to colonize Africa. Under new imperialism, Africa was almost entirely carved up and appropriated by European nations. While the concepts of “God” and “glory” still applied, the imperialist powers of the 1870s were most interested in that era’s equivalent of “gold”: the raw materials available in Africa and Asia that could be used to create wealth in industrialized nations. And while some Europeans justified their actions by citing the fact that colonization brought Christianity to native peoples, religion was frequently misused as a tool of discrimination, racism, and cruelty. It was not uncommon for Europeans to trick indigenous peoples into signing away their rights and possessions, and some individuals, like King Leopold II of Belgium, forced colonized populations into slave labor.

**The Rise of the New Imperialism: How and Why**

The push for imperialism in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries revived in the nineteenth century, when European countries decided again that they wished to solidify their positions and expand their power on a world scale. Today, scholars see this desire for imperial expansion as stemming from three different areas: money, politics, and society-culture. On the first subject, money, scholars are slightly divided. Those from a Marxist background believe that nineteenth-century nations set out on such aggressive imperial pathways primarily because of their desire for better finances, a desire triggered by capitalistic systems, which have an inherent need to grow and expand. Non-Marxist scholars disagree, pointing out that imperial powers targeted areas for expansion that did not have financial value in themselves. This second group of scholars argues that, while desire for more money was one motivation, other desires served equally important roles. They suggest that the desire of an individual country for prestige and the social desire to reach out to people whom some nations saw as less civilized should not be dismissed as mere excuses invoked to hide their true financial motives. Instead, these scholars argue that people from imperial, colonizing nations honestly held onto the idealistic goals of fame and community building.
The need for more money during this time directly correlated to the rise of the age of industry. The industrial revolutions, while they represented great progress, did not come out of nowhere and could not exist on nothing. The second of these revolutions, especially, had created even more complicated manufactured goods that needed supplies. To maintain the advances of these revolutions, countries had to have large amounts of raw materials. These materials included products like copper and bauxite, oil, rubber, and even diamonds. While some of these materials existed in some European countries, none of the European nations had enough materials within their own borders. To get these materials, European nations had to look outside their own continent to three others: Africa, Asia, and South America.

Because each nation had to look abroad for raw materials, individual European nations also began to experience tensions with one another. Each nation saw its neighbors as competitors for power, glory, and raw materials. A friendly country one day could turn into a foe the next. However, if a country established colonies in areas full of raw materials and other natural supplies, it could turn to those colonies for its needs, instead of to its friend-or-enemy neighbors. By relying on their colonies, European powers became able to practice self-sufficiency; they could amass the materials they needed to run the businesses and technologies they had developed. This industry, however, led to a second, related problem. With mechanization and the development of more factories, countries had started producing more goods than they could use up themselves. To expand the limits of their supply and demand, they also looked to use their colonies as places to sell their goods, or markets. Then, when the countries had made money selling their goods to their colonial markets, they could take their earnings and put them back into the colonies as investments. Ultimately, though, the money that countries made from their colonies rarely returned. Instead, the money that belonged to these expanding empires were funneled into more “civilized” and technologically sophisticated regions, like the remaining imperial countries and the United States.

Government and state affairs were the second reason for imperial expansion. Powerful countries looked at the world like a giant game board, and they tried to establish colonies in locations that would benefit and aid their home bases and give them advantages over other imperial nations. This attitude can be seen clearly in the actions of two countries. First, the British knew that controlling Egypt’s Suez Canal, built by a French company between 1859 and 1869, would give Britain tactical and trade advantages, since the canal allowed ships to get from Europe to Asia without sailing all the way around Africa. To seize control of the Suez Canal, Britain purchased huge portions of stock in the Suez Canal Company, and they made a protectorate of Egypt itself by 1882. As Britain’s protectorate, Egypt retained some of its own autonomy, but ultimately had to answer to Britain. Second, 16 years later, after rising to the imperial level of European nations thanks to the results of the Spanish-American War, the United States sought to solidify its position as an imperial authority. To do so, it targeted the Pacific islands and the Philippines. These areas shared potential as naval stations and posts for refueling ships with coal. This last

self-sufficiency relying on oneself—in the case of European nations, it meant relying on colonies to provide resources and manpower so the empire did not have to depend on other outside nations

protectorate a country that is looked after and protected by a larger, more powerful country, but which still retains some measure of independence
example is a clear display of an imperial nation targeting an area for its natural resources and geographic benefits.

The desire for high political standing and authority was so strong that some countries, like Italy, tried to acquire colonies even if it meant suffering losses in finances and manpower. After 1871, many of the most influential European nations focused their attention on the attractive resources and colonial potential of Africa. Several of these countries, in pursuing African colonies, were led by the nationalistic fervor of the masses. In other words, nations that colonized Africa were propelled by large swaths of their own population’s passionate zeal for exalting their own nation above all others. Overseas colonies placated and excited citizens at home, even if governments themselves were not that interested in them. For example, Germany’s chancellor Otto von Bismarck made a show of Germany going after African colonies, not because he wanted them, but because he knew his people did. Bismarck relied on this display of colonial fervor to help his cause when it came time for the citizens to vote. Imperialism abroad was a tool used by politicians to gain domestic popularity.

Part of the excitement about overseas colonies may have been driven by the masses’ worry that Europe had become overpopulated. Between 1850 and 1914, Europe's populace grew by nearly 200 million, jumping from 260 million to 450 million by the beginning of World War I. Citizens worried that politicians, with so many different viewpoints and voices to consider, would have a difficult time placating everyone. Some individuals proposed that their nations’ colonies serve as outlets for surplus population. This idea of using colonies as an outlet ultimately did not become a reality—while many individuals emigrated from Europe during this time (as many as 30 or 50 million), the majority of them did not travel to the colonies. Instead, these emigrating individuals traveled to Australia or the American continent, particularly to the United States.

The third reason for this imperial expansion stemmed from European cultural and social desires, which were often tied to religion. The first people to travel to Africa from Europe were, in fact, religious missionaries. For example, David Livingstone, a prominent British explorer, originally went to Africa to serve as both a missionary and a medic. Other British citizens, specifically Victorians of middle class origins, soon joined Livingstone in Africa. These Victorians believed they had an obligation to bring their knowledge and education to Africans whom they saw as less civilized than themselves and therefore inherently inferior. Today, the discriminatory and prejudicial nature of such attitudes are clear, but they were quite common in the nineteenth century.

While Europe’s motivations for investing in imperial conquest are clear, how one of the tiniest regions in the world (Europe) ended up in charge of nearly 66 percent of the world’s citizens as of 1914 may not be. Certainly, Europe’s size did not correspond to its power, but European nations achieved such authority over the world for several reasons. To begin with, Europe benefited hugely from the developments of the Second Industrial Revolution. Using the telegraph for communication, relying on steam to propel engines, and experiencing medical breakthroughs, such as using quinine to combat malaria, all gave European nations an edge over the parts of the world they sought to colonize. Perhaps most importantly, Europeans
benefited from the development and expansion of railway systems. Using railways made it easier for Europeans to send messages, to conduct commerce around the world, and to travel deeper into continents like Asia and Africa.

The Industrial Revolution’s effects were also apparent in another, very important arena: battle. Technological advances born of industrialization had allowed Europeans to develop highly advanced military methods and weaponry. Machine guns, ships carrying their own weapons, and other advanced armaments made any attempts at self-defense or resistance by people in India, Africa, and China all but hopeless. This power in battle became further strengthened by the complicated, systematic capitalist systems that had developed in most contemporary European nations. These systems made it easier for European nations to occupy colonies, stay in them successfully, and methodically strip each colony of its natural goods.

In the first several decades of the nineteenth century, the majority of European countries were not very interested in overseas imperial expansion. As of 1815, at the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars, only two European nations had large imperial properties across the sea: the Netherlands and Great Britain. The rest of the continent had turned its focus inward, to revolutions and other internal upheavals. However, after 1870, when both Germany and Italy had become unified, more and more countries in Europe found themselves able to concentrate on matters outside of their own borders. Not until the 1870s, then, were European nations immediately and compellingly drawn to imperial growth. This desire could be quickly and widely seen in Britain, France, and Germany, and, to a lesser extent, Italy. Each country expressed its imperial desire differently. Britain treated the conquest and appropriation of more colonies as a necessary course of action. The majority of British citizens backed the government in this regard. France had a new government, the Third Republic, and its internal political scene at last began to demonstrate signs of stability. This meant that France, too, could start to investigate the idea of colonization. Meanwhile, both Italy and Germany had only just come together as individual, united nations. Many Italian and German citizens welcomed colonization, believing it would show the rest of the world the immediate strength and power of their new nations.

During the last 25 years of the nineteenth century, most of Asia and nearly all of Africa would fall victim to European colonization. Through colonization, European nations expanded their authority and presence throughout the world. When 1900 came around, other countries around the globe had also begun trying to participate in imperial pursuits: Japan and the United States began attempting to take colonies of their own. Yet while one initial reason for turning to imperialism had been to avoid conflict between European nations, imperialism itself would end up causing further conflict. The competition between European nations could now escalate on the global stage.

**Technologies and Transport of the New Imperialism**

Nations that participated in the new imperialism benefited from technological and industrial advances in four fields: weaponry, travel, communications, and medicine. First, in warfare, the Europeans developed new and improved kinds of
guns. So even when they went up against groups of colonized individuals who had guns of their own, as some Africans did, Europeans easily prevailed. Two new kinds of guns had been developed. One kind, called breech-loading, let soldiers reload shells into the back of the weapon while lying down. Colonized groups were still using guns that loaded through their muzzles, which made the task more time-consuming and, when done in the middle of a battle, more dangerous. The other new kind of gun used by Europeans was the machine gun, which allowed soldiers to fire many times in sequence. One particularly popular version of the machine gun was called the Gatling gun.

Second, in travel, the Europeans knew how to harness steam—meaning that the Europeans did not have to rely on wind to propel their ships. Thanks to steam power, their boats could travel both more quickly and more directly. This was hugely advantageous both when crossing large distances, like oceans, and when traveling tight quarters, like small rivers. The development of smaller, steam-powered boats enabled Europeans to send explorers, missionaries, and soldiers into the deepest parts of Africa. In addition, by 1869, the Suez Canal had been completely built. Because of the canal, people in Europe could get to Asia much more quickly than they had in the past. The world had started to become smaller and more traversable.

Third, speed of communication increased rapidly. Imperialism was immeasurably aided by the development and use of the telegraph, a mechanism that could send same-day communications across vast distances. Imagine the benefit in having an important note travel from Britain’s colony, India, to its capital, London, in a single day. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, such a message would have taken two years to arrive. This virtually instantaneous (by comparison) new kind of communication revolutionized imperial expansion. With the telegraph, issues and problems could be reported and responded to in much timelier ways.

Fourth, as early as 1820 Europeans knew of a new kind of medicine called quinine. Quinine originated from cinchona tree bark, and it stood out as a remarkable drug because of its effects on malaria. Colonists venturing to tropical regions of the world had frequently met with, and been defeated by, malaria. The availability and successful use of quinine made it easier for Europeans to venture to these areas without getting sick.

**Important Elements of Social Darwinism**

The civilizing and imperialist attitude toward colonization became further complicated in the 1870s. At that time, the theories proposed by Charles Darwin regarding evolution were being discussed, debated, and explored by prominent people in European culture. Leaders of industry, literary types, and even heads of state began to view the past through a Darwinian lens, seeing it as a constant battle among people of different backgrounds for lands and goods. This way of looking at the world became known as racial or **social Darwinism**. Adherents to social Darwinism believed that embarking on a war made their nations greater, because war asked people to give themselves up to a greater good and helped create a pecking order throughout the world based on winners and losers. Social Darwinism served Europeans as a convenient means of excusing the sins of their imperialist behavior. Europeans participating in imperialism viewed their smooth, swift takeovers of indigenous
peoples' lands and resources as proof of European superiority and as justification for their (sometimes secret) goals of increasing their own fame and fortune or spreading their culture and beliefs.

Just as social Darwinism was used to encourage imperialist behavior, the benefits imperialism brought to Europeans fostered greater belief in social Darwinism. According to the people who believed in this theory, the struggle for existence ran parallel to an evolutionary battle. The more powerful would survive, and the less powerful would not. If a European nation was unsuccessful in its imperial quest, other nations saw it as weak and potentially doomed to complete failure. To preserve their reputations on a global scale, then, European countries had to prove their health and power by continually expanding into new imperial colonies and spaces. At that time, each European nationality viewed itself as a separate race existing within a larger white ethnic group. They believed that, according to social Darwinism, battles between races stood as nothing more than an unavoidable part of participating in the natural world order. This gave each nationality within the larger white ethnic group moral justification for going out into the world and trying to subdue persons whom they saw as lesser or lower than they were. To them, the very act of conquering a people was evidence of the superiority of the conquerers and the inferiority of the vanquished.

Social Darwinists eventually carried the implications of the theory even further, claiming that they, as members of a superior and more developed (white) ethnic group, stood duty-bound to bring their knowledge and societal behaviors to the less fortunate individuals across the globe. People honestly thought that members of white ethnic groups would end up holding sovereignty, or complete power, over those whom they saw as inherently inferior in Africa and Asia. This can be seen in visual artworks of these colonial periods, in which European white colonizers would pose with indigenous colonized youth. The artworks suggest that white Europeans would act like mothers and fathers to the “children” (fully grown nonwhite adults) living in African countries and that, just as a child needs the guidance and protection of its parents, so did the African indigenous peoples need the guidance and protection of the Europeans.

Imperialist Ideologies at Work in the White and Brown Men’s Burdens

Thus, many Europeans believed it was their countries’ duty to enlighten and educate members of other, nonwhite races. Under the guidance of Europeans, they believed, colonized nonwhites would slowly but surely gain the same societal advances that the Europeans enjoyed—advances like urban centers, better health care, sophisticated financial systems, and fancier lifestyles. Eventually, some Europeans proposed, the indigenous peoples they had conquered might be able to govern themselves or implement democratic government, as practiced in the Western world.

A literary description of this attitude can be seen in a famous poem by Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) called “The White Man’s Burden.” Kipling, possibly the most significant literary figure of the 1890s, was famed for his works on life in India during the time when it was a British colony. In his poem, the narrator pleads with
other Europeans or “civilized” individuals to travel to far-off regions and sacrifice themselves to provide what is seen as humanitarian aid. The poem calls for the Europeans to send their brightest and greatest children to a lonely place where they will help and assist the very people the Europeans thought of as inferior. Though some modern readers see the poem as satirical and deeply ironic, Kipling’s personal imperialist sympathies suggest that its sentiments were most likely sincere.

This attitude did not confine itself to European countries, either; many people from the United States shared in the idea of the white man’s burden. Indeed, it played an important part in the United States’ choice, once the Spanish-American War was over, not to free the Philippines, which had been under Spain’s control. Instead the United States opted to continue to oversee the comings and goings of an apparently “burdensome” group of people. Like many Europeans, some Americans honestly thought that their society was vastly superior to those of less-developed countries. As members of a superior society, then, they had a moral obligation to teach and guide individuals who they saw as underdeveloped. They also believed that a European or American regime would be able to help indigenous people stay out of their own internal battles, while also making sure that other kinds of misuse and manipulation by smaller groups of white people did not take place.

Nonetheless, some intellectuals and critics did recognize the white man’s burden as an excuse for exploitation. These people argued that imperialism resulted in the “brown man’s burden.” Led by an Englishman who worked in finance and had liberal politics, J.A. Hobson, those fighting for awareness of the brown man’s burden claimed that white imperialists acted and thought unethically. Hobson and his peers directly opposed the ideology of social Darwinism. One individual, in describing the faults of social Darwinism, insisted that it was a philosophy that appropriated evolution to justify actions that would otherwise be considered criminal; another sarcastically summed up social Darwinism by inverting one of Jesus’ beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount, stating, “Blessed are the strong, for they shall prey on the weak.”

Hobson and his fellow critics viewed social Darwinists, including Kipling, as prejudiced tormenters who relied on cruelty, bigotry, and guns to achieve their ends. This view was evident in a satire of Kipling’s famed text, written by a member of Parliament and outspoken foe of social Darwinism, Henry Labouchère. Labouchère’s poem suggested that, instead of using reason or logic, whites resorted to guns and weapons to subdue and control dark-skinned people. This point of view would later be echoed in the famous novel Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad (1857–1924), a writer of Polish descent. The novel scathingly describes European colonizers as completely self-centered and egotistical in their attempts to take over Africa. The book’s protagonist starts out as a broad-minded intellectual and ends up as an uncivilized monster.

Overall, opponents of social Darwinism claimed that European imperialists behaved hypocritically and disgustingly, that their behavior contradicted their professed morality. Indeed, a great disparity did exist between life in European nations and life in their colonies. Within their domestic borders, Europeans enjoyed
increasingly representative governments, improved personal and civil rights, and some measure of equality in terms of treatment and opportunity. However, for indigenous peoples living in imperial colonies in Africa and Asia, things were very different. Imperial rulers made colonized people labor in conditions bordering on slavery and treated natives as second-class citizens who were not entitled to representation in the government, personal or civil rights, or equal treatment. Opponents of social Darwinism maintained that Europeans could only regain the moral high ground by giving up their imperial behaviors and committing to extending the liberty western European countries had fought so hard for to the Third World. The European opponents of social Darwinism, with their liberty-based rhetoric, gave indigenous and colonized individuals some reason to hope for change and greater freedom, but it would be decades before such hopes would be realized.

Extensions
• Read “The Brown Man’s Burden” by Henry Labouchère. Compare his ideas with those of Rudyard Kipling in “The White Man’s Burden.”

Summary
For hundreds of years, European countries practiced imperialism, adventuring to new regions of the globe and settling them as colonies. Old imperialism led countries such as Spain and Portugal to map out the world’s oceans and discover uncharted territory. In the second half of the nineteenth century, European countries plunged back into imperialism with new vigor. In new imperialism, advances made in the Second Industrial Revolution propelled Europeans to find more resources and funds. While financial and economic needs motivated imperialist nations to colonize other lands, other motives were also at play. Among these other motives was the idea that Europeans were superior to people of other races and other cultures. As such, it was believed that the colonizers had a moral duty to bring their civilizing power to these “savage” areas. Critics of colonial expansion, however, stood up to the imperialists and condemned them for their racism.

Looking Ahead
In the final decades of the nineteenth century, European countries began to seek out places on the globe with resources and raw materials that might be extracted and used to power new technologies and industry. Africa and Asia were both places that were attractive to the nations of Europe in this regard. Soon, those European nations that had the wherewithal to do so began to colonize Africa. The land, resources, and wealth that countries gained from their endeavors served as signals of their prestige and power to both their neighbors on the continent and to the rest of the world.
1. They described motives for expansion as practiced by old imperialists: religion, wealth, and fame.

2. Some countries were the Netherlands, Spain, England, France, and Portugal. Adventurers included Henry the Navigator, Vasco da Gama, Hernando Cortés, Magellan, and Columbus.

3. Arable land on other continents, natural goods that could be used for production, territories in which European citizens could settle.

4. Advantages included technology like train systems, telegraph communications, and better arms, as well as advances in medicine like the discovery of quinine.

5. They pointed out the gap between the positive social conditions enjoyed by European citizens and the negative ones endured by colonized peoples, and they highlighted the racist treatment of colonized peoples.
Imperialism in Africa

Essential Questions

- What forms did imperialism take in Africa?
- What was the Suez Canal?
- What was the “scramble for Africa”?
- What were the African settlements, acquisitions, and wars that Great Britain and France participated in?
- What claims did Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Portugal make in Africa?

Keywords

Boers
dominion
Set the Stage

By the 1870s, after the Second Industrial Revolution had concluded, European countries began to realize they needed more funds and materials to fuel their new technologies and industry. Europe discovered that the easiest way to acquire money and natural goods was to colonize other parts of the world and harvest the resources found there. Both Asia and Africa—the latter especially—presented themselves as places to exploit. Soon, European countries began furiously competing to colonize as much of the African continent as they could. In addition to gaining land, resources, and wealth from settling in Africa, individual European nations took the opportunity to compete with each other, each trying to amass the largest imperial state. Each European country’s holdings in Africa, it was thought, helped demonstrate its power to the rest of the world.

Nineteenth-Century Imperialism in Africa

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the two European countries most interested in Africa’s potential for colonization were Britain and France. After the Napoleonic Wars, Britain won a piece of Africa called the Cape of Good Hope. In addition, the British had authority over several individual posts for trade and exchange scattered across the coastline of Africa. These provided secure footholds, from which the British began a larger expansion. Just a few years after the Napoleonic Wars, in the 1820s, the British government sent out colonists to the Cape of Good Hope, and that area, which is today part of the country of South Africa, became known as the Cape Colony. Unfortunately for the British, their colonists almost immediately ran into problems with other European colonists already installed at the cape. These individuals, called Boers, were the descendants of Dutch settlers who had ventured to the cape in the 1600s. Not long after the arrival of the British settlers, the Boer settlers decided to travel north from their original settlements on the cape, and they moved inland. This journey became known as the Great Trek of 1835–1837. The Boers concluded their travels by creating two autonomous states, which they named the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. Six years later, the British settlers acquired an area called Natal, expanding their holdings on the cape to land in the east. Meanwhile, France, which had lost ground in the Napoleonic Wars, began to recoup in other ways. By 1830, France moved against Algeria, in the north of Africa. At both its northernmost and southernmost points, then, Africa had to face European invaders.

Decades later, a rush for the African continent begin in earnest. The rush became known as the “scramble for Africa,” and it lasted for about 30 years, roughly between 1870 and 1900. During that period, a number of European nations, including Britain, Germany, France, and Belgium, focused intently on Africa, working to grasp as much of it as they could, to strengthen their imperial positions in terms of both land and goods. Each European country also wanted to come out ahead of its neighbors and rivals. Each country wanted to gain the most financial and
political power and influence. Instead of admitting that they had entered Africa for those reasons, however, European nations claimed that they had turned to Africa to spread their civilized ways and bring religion to the godless. In the years leading up to 1870, European trade was conducted almost exclusively on the African coastlines only, and Europeans had little knowledge of the territories, resources, or goods that lay within the African continent. European interest in acquiring African settlements increased after the founding of the International Congo Association in 1878 by King Leopold II of Belgium. Before long, nearly all of Africa had been carved up and claimed by one European nation or another. Indeed, by the end of the nineteenth century, with the two exceptions of Ethiopia and Liberia, all of Africa was under European control.

Imperialism negatively impacted Africa in both the short and long terms. In addition to the immediate problems of indigenous people losing their autonomy and property, Africa’s own unique civilizations were, in many ways, stamped out. Over time, the European nations severely altered domestic African economies. By incorporating what had been mostly localized economies into the global world of international finance, the Europeans drastically changed the entire manner in which Africans lived their lives. Africans had to alter the ways they approached government, finance, trade, and society. The changes African countries endured in the nineteenth century laid the foundation for the ways they would govern themselves and contribute to a global economy in the twentieth century.

During the scramble for Africa, European nations paid relatively little attention to the vast changes they brought to Africa; they were too focused on and excited about the goods and materials that they could take from Africa. Over time, the Europeans came to rely on Africa’s production of important goods, including diamonds, gold, other minerals, ivory, and even rubber. Britain and France had gotten an early start at the beginning of the century, but they were soon joined by other countries, including Germany, Italy, Portugal, and Belgium. Arguments over the rights to African territories and goods proved to be highly charged and tenuous. A European war over African holdings was a permanent possibility. This meant that each nation continually engaged in important diplomatic negotiations to try and keep the peace, while simultaneously targeting the best pieces of Africa for itself.

**Britain’s Development in Africa**

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, Britain moved increasingly outward from its base at the Cape of Good Hope in southern Africa. At the same time, in the northern part of the continent, the British turned their attention to Egypt, whose importance lay in its proximity to an important waterway: the Suez Canal. The British made their first inroads into Egypt in 1875. Under the direction of the prime minister at the time, Benjamin Disraeli, Britain arranged to buy shares in the Suez Canal Company, which had previously belonged to the khedive, the sovereign ruler of Egypt, and Britain ended up with a significant amount of the company—44 percent. At that time, the Suez Canal was relatively new, having been completed just six years earlier, in 1869, by a group with
The Suez Canal connects the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea. The canal makes it possible to transport goods from Europe to Asia without traveling around Africa.

French connections. To those British citizens who advocated for the expansion of the British Empire, Disraeli’s move to purchase such a large interest in the Suez Canal Company was financially smart and strategically cunning.

At this time, though Egypt was nominally a part of the Ottoman Empire, for most intents and purposes, it stood autonomous. Yet, the sovereign of this basically autonomous country, the khedive, had not managed the country’s finances well. He owed large debts to banks in Europe. When the banks pressed for the debts to be repaid, the khedive sold his portion of the Suez Canal Company. This turned out to be a short-term solution, though, for when that money evaporated, the khedive encountered more fiscal problems. Seeing the khedive’s weakness, Britain and France moved in and, together, took over Egypt’s economy by the 1880s. The more Britain and France made their presence felt in Egypt, the unhappier the Egyptians became. Egyptians began to struggle against the reforms and regulations set up by the Europeans. To deal with this problem, Britain turned Egypt into its protectorate in 1882. This action not only gave Britain more control over Egypt, it also cleverly forced France out of the country’s affairs.

While Disraeli maneuvered the British into a position of power in Egypt in the north of Africa, a man named Cecil Rhodes (1853–1902) was busily working for British imperial interests in South Africa. Independently wealthy, Rhodes had built an impressive personal fortune through the diamond trade after diamonds were found in a part of the Cape of Good Hope called Kimberly in 1869. Not satisfied
to rest on his laurels, Rhodes pursued a role in politics. He envisioned expanding Britain’s holdings in Africa, so that a whole chain of other British territories in Central Africa would link the territories Britain already had at the north and south of the continent—Egypt and the Cape of Good Hope, respectively. Rhodes’s countrymen shared his expanded vision, which became known as the Cape-to-Cairo Connection. Britain followed this plan by moving north from the cape and sending agents into Nyasaland, both Southern and Northern Rhodesia, and Bechuanaland.

However, the British base at the cape was not as secure as they had thought. Earlier disagreements between the British colonists in the cape and their Dutch counterparts, the Boers, had never really been resolved, even though the Boers had expanded to two other regions. In 1886, in one of those Boer regions called the Transvaal, prospectors found gold. Both the Boers and the British wanted that gold for themselves, and relations between them grew increasingly strained as the process of mining the gold began. Nearly 10 years later, in 1895, a group of British colonists, led by Leander S. Jameson (1853–1917), attempted to make a raid on the Transvaal. Even though the raid, today known as the Jameson Raid, failed, the damage was done. The man governing the Transvaal, Paul Kruger (1825–1904), believed that Cecil Rhodes, the Cape Colony’s prime minister, had hatched a scheme to invade both the Transvaal and the Orange Free State.

Conditions worsened when Germany’s emperor, William II, wrote a telegram to Kruger, telling him he had done well by keeping the Jameson Raid from succeeding. William II’s telegram publicly insulted Britain, and the British grew very unhappy. Four years after the Jameson Raid, in 1899, the British and the Dutch colonists officially began battle in the Boer War. The Boers from both the Orange Free State and the Transvaal fought hard for nearly three years, but they could not defeat Britain. The Boers lost the war in 1902. Eight years later, in 1910, Britain combined its own, original colonies on the Cape of Good Hope and Natal with the former Boer territories, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. The resulting region became known as the Union of South Africa, a fairly autonomous British dominion.

In addition to strengthening their holdings in the north and south, and working to create a British link between them, Britain also turned its attention to western and eastern portions of Africa. To the west, Britain returned to its old posts of trade and strengthened them into individual territories and colonies. These newly colonized areas included Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, and Gambia. To the east, Britain strengthened its hold on British Somaliland, Uganda, Kenya, and the island of Zanzibar.
French and Belgian Interests in Africa

By the end of the nineteenth century, France had just as much, if not more, imperial territory in Africa as Britain. From the safe foundation of Algeria, France expanded in 1881 to Tunisia. Next, the French targeted Morocco and created a protectorate there. Meanwhile, France expanded its colonies in the west and around the equator, specifically in French Equatorial Africa. France’s most important colonies in the west were the Ivory Coast, Guinea, and Senegal. France also expanded its empire to two portions of land near waterways: French Somaliland, located by the Red Sea, and Madagascar, an island east of Africa.

Because both France and Britain had both expanded so rapidly, conflict between them was inevitable. After tensions simmered for several years, the conflict finally happened in 1898 and concerned a region called the Sudan, which stands south of Egypt. At that time, Egypt was under British control. Fourteen years earlier, a group of soldiers led by General Charles Gordon (1833–1905) and made up of Britons and Egyptians had followed the Nile from Egypt and entered the Sudan. At the British-Egyptian soldiers’ base in Khartoum, a group of soldiers fighting for a religious faction of Muslims and led by a man titled the Mahdi, attacked. The Muslim soldiers continued their attacks for nearly 10 months. In 1885, when the attacks finally ended, the British-Egyptian forces were crushed.

Eleven years after Gordon’s defeat, the British tried again. This time, their British and Egyptian soldiers followed the famed leader Lord Kitchener (1850–1916) back to the Sudan. They made their stand at a place called Omdurman and, after almost two years of fighting claimed victory over the Mahdi and his soldiers in September 1898. This victory came at a low cost to the British and a high cost to the Mahdi’s men: the British only lost 28 soldiers, while the Sudanese army lost 11,000. Yet less than a week later, as Kitchener’s troops moved along the Nile, they ran into a French army at a place called Fashoda. The French had chosen Major Jean Baptiste Marchand (1863–1934) to lead their troops into the Sudan. Marchand’s troops had approached from the French equatorial region of the continent.

To face potential enemy troops so soon after a longed-for victory in the Sudan made Britain edgy, and the subsequent standoff between the British and the French became known as the Fashoda Crisis. The two countries faced each other angrily and, for a while, many people thought there would be an Anglo-French war. Eventually, however, the French withdrew from the Sudan and ceded it to Britain. Because of this courtesy, France began to move back into Britain’s good graces, and the two countries’ relationship solidified.

Belgium also angled for a piece of the African continent. King Leopold II of Belgium (r. 1865–1909) sought imperial holdings in Africa throughout the 1870s. Interestingly, however, Leopold did not pursue this imperialism as king of Belgium, but as a private (wealthy and powerful) individual. Leopold hired a man of British and American extraction who had worked as both a newspaper writer and explorer, Henry Norton Stanley (1841–1904), to act as his proxy in Africa. Stanley had the power and authority to sign agreements with African rulers on behalf of Leopold, and he did so in areas throughout the Congo, an area in the central part of Africa.
In 1884 and 1885, Germany’s chancellor Otto von Bismarck arranged for a global meeting to take place in Berlin, and the meeting came to be known as the Berlin Conference. Bismarck arranged for the conference to attempt to clarify the various European countries’ designs on Africa. During the Berlin Conference, other countries agreed to allow Belgium’s Leopold II to create the Congo Free State, which he would then govern personally. Ultimately, however, this personal governance caused many problems. Under Leopold’s personal direction, life in the Congo rapidly deteriorated. As Leopold’s agents forced indigenous peoples to work in the production and acquisition of minerals, ivory, and rubber, a global outcry arose over Leopold’s brutal treatment of the native population. By 1908, the formal Belgian regime stepped in and took over Leopold’s rule in the Congo.

The assignment of the Congo to Leopold was not the only outcome of the Berlin Conference. During the meeting, European nations also agreed on a standard set of methods to follow when creating new colonies for their respective empires. And though these standard and regulated methods improved the colonization process for the imperialist powers, they made things much worse for the African people. Based on rules established at the Berlin Conference, as soon as a European country took authority over a portion of African coastline, it could also take control of lands within the continent. The Europeans could portion out Africa based on all kinds of external justifications, simply by remapping the region. Thus Europeans were not bound to honor the internal separations of indigenous peoples; therefore, they ignored things like language barriers and traditional homelands that demarcated where certain

Africans and Europeans gather elephant tusks to sell in the lucrative ivory trade.
people lived. Groups of Africans were ripped apart or mashed together on the whims of European nations and without thought as to whether or not they shared common languages, religions, or other cultural traditions.

Many representatives of European countries did not act honestly when making treaties with African tribal leaders. Because the Africans had little familiarity with the Europeans’ laws or financial habits, when negotiations for rights to areas and goods took place, the African leaders often did not realize that they had willingly given up their claims to lands or goods that had previously belonged to them. Strengthened by their agreements at the Berlin Conference, European nations continued to press their advantage in the African colonies. When the twentieth century began, the vast majority of Africa had been colonized or subjugated to European governance. Ethiopia and Liberia alone remained independent.

**Other European Nations Approach Africa**

Despite the fact that it had been Germany’s Bismarck who spearheaded the Berlin Conference, Germany did not act as aggressively in Africa as other European nations. During Bismarck’s tenure as chancellor, which lasted from 1871 to 1890, he focused on strengthening Germany from within and broadening its power on the European continent.

When Bismarck came to power, Germany had only recently become unified. Bismarck thought Germany would be better served concentrating on domestic issues and immediate European concerns than trying to expand outward into an empire. Yet Bismarck’s power was not absolute, and his views were eventually challenged. Certain influential organizations within Germany successfully pressured him into making some strides toward German imperialism. Members of these organizations thought that creating German colonies would be financially beneficial for Germany and would also make Germany look more formidable to other European countries. Bismarck ultimately pursued imperialist actions on Germany’s behalf to strengthen his own party’s chances during German elections, reasoning that members of influential imperialist organizations were more likely to vote for a political party that also supported imperialism. Toward the end of Bismarck’s tenure, in 1884, Germany took over three regions in the southwest and the west of Africa: German Southwest Africa, the Cameroons, and Togoland. The following year, Germany authoritatively claimed German East Africa.

Germany’s initial reluctance to engage in imperialism, then, did not keep it from flourishing. In comparison, Italy approached imperialism enthusiastically, but it did not flourish. Seeing Britain’s expansion in the south and France’s in the north, Italy targeted the eastern portion of Africa, also known as the Horn of Africa, for its own imperial design at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1889, Italy established the colony of Italian Somaliland, followed by Eritrea in 1890. The next decade, Italy tried to take over Ethiopia, then known as Abyssinia, but its invasion failed. At the 1896 Battle of Adowa, the Italians met crushing defeat. The Italians did not make further significant progress in Africa until 1912, when they gained ground in Tripoli in northern Africa by defeating the Turks who ruled there. For its part, Ethiopia, remained autonomous, joining Liberia as the only African states to avoid imperial control. Liberia, in the west, achieved this distinction because
of its ties to the United States. Years before, former American slaves had founded Liberia, which had the effect of establishing Liberia as something like a protectorate of the United States. So with the exceptions of Liberia and Ethiopia, all of Africa was under European control by 1900.

Other powerful European nations, such as Spain and Portugal, also made inroads into Africa. Portugal, like Britain, already had ports of trade as bases from which to push into Africa. Eventually, Portugal established complete colonies in both the east and the west of Africa, with Mozambique, and Angola and Portuguese Guinea, respectively. Meanwhile, the Spanish concentrated on the west of the continent, with territories in Rio Muni, also known as Spanish Guinea, and the Rio do Oro. As the twentieth century dawned, Spain developed a protectorate of its own in what was called Spanish Morocco.

**Extensions**

- Go online to find additional information on the scramble for Africa. What were the short-and long-term consequences for the Africans?
- Watch the film Out of Africa. What evidence of European imperialism in Kenya can you see in the film? Is the impact largely positive or negative? How does the character Denys Finch Hatton represent Africa?

**Summary**

During the late 1800s, the most powerful European countries—including Portugal, Italy, Spain, France, Belgium, and Britain—participated in the “scramble for Africa,” rushing to divide up the continent among themselves. Because Europe had recently come through the Second Industrial Revolution, its nations were far more advanced in terms of technology and warfare than the African regions they sought to conquer. Africa had plenty of the raw materials the Europeans desired, and its people provided little resistance. Indeed, the leaders of African peoples often unknowingly agreed to give the Europeans control over their regions when they met with the Europeans and made trading pacts. When the Europeans clashed too forcefully about how to divide the African continent, they met at the Berlin Conference and agreed upon a plan. While this plan kept the Europeans from arguing over Africa, individual African tribes suffered as a result of it. As of 1900, only two parts of Africa had not succumbed to European control: Ethiopia and Liberia.

**Looking Ahead**

The Europeans did not focus their imperial ambitions solely on Africa in the 1800s. During that time, European countries also covetously eyed resources and territory in Asia. Europeans became especially interested in China, and European nations moved rapidly to secure their interests there, just as they had in Africa. Meanwhile, Western countries approached Japan in the hopes of fostering more global trade. To the surprise of many, the small island nation of Japan soon became a substantial imperialist power, just like many nations in Europe. Japan expressed interest in imperial expansion into China, an interest that resulted in war between the two countries over their rights to a third Asian property: Korea.
1. The khedive of Egypt, who owned a huge number of shares of the Suez Canal Company, was in debt and agreed to sell 44 percent of the company’s total shares to Britain, giving the British a controlling interest.

2. British colonists tried to invade and occupy Transvaal, an area colonized by Dutch settlers, but they were repelled by the Dutch.

3. The Mahdi’s army lost Sudan to Britain.

4. Belgium and its king, Leopold

5. France, Great Britain, Spain, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Portugal
Early Imperialism in Asia

Essential Questions
- What forms did imperialism take in India, China, and the Middle East?
- How did the Japanese practice imperialism?
- What were the causes and effects of the Russo-Japanese War?

Keywords
extraterritoriality
sphere of influence
Set the Stage
As the nations of Europe scrambled for territory and resources in Africa, they also concentrated on the Middle East, Asia, and India. However, European nations revised the imperialist tactics they had employed in Africa and used more subtle methods. When colonizing Africa, Europeans had created new nation-states that arbitrarily brought together people of different social and linguistic groups, often forcing traditional rivals to share new national boundaries. Europeans also tried to bring African societies into a political system similar to their own. In contrast, Asian societies typically had more similarities to European societies than African societies. Europeans had far less work when it came to incorporating Asian peoples into European empires. Thus, several nations, including Russia, France, Britain, and Germany hurried to claim portions of Asia. France laid claim to Indonesia, Britain occupied much of India, and Germany began making plans to lay claim to parts of China. Russia’s imperialist strategy would backfire, as the country targeted parts of China that Japan had already begun to dominate. When Japan and Russia came to blows over China, the Russo-Japanese War ensued.

Imperialism in Asia in the Early 1800s
The 1800s saw the rise of the new imperialism and the “scramble for Africa.” The sway of imperialism extended beyond Africa, however, as European countries also turned their attention to Asia. In many ways, Europeans would find it easier to subject Asian peoples to European control than African peoples. Because African countries had such different forms of government and society, the European colonizers had to work very hard to set up European-style systems in Africa. Societies in China and India, on the other hand, had systems of government and society with much more in common with European systems. The Europeans could thus more easily adapt Asian societies to suit their own needs. In a sense, the Europeans could install their own ways of governing to those already in place in Asia—a system far easier than the one they had embarked upon in Africa.

Britain, one of the European countries most invested in imperialist expansion in Asia, initially turned its attention to two of the largest Asian countries: India and China. Britain’s interest in India originated from its conflict against France during the Seven Years’ War, which France had lost to Britain. As part of the spoils of war, Britain received the right to monitor India. This monitoring became organized and led by the British East India Company. This monitoring was not absolute rule, yet that would come soon enough. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the people of India could not agree on a cohesive governing system, which left them vulnerable, so Britain took advantage by developing loyalties among individuals throughout the country. Meanwhile, the British East India Company gained power and authority. This group, founded in 1600, had first been set up so that the British could participate in the Asian spice trade and compete with its primary
trading opponent at the time, Holland. While it took time to establish the East India Company’s influence in India, by the early eighteenth century company members had significant influence over Indian domestic politics. The company also focused on bringing British imports into India. Britain used the company as a kind of army to take over each separate region in India, and by 1848 nearly all of the subcontinent was controlled by the British East India Company.

As British control over India strengthened, many Indian people saw British attitudes as discriminatory and disrespectful toward Muslim and Hindu practices. The people of India could only stand this disrespect for a limited time, and by 1857, violence erupted. That year, soldiers of the Indian army known as sepoys led a campaign of resistance against British rule. This uprising became known as the Great Mutiny, or the Sepoy Rebellion. Eventually, Britain put down the sepoys, showing them little mercy. The next steps Britain took included removing the British East India Company as an informal governing body and installing the British ruler, Queen Victoria (r. 1837–1901), as the absolute ruler of India. While Victoria stood as the figurehead of British rule of India, she did not really participate in day-to-day governing. Instead, the British Parliament ruled India, assisted by a tiny but powerful group of bureaucrats in India, all of whom were white and British. For the most part, Parliament and the bureaucrats treated the Indians as inferiors in terms of culture and society.

China put up a strong defense, but ended up submitting to Britain at approximately the same time India did. For centuries, China had tried to keep out people from other nations, thinking of them as less educated and less civilized. As the years went by, however, China’s power began to wane, especially in relation to the advancements made by Europe’s industrialized nation-states. By the nineteenth century, the Qing Dynasty had difficulty maintaining China’s isolation from Europe. For many years, powerful European nations had sought access to a variety of products made in China, but trade between Europe and China was limited because the only product the Chinese had been willing to purchase had been opium, a highly addictive drug that was not produced in Europe. When the British strengthened their foothold in India, they had access to the poppy fields from which opium is made. The British wanted to export their opium supplies directly from India and across the Chinese border. China’s rulers resented the opium trafficking of the British and banned the trade. Chinese authorities arrested British traders on the command of the emperor. In response, Britain went to war against China in 1839, sending troops to key Chinese cities in what became known as the First Opium War. The conflict ended with the signing of the Treaty of Nanking in 1842. This treaty gave many advantages to British traders. Not only did Britain take possession of Hong Kong, a key seaport, but China also had to allow international goods into a number of other Chinese ports. The Second Opium War, fought

Britain’s Victoria ruled as the longest-reigning female monarch in history. She served as the “empress of India” from 1877 until her death in 1901.
by the British and French against China between 1856 and 1860 also resulted in China’s defeat, further opening of Chinese ports to European traders.

**Imperialism in Asia in the Late 1800s**

Britain continued to strengthen its hold over India throughout the century. India had already begun to industrialize before the arrival of British rulers and was therefore capable of producing its own goods, but Britain viewed India primarily as a source for natural resources and a market for goods produced in British factories. Thus, British rulers of India tried to quash the subcontinent’s nascent industrial development. Still, British rule did have some positive outcomes for India. For example, the British constructed railroad systems throughout the country in an attempt to modernize it. They made it possible for Indian citizens to learn English, so Indians could interact with and participate in British society.

The British also culled the best and brightest Indian youth and sent them to Britain to be educated at colleges there. The idea was that this kind of training would help create more bureaucrats who could work on behalf of Britain in India and be accepted there as locals. Perhaps fittingly, this education would work in favor of the Indians and against the British. Indians educated in Europe returned home and began working together to fight for their rights against the British. By 1885, they had founded a governing body to represent Indian nationals called the Indian National Congress. The majority of people serving in the initial congress were Hindus. Members of the congress began calling for political autonomy and equal rights for India and Indians. Just a few years later, left-wing members of the Indian National Congress began advocating total separation from Britain. Two individuals in particular, Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964) and Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948), would use what they had learned about British ideals and moral codes to support India’s own quest for self-rule and independence.

That liberty would take decades to arrive, however. In 1900 Britain governed India with a tight bureaucratic apparatus. At the same time, Britain had other worries. Russia had been making incursions into the center of Asia, establishing a foothold north of Britain’s own imperial outposts. The British became particularly concerned when the Russians made inroads into Afghanistan, a region that Britain had already been interested in for some time. Britain and Russia stood at a stalemate for quite some time in regard to Afghanistan, a situation eased only in 1907 when Russia promised to remove its troops from the region. Britain also had concerns about France’s imperial expansion, taking place on India’s eastward side in Indochina. In 1886, to strengthen its position on the eastern front, Britain took control of Burma. Between Afghanistan and Burma, British India’s defenses would be strengthened from two directions.

Britain also made treaties over territories with Germany and Holland. In 1884, Germany confirmed it would work with Britain to divide up the large Pacific island known as New Guinea. Seven years later, Holland and Britain divided up Borneo, another island in the East Indies.

Meanwhile, beginning in the 1860s and extending through the end of the decade, France continued to develop its control over territory in Indochina, close
enough to British Asia to create a threat of conflict between the two European powers. War between Britain and France was avoided in 1896 when the two countries agreed that they would work together to keep an autonomous nation as a kind of shock absorber, or buffer-state, between them, to prevent either country from expanding too far. This buffer-state, modern-day Thailand, was called Siam.

By the 1890s, most imperialist European nations had come to focus on China, where the Manchu Dynasty had been revealed as corrupt and unable to defend China. China was vulnerable, particularly to encroachment by Britain, France, Germany, and Russia. These countries created **spheres of influence** in Chinese territory. These spheres did not belong solely to their respective European countries, but the European nations exerted tremendous power within them. The close proximity of European territories caused great concern among the Chinese. France moved from its controlling position in Indochina to create its spheres of influence in the south of China. Britain had significant financial investment in China, as well as control over Hong Kong. The British used their power to establish a sphere of influence that radiated from the Yangtze River Basin.

The existence of these spheres of influence were not China’s only problem. Because of a system called **extraterritoriality**, European nationals within China were not subject to Chinese laws. These nationals only had to obey the laws of their own country of origin. With so many different European nations establishing centers of power in China, the international ability to conduct trade freely through China seemed in grave jeopardy. The United States, which was rapidly developing its own imperialist interests in the Pacific as well as trade missions to Asia, created a compromise called the Open Door policy. This policy’s goals included keeping China whole, rather than splitting the country among European nations. Despite the Open Door policy, Chinese citizens grew increasingly frustrated with their treatment by the Europeans. A clandestine group of Chinese individuals banded together against the foreign powers and led a revolution in 1900 called the Boxer Rebellion. European countries worked together to put down the insurrection. During the carnage that followed, thousands of Chinese citizens who practiced Christianity died, and more than 200 foreign missionaries in China were killed as well. As a result of the Boxer Rebellion, the Chinese had to pay the Europeans additional penalties. The Boxer Rebellion also ushered in the final chapter of rule

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**sphere of influence**

area where a foreign nation exerts political or legal control

**extraterritoriality**

government policy that foreign nationals in another country, such as China, would be held responsible only to laws of their home nation, rather than those of the nation where they were located.
for the Manchu Dynasty, which would collapse completely in 1912. The Boxer Rebellion demonstrated the people's unhappiness with European encroachment in China and, by extension, with their own government, the Manchu Dynasty, for permitting it. After 1900, European control in China increased as the country's domestic government faltered. Different organizations, which worked against both European influence and their own Chinese government, schemed to take down the Manchu rulers. Their successful 1912 revolt would result in a new government similar to European models.

Japanese Imperialists
Another threat to China came not from Europe but Japan. In 1894, the Japanese declared war on the Chinese over a territorial dispute in the Korean peninsula. By doing so, Japan entered into a groundbreaking stage of imperialist conquests. In less than 50 years, Japan would move from an isolated and backward state to a modern, industrialized nation with a military comparable to those of European powers. It would become a country with an internal train system and well staffed with its own manufacturing sources. It would move from having no colonies to possessing strong footholds in a nation much larger and much more populous than itself: China.

Toward the end of the 1600s, Japan cut itself off from the rest of the globe. This self-imposed embargo lasted more than 150 years, ending in 1854 when a sea-faring military delegation from the United States, led by Commodore Matthew Perry (1794–1858), forced the Japanese back into global commerce.

Japan began to rapidly catch up with Europe by updating its governing regime and its finances to contend with the nineteenth-century international economy, and preparing its military to defend the country and fight using modern weapons. The Japanese evaluated both the missteps and successes of European imperialism, and applied the most successful tactics to their own territorial pursuits. It soon became clear that Japanese industrialization had been successful: during the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895, fought primarily for control of Korea, it took relatively little time for the Japanese to defeat the Chinese. Japan had become a key global authority, which took many national governments in Europe by surprise. The peace agreement at the end of the Sino-Japanese War, known as the Treaty of Shimonoseki of 1895, included many concessions to Japan by China, including the cession of Taiwan, known then as Formosa. China also agreed to Japanese control of Korea and gave Japan control of the Liaotung Peninsula. This peninsula came with a significant area called Port Arthur.

These rapid gains on the part of Japan worried several European countries, including France, Russia, and Germany. These three nations were afraid that Japan's authority in China would grow too strong. As a result, they demanded that Japan give up its hegemony in Korea and its right to lease the Liaotung area.

Expansion in China and the Russo-Japanese War
When Japan relinquished some of its claims on China under pressure by European powers, Russia and Germany did not hesitate to profit from what they saw as a
potential Japanese vulnerability. By the end of the 1890s, Germany had taken over an area of China called the Shantung Peninsula. Even worse from a Japanese perspective, Russia had received permission to lease the Liaotung Peninsula, a right Japan had won in the Treaty of Shimonoseki but later abandoned. In addition, Russia had begun constructing rail systems throughout Manchuria, including the Chinese Eastern Railway in the north, which would make an already-existing route, the Trans-Siberian Railroad, even shorter. The Trans-Siberian Railroad traveled from Vladivostok to Moscow. To the south, the South Manchuria Railway was planned by Russia to connect other parts of China and Russia to Port Arthur. Throughout this time, both Britain and France also continued to press their advantages in China to keep up with the other imperialist countries.

This combination of events made Japan increasingly wary of the European powers, especially Russia. Not only had Russia started building another sphere of influence, this one in Manchuria, but it also seemed that Russia had ideas about extending its reach into Korea. In February 1904, Japan declared war on Russia. Few observers saw it coming: Japan launched a surprise assault on Russian ships at Port Arthur. In 1905, Japan won an important conflict against Russia in the Battle of Mukden. In May of that year, Japan’s armies wiped out ships belonging to Russia’s Baltic Sea force that had been posted to the Far East. This conflict became known as the Battle of Tsushima Straits.

To resolve terms between the countries and create peace, U.S. president Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919) served as a negotiator and helped forge the Treaty of Portsmouth. This treaty, which took effect in September 1905, included four important points. First, it restored the leasehold rights of Liaotung to Japan. Second, Russia was allowed to hold on to its sphere of influence in northern Manchuria, but Japan received permission to create one of its own in the south. Third, Russia had to give the south portion of Sakhalin Island to Japan, and finally, Japan received permission to occupy Korea. In 1910, Japan would take over Korea completely.

**Extensions**

- Read the short story “Shooting an Elephant” by George Orwell. What does this story reveal about attitudes held by colonizers and the colonized?

**Summary**

As well as expanding their empires to Africa, European nations brought them to Asia. However, the imperialist methods the Europeans employed on the two continents were very dissimilar. Asian societies already had complicated financial and political institutions; Europeans could bend the existing institutions to their own ends rather than starting from scratch. When Britain claimed India and portions of China, it set a standard for the other European countries to also adopt. France took over Indochina, while Germany and Russia moved into China as Britain had. In addition, the United States began establishing an important presence in China, through market treaties. The United States’ actions also brought Japan into contact with imperialist ideas. Instead of becoming another European colony, however,
Japan turned into an imperialist power in its own right. Soon, Japan had begun disagreeing with other European nations, such as Russia, about authority over China. This disagreement culminated in the Russo-Japanese War.

**Looking Ahead**

Imperial actions would be tied to another nineteenth-century problem, overpopulation, and provide a possible solution to it through colonization. As the twentieth century drew near, Europe would experience a tremendous and unique population increase, which would strain its resources to the breaking point. Many Europeans would end up leaving the continent, either temporarily or for good, in search of better circumstances, food, and funds. As they traveled around the globe, they would help enforce an economic separation between the world’s rich and poor—a separation already established by Europe’s imperialist behavior.

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**SELF-CHECK ANSWERS**

1. Africa’s societies were so different from European societies that when European countries colonized Africa, they had to implement new political and financial systems from the ground up. In contrast, Asian political and financial systems were similar to European ones, meaning that Europeans could tap into these systems during the colonization process.

2. Britain and China’s struggle about whether Britain could import opium into China

3. Indochina

4. Japan defeated Russia: Russia had to make significant concessions to Japan when the war concluded. Then, Russia moved away from Asian imperialism to concentrate on Europe’s Balkan region, laying groundwork for World War I and the Russian Revolution.
Migration and Inequality

Essential Questions

- What caused the global inequality seen by the early twentieth century? How would you compare global inequality in 1750 and 1970?
- What was the impact of population pressures and migration patterns in the late nineteenth century, especially on European and Asian migrants?
- What did the critics of imperialism and industrialization use as their arguments?

Keywords
- decolonization
- dwarf economy
- immigrants
- migrants
- pogroms
- Third World
Set the Stage

Facing the challenges posed by wars, starvation, droughts, and disease, Europeans born prior to the eighteenth century found life to be short and often painful. People raised large families and seemed resigned to relatively early deaths. As society advanced, however, people lived longer, often as a result of better medical care and more advanced technology. By the 1800s, people in Europe enjoyed longer life expectancies. Longer lives meant greater demand for resources that Europe alone could not provide. By the nineteenth century, Europe’s population began to exceed its resources. Europeans would have to travel outside their continent’s borders to bring in the resources their home territories could not yield.

The Rise of Global Inequality (1750–1970)

The dramatic changes resulting from Europe’s nineteenth-century Industrial Revolutions are difficult to measure. Yet the Industrial Revolution changed the world; it was a defining moment in humankind’s trajectory. The Industrial Revolution changed everything—how people lived, where they lived, what they ate, and what they did. In short, for the people of Europe, everything changed as a result of industrialization.

One of the most important changes created by the Industrial Revolution came in the ways it shifted the balance of power between all the nations of the world. In the industrial era, the world became divided into two separate, uneven camps. In one were the countries that had industrialized and become richer and more powerful. In the other were the countries that did not industrialize and became relatively poorer and less powerful. As the industrialized countries, which included the nations of North America and Europe, became more powerful and sophisticated, they became more and more dominant on the world scale. In turn, the countries that had not benefited from industrialization, known as the Third World, fell further and further behind.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the differences between the two groups had become profound. As the world became increasingly globalized, the wealthy countries got wealthier while needy countries became even more impoverished. The globe’s financial markets came to depend on the divide between the wealthy and impoverished regions, a situation that continues in the twenty-first century. Global resources are still divided unfairly between the very wealthy regions and the very deprived.

Most economic historians agree that the globe’s finances had been fairly evenly distributed as late as 1750. At that time, the typical person living in Europe had about as much money and possessions as a typical person living in Africa, Asia, or the Americas. In fact, in the middle of the eighteenth century, Europe did not stand out as a wealthy group of countries. Of all the nations in

Third World poorer half of the world that did not reap the rewards of industrialism; those who had worse economies and living standards than the “First World” West
Europe, even the richest, Britain, did not have any financial achievements to set it apart from countries outside of the Western world.

Scholars also agree that the division between rich and poor countries, and the corresponding health and societal benefits that accompany a strong economy, can be blamed on the aftereffects of the Industrial Revolution. Britain’s history provides a clear and illuminating example of this change. Historic records show that by 1830, Britain had industrialized far more rapidly than other European nations. Correspondingly, citizens of Britain happened to be making far more money than citizens of other European countries at that time. However, as the century moved forward, Britain’s advantage over the other European nations—and the United States—became smaller. As other European nations began to catch up to Britain from an industrial perspective, their economies also started to catch up.

By the dawn of the twentieth century, people in the parts of the world that had been first to industrialize continued to prosper. This situation went on for decades, through the end of World War II. It would take the new peacetime changes and the process of decolonization to finally begin to change the ingrained global financial disparity. Nations that had formerly belonged to the Third World could start to try and break out of that category. They started to try to increase their own national finances to encourage industrialization.

Differences between countries in terms of finances has meant real differences in citizens’ quality of life on almost every level. One can expect that, in comparison to citizens of a First World country like Britain or the United States, the citizens of a poor, Third World country would have to deal with poor living conditions, low life expectancy, and insufficient nutrition. Not surprisingly, this disparity in life and finance between regions has led to much discussion. One group of scholars contends that the people of the First World have worked hard to create and maintain a higher social and economic status. A different group of scholars contends that the First World has not honestly gained its higher wealth and status, but took it by exploiting the resources of the Third World. These scholars blame First World countries for practicing imperialism and colonial policies up through the twentieth century, keeping Third World countries impoverished by force, taking their resources and keeping them from rising up and making the world a better place for themselves.

The Population Push
Prior to the eighteenth century, Europe’s population had grown slowly and erratically. There had already been two sharp increases in population; the first, from about 1050 to the early 1300s, was halted by the Black Death. The second, from about the 1500s to the mid-1600s, had been a slow but steady upswing of an increase of about 1 percent per year, leveled off by deaths from war, starvation, or disease. The population of Europe had been prevented from growing too much because there had not been enough food or other resources to go around. As a result, the population grew quite slowly for much of the late 1600s and early 1700s, before beginning yet another steep climb in about 1750.
With the 1700s, then, came the third and most important increase in Europe’s population. This increase would last for almost 200 years, into the twentieth century. While during the 1800s European citizens began having fewer children, the population did not experience a corresponding decrease because fewer people were dying at the relatively early ages that had been customary in the 1700s. People had started living longer, owing to advances in health care and technology, as well as better habits in hygiene. In 1800, about 188 million people lived in Europe. One hundred years later, the number had more than doubled to 432 million.

Those numbers do not disclose the whole story, nor do they reveal just how much Europe contributed to the world population during that time. An additional 60 million persons moved away from Europe in the century following 1815. If they had stayed, Europe’s population could have conceivably swelled to more than 500 million. The 60 million Europeans who moved away from Europe itself, known as migrants, traveled mainly to regions that had already been colonized by European countries, such as Australia and New Zealand, Siberia, and North and South America. In these new regions, the European migrants helped quickly raise the populations there. For instance, in the 100 years following 1800, the populations of the United States and Canada rose by 75 million. This rapid increase in population meant that the percentage of the world’s population belonging to people of European descent continued to grow. People on other continents, such as Asia and Africa, did not see the rise in numbers that the Europeans did. By the time World War I began in 1914, Europeans and their relations on other continents made up nearly 40 percent of the world’s population.

It makes sense, then, that the increase in Europe’s population would make European countries even more interested in imperial conquest, and drive European citizens themselves to emigrate in search of land, resources, and personal gain. Faced with a larger population in the 1800s, Europeans had the same problems they had had in the 1700s: shortages of food, not enough land-based resources, and too many people in urban centers. By the nineteenth century, however, there existed fewer means of keeping the population in check, such as wars, famines, and disease.

The people of Europe began to migrate about two decades after the initial expansion of the population. About a generation into the expansion, the new citizens realized that very little chances for fortune or stability existed for them in their home countries. All the property had already been divided up among existing citizens, and it would be difficult for new generations to achieve upward mobility. As a result, many young people left. This swift migration happened most of all in the early 1800s, when the life-changing aspects of the Industrial Revolution had not yet been fully felt. The Industrial Revolution would supply new means of employment for European citizens, and provide a means of supplying European citizens with resources and new chances for self-improvement—things previous generations would have left Europe to find for themselves. Before the Industrial Revolution, Europe’s population had simply outstripped the relative area on which it had been raised.

Thus, in the early years of the Industrial Revolution, millions of Europeans became migrants moving outside of the domestic homes they had always known.
While some citizens preferred to stay on European soil, moving to urban centers and away from their former agricultural homes, others went to new continents entirely, hoping to make their fortunes elsewhere. Ireland, in particular, saw two tremendous losses of population: first, during the Industrial Revolution, as its citizens seemingly emigrated en masse to England, and second, during the Irish potato famine, as its citizens sought to escape hunger by relocating to the United States.

Many Europeans left their countries for brighter options overseas. To examine their journeys, three important elements of nineteenth-century immigration must be taken into account. For one thing, as the nineteenth century drew to a close and World War I approached, it seemed as though more citizens emigrated from Europe than ever before. In the first years of the 1900s, for example, over 11 million people emigrated from Europe—a strong contrast to the approximately 2 million who had emigrated halfway through the previous century. People leaving Europe in search of a better life elsewhere can thus be seen as an important and integral part of what it meant to live in Europe during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Those who continued to live in Europe during that time often expected some of their friends and relatives to migrate or emigrate. Family units became separated as Europe’s young continued to move across the globe, but not all European citizens emigrated in the same way or at the same time. Based on their country of origin, European immigrants’ approaches to migration varied considerably. Take, for instance, emigrants from Ireland and Britain. As early as the 1840s, citizens from those two countries had begun departing from their homelands by the millions—in part because British citizens who had been living in the countryside became impoverished and needed to find livelihoods elsewhere. Another contributing factor, though, came from the British Empire’s policies that gave certain colonial privileges to citizens of British extraction over others. A British emigrant would have a better chance at finding work in a British colony than a German, French, or Italian emigrant, and there happened to be more British colonies than any others. This meant that British citizens who had received substantial training or had business experience became nearly as likely to leave Britain as their poor, rural counterparts. In the 80 years following 1840, nearly 33 percent of all European migrants came from Britain.

The migration patterns of other countries, like Germany and Italy, varied greatly. In Germany, the migration of citizens began slowly after 1830, with great rushes outward every 20 to 30 years. After the last rush in the 1880s, though, Germany’s emigration slowed down greatly. Germany had begun industrializing very successfully and had started to close in on Britain. As such it had begun creating more and more opportunities for domestic employment of its own citizens. The people of Italy did not seem so lucky. Italian emigration saw a steady increase through the beginnings of World War I. This continued increase seemed to indicate that Italy had not been as successful in industrializing as Germany or Britain, and that people in the Italian countryside could not find employment or resources with which to support themselves. Overall, then, the number of people who might emigrate
from any European country depended on that particular country’s financial and societal state, as well as the condition of the country’s overseas imperial colonies.

The majority of Europe’s migrating citizens eventually ended up in the United States. However, of all the migrating citizens in the world during the 1800s and 1900s, less than half ended up moving to the United States. The greater portion of the migrants of this period ended up in countries like Australia, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, and Russia. While the United States had plenty of migrants coming in, those people did not make up as great a share of the country’s population as they did in other countries, like Brazil, Canada, and Argentina. This can be seen clearly by comparing migrants coming in to Argentina and the United States in the first decade of the twentieth century. Every year during that decade, the percentage of new migrants in Argentina’s entire population equaled 3 percent; in the United States, the percentage hovered at about 1 percent. Proportionally, more immigrants came to Argentina.

**Migrants from Europe and Asia**

Nineteenth-century migrants came primarily from Europe and Asia. During that century, a number of people left Europe in waves due to a variety of motivating factors. An overwhelming majority of European migrants were impoverished individuals, and frequently they came from the countryside. A typical European migrant, in fact, could be described as either a rural tradesperson, or a farmer or farmworker from the lower class. Frequently, this typical migrant found it impossible to sustain a minimum standard of living due to the confluence of several new factors: the availability of inexpensive products made in factories, the scarcity of arable land, and the practice of farming by large landholders rather than small individuals.

This latter point is clearly illustrated by the wave of German migrants who departed southwest Germany and the Rhineland between 1830 and 1854. These Germans fell prey to something Friedrich List described as the **dwarf economy**: Germany had only miniscule portions of arable land available to individual farmers at the time, and as industrialized factory products became more prevalent, craftsmen could not find a market for their products. European citizens faced with these circumstances often found it better to put most of their possessions on the market and take the resulting funds to purchase cheaper property, often in areas like the Midwest of the United States. Today, many people remember these migrants from Europe as individuals who had absolutely no money and no place to go, or as working-class individuals forced out of the cities of Europe. However, more often than not, these migrants could best be described as hard workers from various professions, who brought their talents and skills with them as they emigrated from their European homelands.

Generally speaking, migrants brought an ethos of hard work with them when they traveled to new lands. Many sought to rise into a higher class in a new country. Often that meant that newly colonized nations welcomed migrants, because of the hard work and good qualities they brought to their new homes. Most of these migrants happened to still be relatively youthful. For instance, about 66 percent of the migrants who came to the United States had not yet turned 31. Even more
shockingly, nearly all of them—90 percent—had not yet turned 40. Many did not have spouses or families. When the migrants landed on new shores, they had much to offer—health, ability, and determination.

**Returning Home**

Many of the European citizens who left their homes on the continent during the nineteenth century had every intention of returning to their home countries after spending some time making their fortunes abroad. This put them in direct contrast to immigrants, who left their homelands and planned, as they did so, on leaving for good. For example, approximately half of the Europeans who migrated to Argentina did not stay. About a third of all Europeans who had migrated ended up going back to their home countries. Whether or not migrants returned home, of course, seemed to correspond with where they had been from in the first place. Balkan migrants, for instance, became far more likely to return home later in life than migrants from Ireland. Of all the European migrants who traveled to the United States to work during the late 1800s, 87 percent of those from the Balkans ended up going home, while 90 percent of those from Ireland ended up staying.

For many migrants, deciding whether to go home depended more than anything on one main factor: whether they would be able to purchase territory of their own in their previous homelands. In most of Britain, it seemed nearly impossible to purchase land. The vast majority of British soil was owned by a relatively few wealthy individuals.
or corporations. Returning migrants, even those who had made a good deal of money in the New World, would have little hope of buying farmland back home in Britain.

Financial reasons for not returning to a place of origin, however unfortunate, pale in comparison to other, more life-threatening reasons. European Jews living in Russia, for example, did not begin to migrate in large numbers until the late 1800s, but when they left most of them had no intention of going back. Up until the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881, the Jews of Russia had managed to live fairly comfortably. Even though the fanatics who killed Alexander II had not been Jewish, the Russian Jews received blame from the tsar's death. Under the following tsar's regime, the Jews suffered tremendously, as the state created and enforced new prejudicial laws and implemented pogroms. At the beginning of the 1880s, approximately 5 million Jewish people lived in Russia. They had been forced into certain regions of the country, and their mobility throughout Russia had been limited. Jews could live in tiny urban centers in a region known as the Pale of Settlement. Few careers were open to Russian Jews, and those tended to be in the crafts or in small-scale market exchange, and they had little hope of purchasing territory to farm. With all these factors limiting their opportunities for advancement in Russia, it made sense that the Jewish people who had started to migrate during that same decade would not wish to return to a land where the government seemed prejudiced against them, where they could not own property, and where they would struggle to make a living.

The Example of Italian Migrants
A typical case of the trajectory of European migrants can be found in the many paths forged by Italian migrants during the latter part of the nineteenth century. While people from other countries, such as Britain and Germany, had begun migrating decades earlier, Italians did not really start to move until the 1880s because they had not really had a reason to leave any earlier. By the 1880s, though, 75 percent of the Italian people relied on farming to support themselves. When farm machines and new methods in the United States created a tremendous increase in wheat production, Italy began importing the inexpensive grain from across the Atlantic. Italian people of the working class had already been facing significant economic hurdles. Now they suddenly found themselves unable to make a living by producing and selling their own wheat.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Italy had not yet become fully industrialized, even though its citizens had begun to witness a swift population increase. Several groups of citizens had no choice but to depart their nation, much as they might have wanted to stay in Italy, because they could not afford to do otherwise. Unlike British and Irish migrants, who had been tenant farmers or persons working on land they could never hope to own, many Italian migrants did abandon their own tiny plots of land. The Italian citizens who were tenant farmers often ended up remaining in their own country, where instead of putting their energy to use in farming or industry, they became politically active, most frequently on the left. While they stayed, millions of other Italians departed for greener pastures. By migrating, people hoped to achieve two goals: first, to leave overcrowded Italy, and second, to start making more money, which some migrants hoped would enable them to return to Italy one day and purchase back all the territory they had lost.

pogroms state-organized prejudicial and brutal assaults, often aimed at a specific collection of people
Italian migrants spread out across the globe. A large part of them traveled to the United States, especially after the turn of the twentieth century. Prior to that, an even larger number of Italian migrants had traveled to South America—specifically, to Brazil and Argentina. In those South American regions, 67 percent of the migrants were from Italy. Italian migrants became particularly drawn to the opportunities of working on the great coffee plantations of Brazil. Because the plantations in Brazil had long relied on the labor of enslaved human beings, the recent abolition of slavery had created a labor shortage. The Brazilian coffee industry needed workers, and quickly. To get Italian migrants to come and work for them, the Brazilians offered to help offset their voyage costs and pay them more money than they could get elsewhere.

Even stable conditions like those in Brazil could not keep Italian migrants tethered anywhere for too long. The majority of these migrants did not want to build long-term lives outside of Italy. Instead, they thought of themselves as migrating birds who would travel south for the winter to find sustenance (money). In other words, they would continue to do their own farming at home on their domestic Italian farms, where their products included flax as well as grain. Then, in the colder European months, the Italian migrants would travel to South America and work on farms there, leaving Italy in December and staying in South America until the first of the European spring, in April. As soon as they got back to Italy in April, it would be time to start all over again. Today, traces of these Italian migrant workers are visible throughout the countries in Latin America, particularly Brazil and Argentina. Many Italians who traveled outside of their home country had training in construction and building design. They held a practical monopoly on those careers in other countries, and many of the buildings they helped create in Latin America’s urban centers have a feel that is quite reminiscent of Italy itself.

As one might expect, the Italian migrants who traveled so extensively did not have it easy. They could reap substantial financial rewards, however. If an Italian migrant worked in both Italy and South America and saved his money, he could collect anywhere from 250 to 300 dollars in just a few months. Some Italian migrants preferred to stay relatively closer to home, however, venturing across the border into neighboring European nations. Of all the surrounding countries, most Italians preferred to venture to France. In hardly any time at all, Italian immigrants in France had begun to catch up to their counterparts in the United States. By 1911 the number of people of Italian descent born in France was about one-third the number of people of Italian descent born in the United States.

Whether migrants came from Italy or another European country, they remained influenced by their connections to friends and relatives. Maintaining those connections would often determine how migrants lived. For example, a group of people who had been friends in a small town in Ireland might migrate en masse. When they arrived in their new location, they would put down roots in an area relatively close to one another. In effect, they would have packed up part of their old town in Ireland and brought it with them to a new city across the ocean. These migrants wanted to alter the destiny they would have had as European citizens. This was true not only for working-class migrants from Italy or persecuted Jews from Russia, but also for citizens of Scandinavian countries like Norway and Sweden. Migrants saw
life-changing opportunities in new places where they could help form the world around them and where the majority could rule. All too often, at home their lifestyles and opportunities would already be dictated by their class and financial standing. They would have to bow to the whims of the more aristocratic individuals, who controlled nearly every aspect of European life, especially its politics and religion. Unlike the migrants, aristocrats wanted things to stay the way they were. Norway’s poet laureate, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, spoke for many of his fellow countrymen who planned on becoming migrants, when he claimed that he had no choice but to leave home and go out into the world—staying would eat him up from the inside.

This belief that home no longer held promise for young migrants also spread within Ukraine’s urban center of Kiev. At the end of the nineteenth century, Kiev had a large population of Jews. One spoke for all of them in 1882, claiming that Kiev had nothing left for them; if the Jews stayed there, other people would walk all over them, disrespect them, and steal from them. The speaker stated that if they could not be treated civilly, the Jews would have no choice but to leave. For the Jews and the Norwegians, then, for people of minority religions and majority lower classes, migration stood out as the best possible solution of bettering themselves and increasing their social, financial, or class standing, or overall well-being, as the case might have been. Only when situations began to improve at home in European countries did migration abate. Potential migrants had to be enticed into staying by being promised civil rights.

**Migration from Asia**

During the same period of the late nineteenth century, Asia also provided a significant number of migrant workers seeking out better working and living conditions overseas. The worse things got in areas of the Asian countryside hit the hardest by economic upheaval, the more people left their nations behind in search of larger opportunities. From Asia, the migrants included people from India, Japan, China, and the Philippines, as well as other, smaller countries. Like European migrants, some would return to their native villages eventually, while others would settle in their new country and stay. Compared to the large number of European migrants, which totaled over 60 million, the number of Asian migrants seems relatively small: approximately 3 million in the four decades leading up to 1920.

The majority of Asian migrants traveled to the United States (primarily California and Hawaii), parts of Africa and the south of Asia, Australia, and Latin America. In nearly all these new locations, the migrants served as indentured, or contracted, workers either mining for gold or toiling on large farms. Frequently, the managers of these lands brought in Asian migrants to work because abolition had eliminated their ability to force enslaved people to labor for them. When managers could not rely on slave labor, they turned to migrants. There is evidence of this as early as the 1840s: during that decade, Cuba did not have enough of a labor force to meet the demands of its harvest. The governing regime, with roots in Spain, hired migrant workers from China. The migrants who came from China to Cuba did so after committing to eight years of work. For their troubles, they received meager food and pay, and
their Cuban overseers paid them roughly 25 cents for a day’s work. Cuba continued to import Chinese migrant workers until 1873, when the Chinese government put a stop to it. In the last 20 years of the migration, some 130,000 Chinese citizens left their homes, only to discover that their new lives in Cuba consisted of exceedingly hard work, bad conditions, and terrible pay.

A comparable situation greeted Asian migrants to Peru, where over 100,000 Chinese laborers went during the 1800s. Other nations also strenuously drafted people from the Asian continent as an inexpensive workforce. Just like European migrants, Asian migrants hoped to make a better life in these new worlds and use their experience to their own advantage. As soon as they could manage it, many Asian migrants would escape from the demeaning positions farming or mining and go to larger, more populated areas to try and make their way. Unfortunately, they continued to face hardship. Asian migrants had difficulty being accepted and assimilating. If they went to places already inhabited by white Europeans, they were treated as second-class citizens, at best. The same thing happened when they met with migrants of color in other regions, like the eastern part of Africa or in Malaya. Asian migrants faced discrimination everywhere.

To make matters worse, this discrimination was legally enforced. Other migrants did not want Asian migrants to join them in their new communities, making judgments on racial bias and, in many cases, replicating the prejudicial treatment they themselves had faced in their home countries. In the 1880s, both Australia and the United States had started taking legal steps to minimize the number of Asian migrants in their countries—laws that remained in place up until after World War I. Because of these laws, the majority of migrants who came to settle and stay in overseas lands were overwhelmingly white or European, not Asian.

Arguments Against Imperialism

Even though the vast majority of European citizens living in the late 1800s and early 1900s took pride in many of their nations’ imperialistic behavior, believing that brought their country honor, power, and riches, that did not hold true for everyone. Some Europeans stood up against their compatriots and spoke out against imperialism. Of those critical thinkers, two of the most well known came from very different backgrounds. John A. Hobson (1858–1940), who had a background in British finance, argued that European imperialism could not claim reform-based or religious motives, because it revolved around acquiring wealth and power for individual European nations. To increase their wealth, European nations had to develop global trading arenas and spend money abroad to see returns. Hobson’s radical solution proposed that Europe should put its money back into its own coffers. National governments ought to target extremely rich citizens and tax the imperial wealth they enjoyed to assist the poverty-stricken lower classes. It is

The California Gold Rush began in 1849. Like people from many nations, Chinese prospectors sought a share of the wealth. The Chinese began traveling abroad after European nations opened Chinese trade to the West.

In what way can the Asian migrant process be characterized?
easy to see why Hobson’s plan had little appeal for Europe’s rich individuals and companies, who had much more to gain through imperialism.

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870–1924), is most well known today for his revolutionary social and political reforms in Russia during the Bolshevik Revolution. Like Hobson, he spoke out against imperialism. His 1916 book, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of World Capitalism*, argues that capitalism and imperialism are linked, and that the fate of one triggers the fate of the other. Lenin claimed that the two related behaviors had caused World War I because both gave authority and wealth to the select individuals at the top, while the masses suffered and saw no gain. To help those at the top get richer, capitalists had to turn to imperialism, acquiring more territory to gain more resources and make more money. Their capitalist desires forced countries to pursue imperialist policies, which in turn fostered international conflict and world war.

Neither Hobson nor Lenin provides a complete answer to imperialism, however, and neither one explains what happened in the case of Italy’s imperialistic policies. Like other countries in Europe, Italy sought territory in Africa to colonize for itself. Yet in 1898, Italy lost an important battle to Ethiopia and was unable to pursue its colonization goals. That year marked the first instance of an important European nation losing to an African state. Despite this initial humiliation, Italy persevered in other parts of Africa, eventually controlling Libya in 1911. But at what price? Italy had spent tremendous amounts of money on its Libyan campaign, and many Italians had died as a result. Meanwhile Libya itself offered few resources to its new rulers in Rome.

Today, scholars are interested in the fundamental question of how imperialistic practices in Europe altered the entire globe, including those countries where the practices began. Scholars point to three important critical points. First, European imperialism allowed for other important nations to become relevant players on the world stage. For instance, because of their ability to take advantage of resource-rich and strategically situated territories, Japan and the United States used European-style imperialism to assert a power, making them equal to the European powers. At the outset of the twentieth century, after the Spanish-American War, the United States had a strong colonial foothold in the Philippines and Hawaii. In addition, it oversaw a narrow isthmus in Central America where it would soon construct the Panama Canal; it controlled key islands of the Pacific, including Guam and the Midway Islands; and it controlled the government in Cuba, which had been one of Spain’s final American possessions. For its part, Japan had launched an aggressive imperial campaign against Korea and parts of China, proving its status when it defeated Russia in 1905. Both the United States and Japan would see an increase in influence and authority until they clashed directly during the Second World War.

A second point scholars make concerning the effects of imperialism concerns the way it created diplomatic conflict between the European powers, leading to rapid militarization and growing radical nationalism. The great European nations did not come to immediate blows or international conflict over their imperial territories on the continents of Asia and Africa, but they certainly laid the roots of the global war to come. For example, two sets of disagreements between different
European nations in the early twentieth century laid the groundwork for World War I. In 1905, Britain and Russia nearly came to blows over Persia, where the imperial designs of both states overlapped. Meanwhile, France and Germany disagreed over how to resolve a series of crises in Morocco, causing both sides to mobilize for war. Each time, though, the European nations narrowly avoided war, but their simmering imperialistic tensions remained.

Third and finally, imperialist practices set up long-term events, with effects that are still felt in the twenty-first century. The ingrained behaviors and attitudes of imperial colonizers and the effects of colonization upon millions of exploited people would not just simply disappear overnight. Prejudice and discrimination will take time and patience to eradicate. As of the twenty-first century, imperial Europe may be a thing of the past, yet from time to time, echoes of imperialist invasion and resistance can be heard clearly. Acts of violence and terror, wars between different regions of the Third World, and the lagging financial status of former colonies remind us that imperialist behavior still has repercussions today.

**Extensions**

- Read from *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of World Capitalism* by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. How does he associate capitalism and imperialism? What predictions did Lenin make about colonized nations?

**Summary**

The Industrial Revolution changed everything—how people lived, where they lived, what they ate, and what they did. It divided the world into two parts: the industrialized “haves” and the non-industrialized “have-nots.” The industrialized countries gained more and more advantages over the non-industrialized based on their better economies, which led to better quality of life for their citizens. This led to a large financial separation between wealthy and poverty-stricken nations. Meanwhile, Europe’s population began to expand rapidly during the 1700s, and soon the continent became overcrowded. Because large groups of citizens could not earn enough money to survive or afford to purchase property of their own in the nations they had grown up in, they began migrating to other parts of the world. Most migrating individuals came from Europe or Asia, and their migration dovetailed nicely with the practice of European imperialism. Even though most people in Europe and the United States supported the practice of imperialism, many others spoke up against it.

**Looking Ahead**

As more citizens left Europe for other western colonies, Europe would begin to turn its covetous, imperial eye on Africa. The coming years would see European imperialists pay new and intense attention to the resources and territory of Asia. The British would colonize India, while a larger group of different European nations would move into and divide up China. Meanwhile, after the United States stepped in to force Japan into trading with Western countries, Japan would surprise everyone by becoming an imperial power in its own right.
1. Nations from the Third World were typically those that did not participate in the Industrial Revolution and became poverty-stricken as a result; this poverty led to a poorer quality of life in general.

2. The population increased because, even though fewer people were being born, most people were living longer because they had improved food and health care.

3. Immigrants move away from their original homes for good, while migrants hope eventually to go back.

4. The majority of Asian migrants ended up as indentured laborers in the United States and Latin America.

5. Lenin believed that capitalism caused imperialism: Because European countries needed more funds, they had to expand their trading systems with other nations and control them through colonization.
Asian Responses to Imperialism

Essential Questions
• How did India react to imperialism?
• How did Japan react to imperialism?
• How did China react to imperialism?

Keywords
Boxers
gunboat diplomacy
home rule
racial discrimination
samurai
shogun
**Set the Stage**

During the new imperialism, Europe’s imperialist taste for acquisitions soon spread from Africa to Asia. While the majority of African regions quickly succumbed to European advances, the Asian countries would react to Europe’s imperialism in a variety of ways. Social Darwinism practiced in Africa would be echoed in Britain’s racially prejudiced treatment of India. The isolated nation of Japan would be prodded by the United States into joining the nineteenth century, and would surprise everyone by becoming an imperial power in its own right. Meanwhile, China and its governing dynasty, once one of the world’s great powers, had begun a slow downward spiral that would leave it, like India, vulnerable to European imperial ideas.

**Britain’s Indian Empire**

By the nineteenth century, Britain was firmly established as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, imperial powers in the world. While the headquarters of the empire remained Britain itself, of all the imperial properties Britain had incorporated, India stood as its most precious gem. More valuable than any other British-controlled region, India stood as the most important piece of the British Empire. In turn, of all the regions Britain occupied, India’s changes would be the most dramatic. These changes arose in large part because of the complete and total governance Britain enforced over India for centuries. This put India in direct contrast with other regions of Asia and Africa that had been colonized in different ways. For example, many African nations did not come under European rule until the final years of the nineteenth century, which meant that Europeans simply had less time to sway and influence the people there. China, even when confronted by powerful Europeans seeking to force the opening of trade relationships, clung to its own limited autonomy. Japan wielded enough power to become an imperial power in its own right.

India’s connections to Britain began in the 1600s. While Portuguese colonizers had first come to India during that time in search of their own fortune, the Portuguese eventually became supplanted by the British East India Company. The British East India Company, with a royal monopoly on Indian trade, wielded military power. The company infiltrated small groups of Indian populations and took over separate, smaller regions one by one; by the middle of the nineteenth century, the formerly autonomous regions of India had succumbed to the British East India Company. For the next decade, India’s former government members would struggle to reclaim authority in their own country and remove the British from their lands.

The former Indian government initially tried the standard means of using its own army to fight Britain’s colonizers, culminating in the Great Rebellion of 1857 and 1858. During the Great Rebellion, also known as the Sepoy Mutiny, the British
East India Company saw hired Indian soldiers—both Hindu and Muslim—with whom they had previously fought alongside turn against them. The Indian soldiers, called sepoys, resisted when asked to bite off the paper cartridges for their rifles, which they believed were greased with beef and pork fat, a seeming violation of the religious beliefs of both Hindus, who did not eat beef, and Muslims, who did not eat pork. The uprising spread rapidly in two geographic regions of India, the center and the north, but could not be kept going in the south, where the sepoys came up against other Indian soldiers fighting on the Europeans’ behalf. The Europeans eventually won. After the Great Rebellion, Britain’s government took over officially from the British East India Company.

In the years following the Great Rebellion, India became governed by Britain’s Parliament, located in London, which made choices and laws for the country that a small group of English, India-based bureaucrats carried out. By the turn of the twentieth century, India had over 300 million citizens, but the country had to bow to a group of fewer than 3,500 high-ranking bureaucrats. Overall, these English bureaucrats seemed, for the most part, capable and supportive of the poor citizens under their governing care. This government remained far from perfect, however. It kept British and Indian citizens apart in social settings and was clearly prejudiced in terms of which citizens could participate in different kinds of employment.

Unfortunately, the majority of the British bureaucrats in India saw the entire Indian citizenry, with a wide variety of racial and class backgrounds, as lesser beings. Even the great army tactician General Horatio H. Kitchener, perhaps the most illustrious figure to take charge of Britain’s armed forces in India, believed in this innate supremacy of the British. Kitchener stated that the British had in fact been able to conquer India because Britain had decided its own citizens were racially superior to Indian citizens. According to Kitchener, it didn’t matter whether an Indian citizen happened to be smart, brave, or scholarly, because the best Indian would never be as good as a British soldier.

This racial prejudice can be clearly seen in an incident that took place in 1883. That year, Britain’s Parliament began discussing an important piece of legislation. Had it passed, it would have permitted judges of Indian descent to preside over Indian trials involving Anglo-Europeans. British citizens recoiled at the proposed legislation, and popular opinion helped get it overturned. Many ordinary British citizens could not countenance the idea that a person of Indian descent would pass judgment on them. This incident shows that the imperial state in India had been founded on prejudiced racial beliefs.

That said, even though the British elevated themselves above their Indian counterparts, the British still threw themselves into their work in India, making many positive improvements there. For example, the British recognized that they would eventually need to replace their own bureaucrats with native Indians, and that those Indian representatives would need a proper education to participate in that bureaucracy. To achieve this, the British set up school system to prepare students for university and to work in English. Despite other elements of prejudice in the British-run Indian society, it must be noted that British influence enabled Indian citizens to improve their financial standing and social status, both through the kind of learning
they received and in the chances they had to work in the British-run Indian government. The first people to take advantage of the British system’s potential for upward mobility came from a group of upper class or high-caste Hindus. They saw a necessary opening for people to mediate between India’s masses and the British bureaucracy, and realized they could fill that opening. Over time, the high-caste Hindus came to occupy a class group familiar in many colonial societies, below those citizens of the colonial power but above their fellow native-born people. As members of this new Indian social class, the high-caste Hindus became steeped in the ideas and societal traditions of Britain and the West.

The upwardly mobile, high class group of Hindus played a highly important part in the process of bringing India’s finances into the contemporary market. This process can be seen as yet another outcome of Britain’s impact on India. Indeed, Britain made several changes in India to support this financial process. The British set up agricultural estates to farm jute, a fiber, and tea. Britain also built a railway system in India that became the third largest in the world, and used it to improve the speed and exchange of commodities and ideas throughout India. Additionally, Britain developed better large-scale irrigation systems in India. Even though all these improvements created more products and more money coming out of the country, the majority of poor Indian citizens did not appreciate the benefits. Even as the British and high-caste Hindus produced and transported more goods, the number of Indians in the country rapidly grew. The growing number of supplies barely kept up with the growing population.

Ultimately, all these factors and changes benefitted Britain, resulting in an India fused together under British control and run by native civil servants who spoke the imperial tongue and were educated. Britain brought India together as a single nation with one governing body, even though the people within that system had formerly been serious opponents or members of vastly different religions. For example, both Muslim and Hindu Indians became subject to the same laws. Every faction of India had to band together as one country, even though hundreds of years earlier, as far back as the Middle Ages, some of the regions had battled against one another. Whether Muslim armies or Mongolian ones had defeated them, they all had to now answer to Britain. The magnitude of such a forced unity can be hard to grasp. For comparison’s sake, one can imagine what would happen if a single imperial nation had vanquished every single nation on the European continent and brought them together as a new nation-state, responsible to a higher federal authority. Countries as disparate as France and Romania, with their different religious beliefs and cultural mores, would have to leave those behind on the command of the governing power.

Many Indians rejected the British treatment of them. Upper class native members of formerly different regions, now under the larger umbrella of India, began to agitate for nationalism after facing years of prejudice that could not be overcome. Unfortunately, the British remained fundamentally prejudiced against the Indians even as they provided them with the tools they needed to succeed in British-run Indian society. An upper class Indian might receive the best education and training available, but even then he would never receive the same treatment and respect as an uneducated British native. There remained an upper level of society sealed
Even the higher-caste Indians were denied entry to the most exclusive social establishments and lodging places. They could not get hired in the most upper-level executive positions, and sometimes could not even sit in specific areas of trains.

Over time, upper class Indians refused to stand for this treatment. In a way, by providing Indian natives with a limited amount of freedoms, Britain hastened the development of Indian nationalism. Had Britain not brought Westernized ideas of freedom and civil rights to the Indian upper classes, the Indians would not have been able to request them in British terms. Had Britain kept most of India's citizens at the most general, poverty-stricken level, those people might have more willingly accepted British prejudice. But India became increasingly full of people who saw that the foundation of British colonial rule was racial discrimination, treatment that violated their human rights. The Indian upper classes saw British treatment for what it was: a hypocritical denial of the freedoms and rights the British themselves had lauded, and a system of government that did not fully represent or speak for its racial discrimination bias against one group of people by another because of race.

Cockfighting served as a popular blood sport and form of entertainment in Europe. This painting depicts British colonists watching a cockfight in India.
people. Even if the British government seemed to be less tyrannical overall because it had gone to some lengths to improve life in India, in many respects the overseas government remained implacable and unchangeable.

It should not have seemed surprising, then, when the upper class created the Indian National Congress in 1885. This group, made up mostly of Hindu citizens, began working together to articulate their requests for more equal rights for India’s citizens and more autonomy for India itself. To bolster their arguments, the Indian National Congress compared India’s situation to other areas that Britain had colonized but to which it had given more rights. Of course, these areas, like Australia and Canada, happened to be mostly white, which fueled accusations of racial discrimination among British colonial authorities. About 20 years after the Indian National Congress had been founded, some of its more left-wing members began advocating absolute autonomy for India. During those 20 years, the rest of the world had seen Japan’s transformation from an old-world country to a new-world imperialist power. Left-wing National Congress members wanted to apply Japan’s methods to India. This desire for autonomy did not stay limited to the left wing, either. Other members of the National Congress, including the more neutral members, had begun requesting Indian home rule and the use of a parliament, with voted-in members, just as Britain had.

Indian citizens started coming together to protect their own country against the British. Despite initial regional differences, Indian citizens had learned concepts about equality and freedom from Britain to claim those rights for themselves as a unified group. Yet the Indian people’s nationalism had only just begun. After World War I ended in 1918, Indians would band together under the vision of peaceful advocate Mohandas Gandhi and his disciple Jawaharlal Nehru. Gandhi advocated for India’s independence, but he did so without violence. Instead, he urged his supporters to employ peaceful but effective techniques, such as boycotting British products. However, Gandhi’s methods could not extend completely over a divided India, where the Muslims and Hindus continued to disagree with each other. Britain refused to give up its authority over the country, and remained nominally in charge of India through World War II. After the war, Britain faced virtual bankruptcy and pressure from India’s independence movements. Gandhi, murdered in 1948, died one year after the British granted his country its independence in 1947. The British announced the division of their former Indian Empire into predominantly Hindu India and predominantly Muslim Pakistan.

**An Imperialist Case Study: Japan**

By the mid-1800s, Japan had been separated from the rest of the civilized world for centuries. Its people and its government had withdrawn the island nation from global commerce and exchange, preserving a complicated but almost medieval way of life. This way of life would be disrupted in 1853, with the entrance of Commodore Matthew Perry of the United States. Perry had arrived to pressure Japan into resuming interaction with the rest of the world. To do so, he employed gunboat diplomacy, which meant he threatened to open fire on the Japanese unless they complied.
At the time of Perry’s intrusion into Japanese life, the government in Japan had been fairly stable for two centuries. Japan had a nominal ruler, the emperor, but he did not have much significant authority. Instead, true power rested with the shogun, an armed forces governor who inherited his position in much the same way the emperor did. The shogun received assistance from aristocratic fighters called samurai. Together, the shogun and the samurai reigned over a relatively peaceful nation. The samurai would suffer the most from Japan’s new relationships with the West. Frequently, the samurai had little money, even though they had power. The samurai did not like that the United States had abruptly come in and changed the balance of power in Japan. Additionally, the samurai felt embarrassed about the unfair agreements Japan had made with the United States and other European nations.

Beginning in 1858, the samurai waged a campaign of violence against the representatives of other countries who had come to Japan. These representatives, primarily diplomatic agents and traders, had come to the large urban center of Yokohama. From 1858 to 1863, the samurai murdered foreign agents and committed other terrorist acts against the non-Japanese agents in their country. Some samurai also began working against the Japanese government. Western countries wasted no time in reacting against the actions Japanese samurai had taken against their nationals. The Westerners made it clear they would not tolerate that kind of treatment. The United States, France, Britain, and Holland combined forces and sent a group of ships to punish Japan’s military. This Western naval group successfully targeted important Japanese strongholds. When the strongholds fell to the West, the weakness of the shogun and his military regime was revealed. It became clear that Japan would need to institute rapid changes to compete with the powers of Europe.

The Meiji Restoration

A few years later, in 1867, a group of samurai who had remained faithful to their mother country successfully revolted against the shogun’s government. The samurai restored their emperor to his former place of authority, through primarily peaceful means. The event became known as the Meiji Restoration. In hindsight, it is clear just how important the Meiji Restoration was in bringing Japan safely and successfully into the nineteenth-century globalized world. Right away, the Meiji regime had to deal with its most significant problem: how to engage with Western countries and protect Japan itself.

The Meiji regime altered their behavior so quickly that it took many observers by surprise. From an historical standpoint, the Meiji’s alteration is a rare example of a successful and positive abrupt change in a regime’s behavior. To begin the process of reforming Japan and repairing its international relations, they brought a halt to the crimes the samurai had been perpetuating upon foreigners. They chose to learn from the foreigners. The Meiji evaluated the systems of other Western countries and decided they had been doing some things well, particularly in regards to creating military defenses and increasing the output of manufactured goods. They decided to remake their country using powerful Western nations as their models, most notably the United States and France. This large and sweeping desire for reform
applied to almost every level, as the Meiji tried to accomplish two important goals. First, they wanted to bring their nation up to speed with its most modern global counterparts, and second, they wanted to defend their nation. To do so, they would have to find a way to replicate the industrial and political changes Europe had already undergone.

The Meiji government wasted no time in implementing its ideas for a new state. As early as 1871, the Meiji discarded the previous medieval means of governing Japan, which had relied on an upper class. In its place, they created a powerful central government. Up until this point, Japanese people had been held to laws that divided them into four different classes, and they had not been able to leave the country without being accused of dire law breaking. The Meiji took the ideas of the French Revolution as their model, calling for equality of all Japanese citizens. The people of Japan would also be allowed to travel as they wished. In addition, the Meiji changed the very finances of Japan, setting up free markets in which merchants could vie with one another. They also starting constructing both train systems and manufacturing plants. Initially, then, it seemed as though the Meiji regime had taken on some of the best and brightest European ideas for creating a civilization based on civil rights and equality.

Liberty and equality did not stand as the most important values for the Meiji, though. More than anything, the new regime wanted to make sure Japan had become a strong and authoritative nation. To this end, Japan revamped its military. For the first time, Japan had a naval fleet, and not just any fleet, but a strong and up-to-date one. In addition, the Meiji took as their models the German and French armies, and used those countries’ ideas to remake the Japanese army. Japan’s new army, led by highly trained officials, required every male citizen to be drafted in for three years. The drafted-in members of the army immediately boosted its ranks and worked well together. The army used them to settle small disagreements in less urban areas. Just a few years after its creation, in 1877, the army successfully settled a large revolt of unhappy peasants, who had been trying to recoup their former rights.

The Japanese did not only copy Western military ideas. They implemented ideas from a variety of disciplines, taking special advantage of the ground Westerners had gained in the sciences and in technological developments. In an effort to widen the country’s knowledge base, its brightest citizens were sent overseas to become better educated, while the Meiji regime brought in Western specialists and professionals to share their secrets by offering better pay than the specialists and professionals could receive in their own countries. However, the government kept a close eye on the specialists and professionals, and would bring in Japanese substitutes for their positions as quickly as possible.

By 1890, the Meiji had successfully created a new, more powerful, globally compatible version of Japan. Of all the Western examples to choose from, the Meiji chose Germany’s system of government—with a strong central authority and a relatively weak legislative branch—as the one to copy. Japan created a constitution with strict authoritarian principles. While the new government included a legislative body, like the German Reichstag, it was limited in its power.
Japan also embarked on an imperialistic quest of its own just as its powerful Western models had. Japan’s imperialism served two purposes. First, it showed the Japanese and the rest of the world just how powerful Japan had become. Second, it brought all Japanese citizens together in a nationalistic project. Japan began demonstrating its imperial prowess early in the Meiji regime. In 1876, Japan successfully used the same gunboat diplomacy that Perry had used against it to assert its domination of Korea. Nearly two decades later, Japan found itself battling China over rights to control the Korean Peninsula. When China lost overwhelmingly to Japan, it sent a strong message to the rest of the world that Japan had arrived as an imperial power. As part of its prize for besting China over Korea, Japan received Formosa, known today as Taiwan.

In the 15 years that followed, Japan repeatedly went head-to-head with the most powerful European nations in search of imperial resources and authority in China. Japan concentrated on Manchuria, in which the Russian government also happened to have interest. Japan did not hesitate to confront an established imperial power, launching a surprise assault on Russia in 1904. The conflict that followed saw a large loss of life on both sides, but ultimately Japan prevailed. It did so with an important gain in Chinese territory, taking over a region near Port Arthur, which had previously been one of Russia’s protectorates. Japan stood as a truly important global player, whose quest for imperial expansion could not be ignored. Although the United States, which shared the very large border of the Pacific Ocean with Japan, had started to object to Japan’s presence in China, the Japanese continued enlarging and deepening its hold on that country.

By successfully reshaping itself and embarking on imperialistic quests, Japan set new standards. For the first time, a country outside of Europe and the United States had been able to reform itself to compete with those powerful Western nations. Significantly, Japan had done so by honoring its old traditions and customs, and used them to modify Western ideas. Through its military might, particularly through its defeat of Russia, Japan had shown the rest of the world that the great European nations were not invincible. A country from Asia could rise above them. The ground Japan had gained became of great interest to people in China, even though they had been defeated, and in Vietnam. Vietnam had been subject to France’s imperial authority for many years, and some of its people, particularly those in the southern part, envied how Japan had risen up against the West. Some Vietnamese people deployed fellow citizens and undergraduates to Japan as a means of attempting to figure out how that Asian imperialism could be possible. Overall, Japan’s successful trajectory showed citizens in other imperial-occupied regions—those on the continents of both Africa and Asia—that a nation could free itself, remake itself, and become a force to be reckoned with, in less than a 50-year period.

**China’s Overdue Rebellion**

In the second half of the nineteenth century, as Japan started coming together, China began to fall apart. By 1860, China had been ruled by a single dynasty for the past two centuries: the Manchu Dynasty. Yet by that year it had found itself
on shaky footing and many believed it would fall apart completely. Despite the government’s best efforts, China had been unable to keep European traders and invaders out, to the dismay of most of the Chinese people. China became divided by small uprisings and general disorder and confusion. Many observers were shocked, then, when the Manchu government pulled itself together, using its powers based on ancient customs, to remain in power for another three decades.

The Manchu Dynasty could not have recovered without two important elements. One, although the dynasty had been failing, it fooled everyone into thinking it had a new lease on life when it presented alternate rulers who seemed as though they could guide the country smoothly and well. Important individuals, including high-ranking army officials and intellectual diplomats, remained faithful to the dynasty and stepped in to put down uprisings, including the Taiping Rebellion, which had begun in 1850. This rebellion found Chinese peasants rising up against the Manchus, and the fighting lasted so long that China became chaotic. During this massive revolt, scholars now estimate, up to 20 million people died. The Manchu army probably would not have succeeded without outside help from European military officials. In addition, the Manchus also found themselves led by a smart and resourceful politician, the empress dowager Tzu Hsi. Although her son technically ruled the country, Tzu Hsi took power on his behalf. She dramatically improved the management and organization of the country, and encouraged her ministers to be proactive.

Two, the Manchu Dynasty temporarily recovered because the European countries pulled back from their former quest of making inroads into Chinese territory. The Europeans gave the Chinese some breathing space largely because they had already achieved the things they wanted most: strong trading relationships and better diplomatic interchanges with the Chinese. The Chinese accepted offers of aid from Westerners because the offers themselves helped China find a new balance between honoring their customs and morals, while also incorporating new ideas of running government and machinery, which came from Europe and the United States.

Despite the Manchu Dynasty’s best efforts, however, the balance could not last. While China had made progress toward reorganizing itself, that all came to an end when Japan stepped in and tried to apply its new imperial practices in China. The resulting yearlong conflict between the two countries, the Sino-Japanese War of 1894 to 1895, demonstrated how much more quickly Japan had modernized its military. China suffered a humiliating defeat. In the peace agreement that followed, China became humbled by the amount of concessions it was forced to give to Japan, including its loss of Formosa. These events presented China to the rest of the world as a weak opponent, a country that could be forced to submit to imperial attacks. So European countries, as well as Japan, were eager to press their advantages and gain more influence in China. To that end, outside nations began jostling for areas in China they could claim as protectorates, as well as demanding more dispensations within China for overseas nationals.
Less than three years after the Sino-Japanese War, the European presence in China seemed at its peak. But European countries could not work together to feel confident about dividing China up among themselves without repercussions from their neighbors. The U.S. Open Door policy helped keep China from being overrun by European nations. Asia’s powerful overseas neighbor did not want to see any other country officially take over a portion of China. Any European country that attempted to do so would risk raising the wrath of the United States.

Perhaps because the different European nations did not officially divide China among themselves, their presence in China tapered off in the years following 1894. This allowed the Chinese to bring some of their old customs to the forefront again and, in turn, the Chinese began to relax regarding the ramifications of Western influences in their country. Some members of the population had begun valuing European and overseas influences for the potential benefits they could have in China. These Chinese reformers acted in a manner like that of Japanese individuals working for the Meiji regime, trying to bring Japan smoothly into the nineteenth century. Even China’s governing regime tried to step in and incorporate Western-style changes to its own structure in 1898, in a period that came to be known as the Hundred Days of Reform. Yet revolution came from outside of the government, too, as exemplified by persons like the rebellious former peasant Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925). Sun had gone to school in Hawaii and studied with Christian missionary workers, which meant he brought very different ideas to bear on the situation in China. He believed that the Manchu Dynasty should be forced out completely and replaced with a republic.

Sun Yat-sen’s beliefs did not meet with approval from all sides, nor did the Manchu government’s attempt to introduce more Western ideas into Chinese life. Conservatives in China wanted to return to older customs and preserve their system of government as it was. Rather than welcoming any of the progressive ideas that could be brought in from the West, this group of Chinese people practiced almost obsessive loathing of Western outsiders, whom they referred to by disparaging names. These traditionally minded people cultivated a saying that reminded them to safeguard their own nation, while ruining persons from outside countries. These Chinese traditionalists frequently fought against Christian missionary efforts from the West. The Chinese traditionalists accused these foreigners of many crimes, such as trying to abolish the ancient Chinese practice of honoring one’s ancestors. The Chinese traditionalists believed that Christian missionary workers endangered smaller groups of relatives within China, as well as China’s very civilization and culture itself.

Some Chinese individuals began to form clandestine groups in which they could air their worries and fears about the government. When the clandestine groups’ desires did not get met, and when the Manchu governing regime continued to incorporate European or Western practices into Chinese life, the clandestine groups became angry and even revolted. One group, called the Boxers, led a revolt, the Boxer Rebellion, in the northeast portion of the country in 1900. This war had many civilian casualties: thousands of Chinese citizens who practiced Christianity
died, along with over 200 missionary workers from other countries. In response, troops from European nations marched into and raided the important Chinese city of Peking. In addition, China was forced to pay very large fines.

For the next three years, China and its government continued to experience a wide range of problems. The Manchu Dynasty had rallied for a while, but it now began to collapse again. As the Manchu family weakened, disorder and chaos grew. Western imperialists began again to push their boundaries in China. Different rebellious organizations, who worked against both their own state’s bureaucracy and against imperialist nations, continued to scheme about creating massive change in their country. In 1912, finally the Manchu Dynasty fell to an internal rebellion. Emperors had ruled China for many centuries. Now those emperors and that way of living had gone. Instead, the leaders of the 1912 uprising banded together and declared China a republic, in the manner of other European nations. Instead of an emperor, they wanted a governing body whose members received seats by being voted in—in short, a parliament. With this drastic change in governing style—indeed, with this revolution—China took another tremendous step forward down a path to Western culture. Even more shockingly, China’s changes had only just begun.

**Extensions**

- Read *The Betrayal of the West* by Jacques Ellul. According to Ellul, why is the West betrayed? What does the author mean by “technological totalitarianisms”? Why evidence does the author supply to support the idea that civilization is on a suicidal track?

**Summary**

Britain treated India as the most precious gem in its imperial crown. Even so, India endured many hardships under Britain’s leadership. The country’s trajectory is an excellent example of how years of imperialist control can alter a subjugated nation. While Britain slowly implemented modern technologies and systems into India’s bureaucratic fabric, most of India’s people did not benefit from them. Elsewhere in Asia, Japan studied the behavior of Europe and the United States, especially as those countries acted imperially in Africa and China. Soon, Japan also became an authoritative imperial nation. While other parts of Asia fell to European imperialists, China managed to hold out up to the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War. After losing that war to Japan, China appeared feeble and vulnerable to the imperialist nations of the globe.

**Looking Ahead**

While the nineteenth century had been consumed with imperial activity, the beginning of the twentieth would witness its repercussions. Global attention would shift from markets in Asia and Africa to conflict in Europe, as World War I began to rage. After that first world conflict, the years of peace would be limited before another war raged again. In the Second World War, Japan’s would join with Germany and Italy to battle against France, Britain, and the United States. Ultimately, it would
be the Japanese who would experience the most devastating weapons of mass destruction that had ever been built: the atomic bomb. Less than 100 years after it accelerated its introduction of modernity, Japan would be crushed all over again. Meanwhile, India’s quest for autonomy would have to wait, to be picked up after the dust had settled from World War II. China would be further torn apart only to find itself pieced back together by communism.

**SELF-CHECK ANSWERS**

1. It was the final, formal revolt by Indian citizens against Britain’s imperial takeover of their country.
2. In India, the citizens’ wish to become relatively independent from Britain and have their own governing body.
3. Samurai were a high class of armed officers who helped the shogun, a customary armed head of state, second only to the emperor, in Japan before the 1850s.
4. Remarkably, Chinese intellectuals and military leaders banded together and eventually put a stop to the uprising, which lasted 15 years. The rebels were peasant class Chinese who stood against the Manchu army. As many as 20 million people died.
5. To replace the Manchu government with a new republic, in the Western style.
Essential Questions

• What was the Bismarckian system of alliances?
• What crises took place in Europe and elsewhere that eventually led to World War I?
• What were the long-term causes of World War I?
• What immediate event led to the outbreak of World War I?

Keywords

Burgfrieden
mass citizen armies
Serbs
system of alliances
Set the Stage

In the years leading up to the First World War, countries in Europe and across the globe seemed barely able to keep the peace. The only thing keeping European nations from battling with one another had become a strained assortment of alliances between countries. Ever since the Franco-Prussian War had ended, various countries had worked for peace in Europe. As Britain’s empire grew, other countries watched with envy. In the wake of the Franco-Prussian War, France’s power would temporarily crumble and the newly formed Germany’s power would increase immensely. Unfortunately, one calamity after another would occur to test the failing bonds between coalitions and allies, particularly in the heart of Europe. When the First World War began, it would be only too evident how the new demands of empire and the collapse of coalitions had led to international conflict.

Alliances in the Bismarckian System

The end of the nineteenth century, the fin de siècle as it is known in French, began a new epoch for diplomacy and negotiations between the nations of Europe. The first change came as part of the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War. France had lost its domination over other European countries and, consequently, became seen as a less powerful force on the international stage. The Germans, by defeating the French in the Franco-Prussian War and creating their own imperial state, began to rise up and fill the power vacuum the French had left.

The Franco-Prussian War came to a sharp halt in 1871, when the Germans forced the French to yield. As a result, the French had to pay reparations to the Germans for the losses they had sustained during wartime. The French also had to sign over to the Germans a region called Alsace-Lorraine. Under Otto von Bismarck’s leadership, Germany had become not only a unified space but also the country with the foremost authority throughout the European continent. Bismarck pledged that Germany had no desire to seek out other land in Europe to add to its boundaries, and that Germany had no quarrels with any other European nations. Repeatedly, Bismarck claimed that Germany stood content with what it had achieved.

Having subdued France to the west, Germany still had to prepare itself to stand against the east, where both Russia and Austria-Hungary stood as strong nations desirous of more power in their own right. Both Russia and Austria-Hungary held sway over imperial groups of nations, thus wielding incredible military power and presiding over large tracts of territory. Since they each held so much already, the two imperial groups began to turn their attention to the finite amount of national resources left in the world. Russia and Austria-Hungary both wanted many of these resources for themselves. Many of these resources were located in the Balkans. Meanwhile, the Ottoman Empire, which ruled over that region, had become widely regarded as the weakest nation in Europe, and its power continued to disintegrate.
The German government worried that its newly formed nation would be caught in the middle during another large war, this one between Russia and Austria-Hungary.

To prevent such a war, Bismarck proposed a **system of alliances**. Bismarck’s alliances had three separate goals. First, he wanted to hold Austria-Hungary and Russia back from overstepping their bounds and attempting to take over Germany. Second, Bismarck hoped to keep the two countries from fighting between themselves. Third, Bismarck planned to segregate France from the alliances in the strategic hope of keeping France from finding allies to join with it against the Germans.

Bismarck’s alliances took several forms. In the Three Emperors’ League of 1873, rulers of Germany, Russia, and Austria-Hungary joined in an agreement to preserve conservative ideas and prevent radicalism and an extremist uprising. During that time, Russia enjoyed great success in subduing the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, which meant problems for other western European countries. Austria-Hungary felt threatened by Russian authority in the Balkan region. Meanwhile, Britain felt threatened by the Russians in the Middle East. It fell to Bismarck to smooth things over and satisfy the powerful European states.

At first, it seemed like Bismarck succeeded, especially given the negotiations he pushed through during the 1878 Congress of Berlin. At that congress, Bismarck succeeded in calming Austria-Hungary and divided up portions of the Ottoman Empire, which had begun to fall apart, into distinct new states. Bismarck enabled Austria-Hungary to control two important regions that had formerly belonged to the Ottoman Empire, Herzegovina and Bosnia. Giving Austria-Hungary these regions helped it feel more equal to Russia in the Balkans. Meanwhile, other regions that had been under the Ottoman Empire’s sway received their own autonomy. The formerly powerful Ottoman Empire continued to crumble.

While Austria-Hungary remained happy with Bismarck’s attempts at diplomacy and negotiation at the Congress of Berlin, Russia did not. People who supported Russia’s empire suspected Bismarck of aligning Germany’s interests too closely with Austria-Hungary’s. Because of this, in 1879 Bismarck chose to protect Germany by allying its militia with that of Austria-Hungary, in the event of a Russian attack. Meanwhile, in other parts of Europe, Italy had been experiencing problems with France—and France remained separated from Germany. As a result, it made sense that Italy would want to participate in Germany’s alliance with Austria-Hungary and Italy did join formally with those other countries in 1882. This agreement among the three nations became known as the Triple Alliance.

Bolstered by Germany’s position in the Triple Alliance, Bismarck returned to his original project of maintaining harmony in continental Europe, especially in the regions to the east. He tried again to smooth things over between Austria-Hungary and Russia. The year before the creation of the Triple Alliance, Bismarck had stealthily approached both Austria-Hungary and Russia, playing on each country’s concern about the other to convince both of them to participate in a clandestine, top-secret union. This union, referred to as the Alliance of the Three Emperors, would remain in effect from 1881 through 1887. During those six years, the three members of this alliance agreed that they would assist each other in any further separation of
the countries in the Ottoman Empire. Should any one of these countries go to war with a fourth country, the other two members of the alliance would stay out of it and remain neutral, although sympathetic to their ally. Fighting with the Ottoman Empire, they agreed, would prove an exception to this rule.

In 1887, when the Alliance of the Three Emperors’ agreement expired, the countries involved could have agreed to renew it. However, Russia and Austria-Hungary worried about developing nationalism and Pan-Slavism in the Balkan region, which would ultimately divide the Austro-Hungarians who wanted to maintain control over Serbia and the Russians who had historical ties to and support of the Serbs. Russia thus backed out of the treaty. Rather than lose hold of this important ally, Bismarck cleverly went straight to Russia with a two-country agreement. Germany and Russia signed a Reinsurance Treaty, agreeing that if either of them should be assaulted by a third country, the remaining ally would stay impartial in the ensuing battles. Overall, Bismarck did tremendous work in foreign affairs in the years following 1871. In an almost 20-year period, Bismarck would keep Germany at the forefront of global politics and international peace. During his tenure as Germany’s leader, Bismarck would maintain harmony in Europe, keeping the two most dangerous imperial states—Russia and Austria-Hungary—at bay and in alliance with his own country.

**Changes in Western Europe**

Yet Bismarck’s peace could not last forever, nor could he himself maintain his grip on power. Bismarck’s career as chancellor of Germany came to an end in 1890, when Germany’s kaiser William II (r. 1888–1918) asked Bismarck to step down. The failures of the chancellors who followed Bismarck showed how rare his leadership skills had been. With Bismarck gone, Germany floundered.

Germany’s first mistake came in 1890, when its Reinsurance Treaty with Russia expired. Surprisingly, Germany elected not to renew the treaty, reasoning that it was becoming too difficult to strike a compromise between Russia and Austria-Hungary in diplomatic relations. Germany’s abandonment of the treaty with Russia showed just how willing the Germans were to abandon Bismarck’s ideas. The fact that Germany acted so quickly to dissolve its bond with Russia reveals its optimistic opinion that Russia would be unable to set up an agreement with France, Germany’s former enemy. Germany held this opinion because of its perceived notion that France and Russia were too unlikely to share interests since France was a republic, while Russia remained a despotic monarchy. Yet Germany would be proven incorrect—the republicans and the despots could work well together.

Political changes extended from Germany to France and Russia in the 1890s. France had been without many international allies for many years, and Russia now found itself in the same position. It seemed only natural that the two countries would find some common interests. In 1894, Russia and France agreed upon a clandestine military treaty. Initially, at least, the new Franco-Russian Alliance seemed like a pact that worked against Britain. More than any other country, Britain competed against Russia and France for lands and power in both the Asian continent and in the Mediterranean region.
Meanwhile, the British began to grow less friendly toward Germany. In the late nineteenth century, members of the Boer nation in South Africa, especially in the British-controlled region called the Transvaal, began to agitate for freedom from British control. In 1896, William II publicly supported the South African president, Paul Kruger, in a telegram, effectively opposing British interests in South Africa. Britain found this insulting and worrisome. Britain also worried about Germany’s military becoming more effective, since the Germans had started nurturing a group of ships capable of doing battle in deep waters.

France had its own problems with Britain, particularly in regard to disagreements over the two nations’ rights in their respective colonies. However, by the turn of the twentieth century, France saw Germany as more of a potential threat to national security than Britain. The French still vividly recalled their upsetting surrender to Germany in the Franco-Prussian War, still smarted from the loss of Alsace-Lorraine, and still considered Germany an enemy. Thus, France began aligning itself with Britain as the lesser of two evils, perhaps because problems with colonies remained more distant than potential threats on the European continent. In 1898, when Britain and France clashed over control of the Fashoda region of the Sudan, an alliance seemed out of reach. However, Théophile Delcassé (1852–1923), the foreign minister for France, implored his country’s regime to step back from Fashoda to placate the British. When France’s government agreed with Delcassé and yielded the Sudan region, the concession stood as the first step down a new path for the French in terms of how they approached international diplomacy.

After enduring anti-British global attitudes during the Boer War, Britain had begun to understand that it, too, needed allies. In the space of two years’ time, Britain would cement relations with Japan and France. First, Britain started by uniting itself with Japan in 1902 through the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Through this alliance, Britain and Japan hoped to guard themselves against a possible move by Russia to increase its holdings in the eastern part of Asia. Second, Britain and France continued to work together, eventually establishing an agreement, called the Entente Cordiale, in 1904. This agreement focused on problems the two countries had experienced in sharing and controlling their colonies. Each country made a major concession to the other. Britain promised to help France in France’s work to control Morocco. In return, France promised Britain control of Egypt.

Other elements of the Entente Cordiale helped Britain and France smooth out other disagreements. The countries resolved the misunderstandings they had over parts of Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Remarkably, they put an end to a centuries-old disagreement they had about which country had the privilege to fish the waters of Newfoundland’s North Atlantic coast. Bolstered by their diplomatic agreement, Britain and France opened a conversation on policy, conferring with each other about important problems that might arise on the international stage.

Just as Britain had looked outside France to ally itself with Japan, France began looking for other allies besides Britain. Even though Italy had publicly aligned with Germany and Austria-Hungary in the Triple Alliance, France began pursuing Italy to support their mutual interests. By 1902, France and Italy had brokered a clandestine accord. Italy would help France create a protectorate in the region of Morocco. In
turn, France would support Italy in other parts of North Africa. The more France strengthened its agreement with Italy, the weaker Germany's connections became. Soon, only Austria-Hungary would stand as Germany's lone powerful ally.

**Problems in Morocco**

Germany, worried by its increasingly unstable position on the global stage, determined to take action. Yet under the leadership of Kaiser William II and the man he had selected as chancellor, Prince Bernhard von Bülow (1849–1929), Germany did not act as diplomatically as it had under Bismarck's guidance. Germany targeted France in 1905, when the French government attempted to establish a protectorate in Morocco. The Germans resolved to use French ambitions in Morocco as an excuse to test international ties of diplomacy. In March of that year, William II traveled to Tangier, a city in the north of Morocco. There, the German emperor announced that his country sought strong ties to Morocco. While in Tangier, William II also incited Moroccan nationalism by talking about the Moroccans' right to autonomy. This calculated move by the Germans came from an assumption that France's other allies, Britain and Russia, would not support French claims to Morocco. Germany counted on Russia being preoccupied with its ongoing war against Japan, which Russia was losing, and assumed that Britain would not follow through with a real show of support for France. Through this move, Germany hoped to weaken the bonds between France and its allies.

To achieve this plan, Germany pushed other world powers into an international meeting, at which the assembled bodies would discuss Morocco and the French claims. The conference, held in 1906, met in an area of Spain called Algeciras, near Gibraltar. This meeting did not go as Germany had hoped. Of all the countries assembled, only Austria-Hungary stood with Germany. The other countries, including Russia, Britain, and Italy, backed France. No one else opposed France's plan to create a protectorate in Morocco: in fact, most other countries supported it. This event became known as the First Moroccan Crisis. The fact that Germany behaved so aggressively led the other countries to become wary of German intentions on the world stage. Russia, Britain, and France bonded largely because of Germany's attitude.

At first, it seemed as though diplomatic bonds between Russia, Britain, and France might be difficult to achieve because Russia had gone to war with Japan in the Russo-Japanese War, causing problems for France because of its complicated relationships between both countries. Russia and France had already formed an alliance, as had Britain and Japan. Having allied nations in open war with each other made it difficult for France and Britain to work together to form a political alliance. Eventually, though, France achieved a break with the Anglo-French alliance of 1904 known as the Entente Cordiale. Thus, by the time of the Algeciras Conference two years later, France could rely on Britain's assistance in standing against Germany. Meanwhile, when Japan won the war against Russia, Britain relaxed somewhat in its position against Russia as a potential threat. Russia's development in the eastern part of Asia came to a stop. However, Russia and Britain still did not see eye to eye regarding other regions of the world, such as Afghanistan and Persia.
France persisted in attempting to convince Britain and Russia to overlook their issues and come together in an alliance, which they did through the Anglo-Russian Entente of 1907. The Anglo-Russian Entente created a potential solution to lingering problems in Afghanistan and Persia. According to the entente, Russia would assert its authority on the northern half of Persia, while Britain would focus on the southern half. Russia confirmed to Britain that it would pull its forces out of Afghanistan altogether. In addition, Britain and Russia confirmed to each other that they would both honor the boundaries of a third country, Tibet. With both sides offering concessions to one another, Britain and Russia were able to move forward as allies.

With the Anglo-Russian Entente in place, Russia, Britain, and France cemented a stronger, three-way alliance called the Triple Entente. Balanced against the Triple Entente came another three-way alliance, formed by Italy, Austria-Hungary, and Germany, called the Triple Alliance. At first glance, it might seem like these two alliances would be well balanced against each other in terms of power and authority, but that turned out not to be the case. While prior to 1890, Germany had stood at the top of the European power chain, after Bismarck fell from his position of German leadership, so did Germany fall from its position of European leadership. Now, it seemed, France had become the most powerful country in Europe.

Even with these two immense alliances in place, Europe remained far from the secure, peaceful region envisioned by Bismarck. In the years following 1907, there would be a series of global issues and problems that, overall, would escalate the conflicts and doubts among different European nations. These conflicts would create the conditions that led to the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

Problems first appeared in Bosnia. Prior to 1907, Austria-Hungary had wanted to take control of the Balkans, and Germany had stood in the way. But by 1907, Austria-Hungary was Germany’s sole loyal partner in its great alliance, and the kaiser’s government relaxed its opposition to Austrian ambitions in the Balkans. Without Germany’s steadying hand, the balance of power in the Balkans threatened to tip. As conditions in the Balkans worsened, citizens in other countries began to fear for the balance of power in Europe.

At first, Austria-Hungary reached out to Russia in the hopes of forming an alliance to strengthen Austria-Hungary’s holdings in Bosnia. The foreign ministers of each country came together in Buchlau, today in the Czech Republic, in September 1908. At their meeting, the ministers came to an accord called the Buchlau Agreement. This agreement had two parts that would benefit each of the two countries. Austria-Hungary would benefit because Russia would stand by it as Austria-Hungary tried to take over both Bosnia and Herzegovina. Russia, on the other side, would benefit because Austria-Hungary would stand by it as Russia worked to be able to transport navy forces in an area of the Turkish Straits.

The goals decided upon in the Buchlau Agreement should have gone into effect at the same time, with each country working to support the other. Yet one month later, Austria-Hungary moved without Russia at its side and claimed Bosnia and Herzegovina. By doing so, Austria-Hungary not only angered Russia, which became
upset that Austria-Hungary had violated their agreement, but also incensed Serbia. Since their country lay close to both Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Serbs had their own ambitions in those countries. As diplomatic conditions worsened between the three countries, Germany stepped forward and backed Austria-Hungary. Serbia could not stand against the combined might of Germany and Austria-Hungary, and likewise Russia did not wish to test the outcome of a full-scale war with the two powers. So Russia stepped back in the early months of 1909 and did not seek to punish Austria-Hungary for violating the terms of the Buchlau Agreement. When this event, known as the Bosnian Crisis (1908–1909) came to a conclusion, it created international embarrassment for Russia.

The next big international incident came in 1911 with the Second Moroccan Crisis. After the Algeciras Conference, Germany had stopped protesting France’s protectorate in Morocco. By 1911, though, Germany had once again begun making noise about it. To halt France’s progress in Morocco, Germany deployed a gunboat called the Panther to the Moroccan harbor of Agadir. At the time, Germany claimed the ship was there to protect German interests in the region, but the crisis threatened war between the two mighty European neighbors. In the negotiations that followed, France smoothed things over between the two nations by giving the Germans a portion of the French Congo. In exchange, Germany pledged to stay out of France’s way in Morocco. Even though this latest crisis appeared resolved, Germany’s actions would have far-reaching consequences. While Germany had not made an assault or an invasion, the country had acted with unusual aggression, which worried other nations of Europe. Those nations responded. Britain sent more naval ships to protect the North Sea, and France sent most of its naval ships to the Mediterranean. This meant that France trusted Britain to protect it from the north should an international war take place.

While France and Britain prepared for potential war, Italy had begun fighting one of its own. Fighting erupted in 1911, in what became known as the Italo-Turkish War, when Italy tried to occupy a part of northern Africa known today as Libya, but referred to at the time as Tripoli. To gain Tripoli, Italy declared war with the Ottoman Empire. Italy hoped to gain Tripoli to boost its own reputation domestically and in comparison to other European nations. Italy also worried that France had pulled too far ahead in terms of holding international power by successfully establishing a protectorate over Morocco. The Turkish, fighting for the Ottoman Empire, found it difficult to contend with Italy’s superior military forces. When the Turkish surrendered to Italy in 1912, they gave up Tripoli.

**Wars and Murder in the Balkans**

Crisis in Morocco soon led to wars in the Balkans. Because the Italo-Turkish War had been resolved so quickly, and the Turks had been shown to be no match for the Italian military, other nations from the Balkans hoped to similarly challenge the Ottoman Empire. In the First Balkan War (1912–1913), a group of Balkan nations including Greece, Montenegro, Serbia, and Bulgaria banded together with Russia’s guidance to become a larger assembly known as the Balkan League. Working together, the Balkan League chose in 1912 to also declare war on Turkey. The war was resolved in May 1913, when the opposing
countries met in England and signed the Treaty of London. According to this treaty, the Ottoman Empire had to give up all the lands it possessed in Europe, with the sole exception being the region adjacent to the Turkish Straits.

As this war ended, Russia and Austria-Hungary both inserted themselves into the international discussion, hoping to accomplish their own ends. Their shared point of contention became Serbia, which wanted to increase its territories and holdings. Austria-Hungary did not want Serbia to grow any larger and argued for the establishment of a new nation in the Balkans called Albania. Russia backed Serbia and wanted to help Serbia receive land on the Adriatic Sea. A global meeting occurred in London in 1913. The majority of the countries there sided with Austria-Hungary, rather than with Russia and Serbia. Albania arose and with it a diminishment for both Serbia and Russia, who saw their plans for increase foiled. Once again, Russia had stood up for something in the Balkan region and lost.

Another war erupted in the Balkans in 1913, as a direct result of the first. Serbia remained unhappy with the outcome of the London conference. Since Serbia had not received the region now known as Albania and it had also been kept from establishing a port on the Adriatic Sea, Serbia wished for some other recompense. Instead of Albania, Serbia demanded a portion of Macedonia originally allocated to Bulgaria. This upset the Bulgarians, who then claimed that they deserved an additional amount of Macedonian land.

Because of these disagreements, the Second Balkan War began. Serbia found allies in Turkey, Romania, Greece, and Montenegro, and that combination of countries proved strong enough to conquer Bulgaria. Because of Serbia’s victory, as decided in the August 1913 Treaty of Bucharest, Bulgaria lost even more ground. Not only did the Bulgarians have to give up the majority of Macedonia to Greece and Serbia, they also had to give some of their lands to Romania.

Even though neither of these Balkan wars had resulted in a full-scale global conflict, European countries stayed tense and poised for new conflict. Meanwhile, Russia had become aggravated by the fact that it could not gain more ground for itself in two desirable areas, the Turkish Straits and the Balkans. This frustrated desire would lay the groundwork for future problems. Moving forward, Russia would be more determined than ever to support Serbia. Meanwhile, Germany continued to be completely loyal to Austria-Hungary.

Into this scenario came, one year later, the last, most crucial event. It took place in Sarajevo, the center of Bosnia, which at that time remained under Austro-Hungarian control. On June 28, 1914, the successor to Austro-Hungarian rule, Archduke Francis Ferdinand (1863–1914), and his wife were visiting Sarajevo. A Slav from the south who was a fervent advocate for Slav independence, named Gavrilo Princip (1895–1918) murdered the royal couple. This led to the eventual loss of 11 million lives.
couple by shooting them to death. Investigators later discovered that Princip had received aid from a clandestine separatist Slav group called the Black Hand. Serbia’s governing regime had not officially been part of the plan, but important members of the regime had known about it. Despite that knowledge, the Serbian government stood by and did nothing to stop Princip from going through with his actions or even letting the Austro-Hungarian government know of the potential danger. This royal murder would trigger international war.

**Mobilization and Alliances**

Several factors contributed to the buildup of World War I. First among them came the increase in military strength around the European continent. Throughout the middle of the nineteenth century, battles fought for mergers of smaller countries into larger ones had resulted in increasingly bigger nation-states. These nation-states needed to defend themselves, and to do so they created armies that were both larger and better equipped than those of the past. These armies received support in weapons and supplies through the development of the large-scale manufacturing of goods and the results of the Second Industrial Revolution. Growth in the business of creating weapons, as well as technical developments in the design of those weapons, meant that armies could go to war more easily and cause even more harm than ever before.

In addition, armies had more people working for them and taking advantage of these developments in weapons technology. In fact, the proportion of people serving in each country’s army had never been so large. These military forces, referred to as *mass citizen armies*, came about through the combination of national drafts and traditional armed forces planning. Entire civilizations became completely military-oriented. This desire for an incredibly strong military did not remain limited to one or two countries, but became felt in nearly every country in Europe. Throughout Europe, rulers of different regimes began equating the prowess and power of their countries to the greatness of their armies and weaponry. High-ranking officials often wore military uniforms at important events.

A focus on naval military buildup caused particular problems between Britain and Germany. Germany decided that its security required a naval force that could match any other in the world. Britain saw the German naval buildup as a threat. William II had decided that Germany should strengthen its naval forces after reading a book called *The Influence of Sea Power on History*. After reading this book, William II formed the belief that Germany had to achieve the same kind of imperial and profitable authority that Britain had; creating a stronger naval force stood as an integral component of this belief. Yet William II had an uneven, overbearing way of behaving, and he did not present his plans to the international stage in a diplomatic manner.

In addition to embarking on a program to modernize its navy, the Germans had also begun crafting a strategy called the Schlieffen Plan. According to this plan in case of war against the Triple Entente, the Germans would fight in two separate fronts, battling with France on its west side and with Russia on its east. While the Schlieffen Plan probably stood as the most well-known strategy
crafted in the years leading up to World War I, Germany had a great deal of company in clandestine plans for war. Every country had its own complicated, clandestine strategy for action in case of international conflict. These strategies incorporated management of groups of soldiers, delineation of train schedules, and plans for possible combat events. Nations would use these plans to make choices about how they interacted with other countries in Europe and, indeed, the world. These strategies hindered national leaders in making choices about how countries should conduct themselves internationally. Frequently, when nations stuck by their previously conceived strategies, smaller-scale conflicts eventually led to global battles. An instance of this can be seen clearly in Germany’s actions from 1914. In 1914, the Germans stuck by their previously agreed-upon Schlieffen Plan, and used it to rapidly mobilize following the crisis in Bosnia. Doing so cut off any chance other countries had at using diplomacy to forestall or curtail a large-scale conflict. In addition to the military mobilization, the alliance system between great powers also contributed to the Great War. Starting in 1871, when Germany had become an unified state, Bismarck had tried to keep the peace in Europe.

Through his system of alliances and treaties, Bismarck had created a precarious peace in Europe. If any of Europe’s most powerful nations wanted to go to war with any of the others, it would not be able to turn to any remaining nation as its ally. Instead, the nation clamoring for war might end up opposing all the other nations—and the war would be over swiftly.

When Bismarck fell from power in 1890, however, under Kaiser William II’s command Germany rapidly invalidated all the alliances Bismarck had worked so
diligently to create. First, the German kaiser did not bother to renew Germany’s Reinsurance Treaty with Russia. William II believed that because he and the Russian ruler happened to be cousins, that family bond would be enough for Germany to rely upon Russia’s support. However, Russia, once separated from the Reinsurance Treaty, wasted no time in making an official alliance in 1894 with France. Germany’s former ally had now connected itself with Germany’s former enemy. Under William II’s dream of raising Germany’s empire up to a level equivalent to that of Britain’s, other countries watched with apprehension as Germany created more overseas territories and mechanized its military production.

As a result, in 1904 Britain sought out the diplomatic agreement with France called the Entente Cordiale. Just three years later, Russia made its alliance with Britain, the Anglo-Russian Entente, so that it could stabilize its place in Asia. As a result, Britain, Russia, and France all became connected, forming a Triple Entente. The Triple Entente stood in opposition to the Triple Alliance, which included Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. Bismarck’s peace had not even lasted 20 years. Instead, William II had destroyed the arrangement Bismarck had established and put Germany in a position of being surrounded by potential enemies. Two groups of three powerful countries faced each other, and each had problems or issues with the other. Instead of keeping the peace, these large alliances prepared diverse nations for war. Each formation of an alliance added to a sequence of events that could only lead to international battle, once the participants had been pushed over the edge into war.

**Empires and Nations**

Colonial empires and the imperial designs of European powers helped create the condition that led to World War I. Larger empires disagreed over questions of expansion and authority, which reinforced the new system of alliances taking shape. First, Italy ended up taking a place in the Triple Alliance in 1882 because it wanted to colonize a portion of land in northern Africa. Because of its disagreement with France, Italy looked to align itself with France’s opponent, Germany. Over a decade later, Germany’s William II became apprehensive over the Triple Entente that had drawn France and Britain closer together. William II wanted to see how strong this alliance had become, so he pushed forward two Moroccan Crises. These crises also focused on French interests in North Africa. Instead of splitting these relatively new allies apart, William II’s belligerent attempts backfired. The members of the Triple Entente became tighter than ever.

Meanwhile, Britain had problems in its own colonies during the Boer War (1899–1902), when it had not had other European nations as allies. As a result, Britain took the initiative, and in the years leading up to 1912 Britain formed alliances with Russia, France, and Japan. During the previous century, Russia and Britain had primarily been at odds. Yet when Russia lost to Japan on the Asian front, Russia found itself reaching back to Britain to protect itself against further defeats in Asia. In addition, Italy’s continued desire for a presence in North Africa, focused by 1911 on Libya, with its connection to the Ottoman Empire, led directly to the events of World War I. When Italy declared war on Ottoman rule, a sequence of events followed with increasing problems in the Balkans.
In addition to these imperial issues, European countries had domestic difficulties to deal with in 1914. Within their own borders, many countries had their own issues of aggressive behavior against ethnic groups, workers striking, problems with extreme politics, and with individuals concerned with civil rights of their own. To stem these internal problems, many regimes turned to imperial conquest and the glory of the nation to bring people together and keep them in line. It is possible that one reason many different governments agreed to go to war stemmed from a view that saw war as a chance to circumvent internal problems and stabilize their nations.

Indeed, after a large-scale conflict had been declared, many working-class Europeans rejoiced. People who had formerly disagreed about domestic issues worked together to put these seemingly more minor problems on hold so that they could support their countries on this international scale. For example, the Germans instilled a Burgfrieden, which translates roughly as “national harmony,” during wartime, while the British put a temporary halt to the problems of home rule in Ireland and women’s right to vote. Over all, it seemed, pushing public support through the masses had been an excellent strategy and had gotten the majority of people in each nation to applaud the war effort.

At the same time, many scholars had come to believe that war in Europe was inevitable. The most recent large-scale battle, the Franco-Prussian War, had taken place more than 40 years earlier. Certain individuals applauded war as an organic component of humanity’s growth. These people claimed that war inspired people to be more devoted to their countries and to more readily give things up. Like Darwin’s natural selection, the heartier nations would survive. This belief emerged, for instance, in a book by Friedrich von Bernhardi, a man of German extraction, called The Next War (1912). Bernhardi stated his excitement over war because he thought global conflict would prove to everyone else just how wonderful and powerful Germany was. Bernhardi suggested that weapons had become so sophisticated that war would be short and swift. In retrospect, this was an innocent, if not naive, belief.

Ultimately, the final component that led to World War I came from the practice of nationalism, or patriotic belief in and devoted behavior toward one’s nation, on both grand and specific scales. Countries refused to back down from war because they did not want anyone to insult their national integrity. Additionally, nationalism caused problems among nations and ethnic groups in the Balkan region that led to clashes between Russia and Austria-Hungary, and eventually to international war.

Extensions
- Read Otto von Bismarck’s Triple Alliance. Summarize his argument for the alliance system.

Summary
In the years following the Franco-Prussian War, Germany and France still mistrusted one another. The possibility of another large conflict threatened. Germany’s chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, worked hard to avoid conflict by setting up a complex
and fragile alliance system. This lasted until 1890, when the new German kaiser, William II, removed Bismarck from office. Without the fragile alliances, the mistrust between European countries soon became tremendous problems. With the exception of Austria-Hungary, Germany alienated nearly every other European nation. Soon, two large alliances, the Triple Entente and the Triple Alliance, existed in Europe. These alliances were forced into international conflict in 1914 when the man next in line to rule Austria-Hungary, Archduke Francis Ferdinand, was murdered in Sarajevo. As World War I began, Europeans could see that the lasting disagreements between their countries and the disbanding of Bismarck’s alliance system were to blame.

**Looking Ahead**

With the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand, a terrible series of events had finally been set into motion. While Bismarck had attempted to keep the peace in Europe, and succeeded for almost 20 years, when he fell from power. European empires’ interests in imperial expansion and national prowess laid the foundation for an incendiary conflict the likes of which the world had never seen. The two great alliances, so recently formed, would test their loyalties and prowess on land and sea. The death and destruction that followed would be like nothing Europe had ever seen before.

**SELF-CHECK ANSWERS**

1. Bismarck wanted to prevent war on a larger scale by maintaining small, individual peace treaties among a variety of countries.
2. Russia and France agreed to a coalition of armed defense.
3. Germany convened an international meeting over whether France would take over Morocco as a protectorate or not; Germany hoped it would not.
4. Triple Alliance: Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy; Triple Entente: Russia, France, and Britain
5. Because of the alliance system, countries that would not originally have joined in the war had to join to defend their allies, when their allies went to war against third parties.
The Beginnings of World War I

Essential Questions

• What was the immediate cause of World War I?
• Who were the rival camps?
• What course did the war take on the Western, Southern, and Eastern fronts?
• What effect did the war have on colonies and the seas?

Keywords

blank check
stalemate
submarine warfare
trench warfare
ultimatum
Set the Stage

Europe’s New Imperialist practices could not last forever, nor could the countries so invested in expanding their empires evade consequences. Germany’s chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, had managed to keep the peace among the burgeoning empires until almost the end of the nineteenth century, but when his system of alliances fell apart, nothing remained to keep the great empires in check against one another. It would take just one act of violence to spark international conflict and provide Europe’s empires with excuses to target even more portions of land. The battles that followed would be some of the most devastating the world had ever seen.

Primary Causes of the War

While European imperial expansion laid the foundation for international conflict, several specific events in the first years of the 1900s hastened the outbreak of war. By 1910, several smaller-scale conflicts had occurred in the Balkans because, prior to the twentieth century, much of the area had been controlled by the Ottoman Empire, which had suddenly begun to collapse. Other European nations saw this weakness as a moment of opportunity. By 1908, Russia and Austria-Hungary sent representatives to clandestinely meet and arrange a pact to divide the Balkans. Russia and Austria-Hungary saw that the Ottoman Empire had become weak from within, and vulnerable to an outside attack. While Austria-Hungary already had its troops fully spread out throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina, in 1908 it gained permission from Russia to take possession of the region. This in turn angered Serbians, who had ideas of creating a country for themselves. In exchange for Russian concessions in Bosnia, Austria-Hungary ceded Russia an important ocean region known as the Dardanelles, giving Russia control over waterways between the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea.

Yet Russia and Austria-Hungary’s secret agreements did not go as planned. The rest of Europe also saw the Ottoman Empire’s problems and worried that countries like Austria-Hungary and Russia would take advantage. So, when Russia attempted to move its naval forces into the Dardanelles, the rest of the European nations opposed the move, and Russia was forced to retreat. Despite this failure by its secret ally, Austria-Hungary moved ahead and took control of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Austria-Hungary had an advantage in taking over that region that Russia had not had in the Dardanelles: an on-ground, immediate presence. Austria-Hungary’s actions, succeeding where Russia failed, seemed to reward bad behavior over good. When Russia was forced to abide by internationaldictates and step back from the Dardanelles, it not only lost what had seemed to be a newly promised region, but it was embarrassed upon the world stage. Austria-Hungary, in contrast, blatantly ignored international dictates and forcibly grabbed Bosnia. Just as diplomats had feared, Austria-Hungary’s actions angered the Serbians, many of whom had a nationalistic vision for the future expansion of Serbia. An especially radical band
of Serbian nationalists had created a revolutionary group known as the Black Hand. The Black Hand’s mission would be to create a larger Serbia, where all Slavs could live, and its first step would be to force the Austro-Hungarian troops out of the Balkan region.

Problems in the Balkans did not stop there. The Ottoman Empire continued to weaken, and the tiny countries of the Balkans, with their proximity to the Ottoman Empire, thought it would soon be time to control their own destinies. They waited and prepared to strike as soon as the Ottoman Empire fell. Two wars in the Balkans quickly followed. The initial conflict, the First Balkan War, lasted from 1912 to 1913. This war ignited after a conflict between Turkey and Italy, which Italy won handily. After that, four other countries in the surrounding region, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Greece, and Serbia, joined together and made a stronger, larger group called the Balkan League. These countries acted as a single league and made a direct, eventually successful attack on the Ottoman forces. When the Ottoman Empire lost to the Balkan League, the Balkan nations gained even more ground. Serbia, in particular, came out of the war with a new position of relative strength in the Balkans.

Other countries in Europe—especially Austria-Hungary, which had its own problems with Serbia—wanted to prevent Serbia from reaching the Adriatic. Thus, during a lengthy meeting that lasted from 1912 to 1913 and became known as the London Conference, Serbia accepted the terms demanded by the other three powerful European nations. Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy demanded that a new, autonomous country be set up between Serbia and the Adriatic. This country would come to be known as Albania. In addition to Serbia’s anger in the matter, Russia also resented this conference. Rapidly, on the heels of Russia’s defeat over the Dardanelles, Russia had lost face in a series of international negotiations.

The aftermath of the First Balkan War led to the Second Balkan War, which took place the same year that the First Balkan War concluded. The primary cause of the Second Balkan War came from the region of Macedonia, which the Balkan League had won from the Ottoman Empire during the first war. Yet the league ran into problems when determining how best to partition Macedonia. Bulgaria, in particular, grew angry with the other league members and challenged them, as well as the remaining Ottoman forces, to this second war. But Bulgaria could not match its former allies and lost.

Ultimately, while the two Balkan Wars stirred up conflict between the countries in the region, as well as with Russia and the Ottoman Empire, the real problems lay in the relationship of two countries in particular: Austria-Hungary and Serbia, who had developed very different and contradictory plans for the future of the Balkans.

**War Begins (July 1914)**

By 1914, tensions ran high in Europe, and the peaceful balance of power had been knocked aside. On June 28, the man next in line to be ruler of Austria-Hungary, the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, traveled to Sarajevo with his wife, Sophie the Duchess of Hohenberg, on behalf of Austria-Hungary’s government to present a possible idea that could assuage the Serbs. The archduke’s idea aimed to give the Slavs of Bosnia some measure of independence without giving them total self-government. Rather
than having a nation and government of their own, with separate boundaries and laws, as the more radical Serbs and Slavs desired, they would be a semi-independent presence inside the Hapsburg Empire.

The Black Hand would not entertain any plan other than its long-held dream of an expanded and autonomous Serbia. The Black Hand decided to take drastic and violent action. With a twofold goal of both humiliating the Hapsburg Empire and putting an end to what they saw as the archduke’s foolish idea, the Black Hand organized a plot to murder the archduke, as well as his spouse, during their visit to Sarajevo. The radical organization brought several youthful, especially fervent party members together and instructed them in ways and means of political murder. A young man named Gavrilo Princip successfully carried out the murders by fatally shooting both the archduke and his pregnant wife. Soon the entire continent erupted in chaos as a result.

First, of course, Austria-Hungary and Serbia’s relationship immediately became more hostile. Even though the Black Hand had been responsible for the archduke’s death, Austria-Hungary blamed the governing regime of Serbia itself. By the end of July, Austria-Hungary had given Serbia an ultimatum as a result. Austria-Hungary also found immediate support from Germany, its long-term ally. Since Austria-Hungary had become the only nation willing to stand by Germany, Germany could not afford to let it down. Thus, William II went above and beyond in supporting Austria-Hungary by bestowing upon it what
people referred to, metaphorically, as a “blank check” to take care of its problems with the Serbians however the Austro-Hungarians saw fit. Because of this blank check, Germany would support Austria-Hungary in whatever action it took. With Germany’s support, Austria-Hungary could afford to risk alienating other European countries, like Russia, Serbia’s primary supporter. Russia’s wrath might have stopped Austria-Hungary from going after Serbia, but since Germany had promised to support Austria-Hungary if Russia became a problem, Austria-Hungary could proceed in initiating conflict with Serbia.

This behavior caused a chain reaction of alliances and arguments. Russia had previously allied itself with France, which now worried about Germany’s potential for joining in this new war and sided with Russia again. Although Britain had ties to both Russia and France through the Triple Entente, it attempted to stay neutral in this conflict at first. Even though its intervention soon appeared to be quite useless, Britain did attempt to step in and smooth things out between Austria-Hungary and Serbia. Yet that wasn’t enough. Serbia refused to accept one aspect set forward in the ultimatum of Austria-Hungary. In response, Austria-Hungary made preparations for war on Serbia. Immediately, Russia proclaimed imminent conflict with Austria-Hungary, in defense of Serbia. Unfortunately for Russia, its government had to plan for a conflict in which it might have to do battle not only with Austria-Hungary, but with Germany as well.

Perhaps it was at this time that the royal cousins who held thrones in Germany and Russia, Kaiser William and Tsar Nicholas, respectively, regretted relying on their familial bond to keep the peace rather than having made a formal alliance. Even though the two men sent many negotiating telegrams back and forth in an attempt to smooth things over, Germany, obliged by treaty to stand by Austria-Hungary, announced it would go to battle with Russia as well. With so many important European nations already entering the field of battle, other countries were forced to enter, too, drawn in by their previous, standing alliances. First, France, which had already publicly declared its support for Russia, officially announced it would battle Germany. Then Britain, the formerly impartial nation, joined the battle on the Russian side. Britain stepped in because of problems another, smaller impartial nation, Belgium, had been having with Germany.

Germany had created a strategy for the war called the Schlieffen Plan, which involved moving troops through Belgium to France. The Schlieffen Plan had two parts, and served as a strategy for Germany going to war in two very different directions, targeting both France and Russia. According to the first part of the plan, Germany would move quickly through Belgium and unleash its army on France before France could prepare to retaliate. Then, after engaging with France, Germany would send a second army to engage Russia. Belgium, a neutral party, would be crushed as Germany moved through it to get to France. Belgium had not taken sides in the war, and Britain had sworn years before to protect the small country between France and Germany. Thus, Britain had to step in to try to prevent Germany’s advance. For its part Germany now found itself at war with three other significant European powers: Britain, France, and Russia. While many people had

**SELF-CHECK**
Who killed Archduke Francis Ferdinand?
anticipated some kind of conflict, not many could have predicted how devastating the conflict would be. In the middle of 1914, when the war had just begun, people remained optimistic and thought the war would be relatively brief, ending in less than six months. They had no concept of what lay ahead.

The War’s Opposing Sides
During World War I, the battle came down to two opposing groups of countries. On one side, the Allies came from three powerful countries, members of the Triple Entente and thus long-term allies themselves: Britain, Russia, and France. As Russia’s ally, Serbia also became a member of the Allies. Later on, the Allies would also include Greece, Romania, Italy, the United States, and Japan. Japan entered the war not to preserve or fight for any ground on the European continent. Instead, the still relatively new imperial power hoped to take over land Germany held overseas, including areas in China and islands in the Pacific Ocean.

On the other side, the Central Powers were composed of only two nations, Austria-Hungary and Germany. Later, though, countries from the Balkan region, including the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria, joined them.

The Western Front (1914–1917)
The European nations wasted no time in acting upon their commitment to international conflict. Less than two months after the death of Archduke Francis Ferdinand, war began in August 1914. On the fourth day of that month, Germany sent its troops into Belgium in accordance with the Schlieffen Plan, effectively forcing Britain to come to Belgium’s aid. To counter the Germans, the British deployed a special group of soldiers called the British Expeditionary Force, or BEF. The BEF headed straight to France, to meet the Germans when they arrived.

The British, French, and Germans met at the Battle of the Marne, which took place in the first days of September 1914. German troops marched through the low country of Belgium and into France, advancing upon the Marne River, which lay just a little over 10 miles from the French capital of Paris. The Germans advanced with nearly 1.5 million troops, but as they crossed the Marne they faced stiff resistance from over 1 million French soldiers, supported by six British divisions. The week-long battle left nearly half a million men dead, some 220,000 on either side, but it represented a great victory for the Allies who had thwarted the German advance.

After the Marne, for a time France and Germany found themselves in a stalemate over the Western Front. While France had kept the Germans from advancing, Germany still held a big portion of France in the north, as well as the majority of Belgian territory, which it had swiftly conquered. The opposing armies employed a new strategy of trench warfare. Along each side of the Western Front, armies dug trenches where soldiers could take cover. Both sides also created different defensive barriers for the trenches, including tough and sharp barbed wire, and small, stone forts for their guns. Little did the soldiers know that they had embarked on a form of defensive fighting that would last for nearly four years.

Generally, the opposing armies would send out groups of foot soldiers to attack the other side. Few of the foot soldiers would reach the opposing army,
though, because each side used machine guns to kill anyone who came near its trenches. Since both France and Germany had trenches and machine guns, neither country's army could pull ahead and defeat the other. Growing desperate, both countries’ armies began using ever more severe and devastating weapons: heavy, high-powered artillery and poisonous gas. Other innovative and deadly weaponry that would be used included flamethrowers, small bombs or grenades, zeppelins, and airplanes. However, in the early years of the war, none of these new ways of killing was enough to break the stalemate.

**Verdun and the Somme**

Two years after the war began, two more tremendous battles followed. The first, known today as the Battle of Verdun, occurred in February 1916. At the time, France's army had created a defensive fort in the French city of Verdun. That month, Germany sent some 1.2 million troops to the area in the hope of finally breaking through the Allied lines and returning to the offensive. The French withstood the initial attack, however, and the fighting dragged on for the next 10 months in the longest and one of the most devastating battles in the First World War and the history of warfare. By July, France had moved from defense to offense at Verdun, and by December had driven back the German assault completely. When the Battle of Verdun ended, Germany had lost nearly all the ground it had gained in the area, and France had strengthened its defensive position. This victory for France came with a severe price on both sides, though: more than 430,000 German soldiers died, as well as more than 540,000 French soldiers, according to recent estimates.
Another devastating battle began before Verdun had even concluded. What became known as the Battle of the Somme began in July 1916. France and Britain launched a large surprise attack along the Somme River, for a distance of approximately 30 miles. The opening day of the battle saw the British army suffer nearly 60,000 casualties. Gradually, however, the Germans were pushed back, although the Allies never forced a complete breakthrough as they had hoped. By November, the battle was over, and the result was indecisive. Germany had been forced to withdraw, but the stalemate continued despite the combined loss of over 1 million lives. In addition to its great losses, the Battle of the Somme is also remembered as a historic moment in warfare because it was the first instance of tanks being used in warfare.

During the year following the two great battles of Verdun and the Somme, French soldiers as well as ordinary French citizens had begun to grow exhausted and fed up with the war. They had been fighting for three bloody years. Thousands and thousands had died in battle, and many more had perished from disease and starvation. The French landscape was a blasted and smoking ruin. Britain's army had no choice but to step in and support its ally, even at a continued high price. That year, Britain's army led assaults in Belgium, where in a part of Ypres called Passchendaele, as many as 700,000 British, French, Belgian, and German soldiers died during three months of fierce fighting. These engagements cost Britain money, men, and arms but did not achieve much in the overall scale of the war. In effect, the Allies and Germany had reached another stalemate.

Perhaps in part because of the British and French people's frustration with this stalemate, both countries saw their governments change substantially in 1916 and 1917. First, Britain elected a new prime minister at the end of 1916. While David Lloyd George (1863–1945) belonged to the same Liberal Party as the previous minister, Herbert Asquith (1852–1928), he came into power as someone backed by the people's good opinion and known fondly to many by his common nickname, the "Welsh Wizard." In November of the following year, a similar changing of the guard would occur in France. Joining the Welsh Wizard came France's "Tiger," Georges Clemenceau (1841–1929), taking the office of premier. Clemenceau and Lloyd George would direct their countries strongly and with authority as the war continued.

**The Eastern Front (1914–1917)**

As if the battles on the Western Front were not enough, Germany also had to contend with the Eastern Front: in effect, Germany was fighting a war on two fronts. Initially, Germany seemed to be doing well in the east, just as it had in the west. At first, the battles on the Eastern Front occurred very close to home in its territory of East Prussia. This happened because Russia's armies sprang into action almost immediately after war was declared. Russia sent two large forces to occupy East Prussia. However, the German army responded rapidly and brutally, emerging victorious over the Russian army in two separate battles. First, in the last days of August 1914, Russia lost to Germany in the Battle of Tannenberg. Then in early September 1914, Russia lost to Germany in the Battle of the Masurian Lakes. On those battlegrounds, at least, Germany could not be matched.
Yet since Germany had to expend so many of its forces in East Prussia battling Russia, it left its ally Austria-Hungary more vulnerable to Russia’s attacks. Germany had to come up with a way to draw Russia’s strength away from Austria-Hungary and focus it elsewhere. To that end, Germany sent an army to eastern Poland, aiming ultimately at Warsaw. A few months later, as 1915 approached, Germany had managed to occupy almost 25 percent of what had been Russian-controlled Poland. Russia did not have enough businesses, factories, or production means to create enough goods to fuel its own armies. The armies out on the fronts would soon be in want of arms, tools, and other products they needed to fight effectively.

While Russia struggled to supply its military, Germany’s army kept on pushing against Russia’s control over Poland throughout 1915. As 1916 approached, Germany had not only taken over the majority of Russian Poland, but it had also taken over Lithuania. In the meantime, Russia kept launching attacks against the defensive Austro-Hungarian armies on the Galician front. Russia did gain some ground in Galicia, but not enough to make a clear victory during 1915. As a result, in September of that year, Tsar Nicholas II stepped in to lead Russia’s military personally. More than six months later, in June 1915, Russia’s army launched a major assault in Galicia, targeting the Austro-Hungarian army. Almost immediately, Germany responded by sending 15 battalions to support and defend Austria-Hungary. No sooner had the Russian attack begun, then it was finished. Before Russia lost Galicia to Germany, though, it had found another ally in Romania. Romania had joined up with the Allies to further its own goal of taking over Transylvania, which at that time was under Austro-Hungarian control. As Russia weakened, however, so did Romania, but even more rapidly. By early 1917, Romania had fallen to the Austro-Hungarian army.

Romania's fall took place nearly a year after Russia had essentially lost to Germany in Poland. The missed opportunity to strike in Galicia in 1916 seemed only to rub salt in the wound. Any chance that Russia might have had to come back along with its fellow Allies and fight more strongly against Germany would be turned aside by its own domestic revolutions during 1917. After a popular revolution overthrew the tsar in February 1917, and another revolution installed the Bolsheviks in power a few months later, Russia was forced to bow out of World War I, signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk as a promise that it no longer would engage militarily with Germany or Austria-Hungary. According to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the new Bolshevik-led Russian government had to make many concessions to Germany. In exchange for peace between the two larger countries, Russia had to relinquish control over several regions near its western boundary, including the Ukraine and Finland. Russia also lost the already much disputed Poland, as well as some areas near the Baltic Sea. In effect, that Russia lost about 33 percent of its citizens along with the lands to the west. With Russia out of the way, Germany could turn its attention back to France and the Western Front.

The South: Italy and Gallipoli
In the years leading up to the war, Italy had been linked with both Austria-Hungary and Germany as a part of the Triple Alliance. As such, the other two countries might have expected Italy to join forces with them when World War I
commenced in 1914. However, Italy did not join with the Central Powers and instead declared itself an impartial party. Doing so made countries like France and Britain hopeful that Italy would join forces with them as a member of the Allies. This hope took legal effect in a clandestine agreement with Italy called the Treaty of London of 1915. According to the components of this treaty, Italy could expect lands in both Turkey and Austria-Hungary after the successful conclusion of the war. In May 1915, Italy joined the Allies to fight against Germany and Austria-Hungary.

Unfortunately for Italy, its armies could not match Austria-Hungary’s. Two years after joining the war, Italy found itself internationally embarrassed when it lost to Austria-Hungary in the 1917 Battle of Caporetto. Instead of Italy lending aid to the Allies, the reverse occurred. Britain and France quickly had to mobilize their own armies to help Italy recover after Caporetto. The alliance did not seem to be working out as well as Britain and France had hoped.

Meanwhile, since the early months of the war, the Allies had been struggling to gain access to other parts of the Balkans. Initially, in November 1914, the Allies had found themselves shut out of the Turkish Straits when the Ottoman Empire, which controlled the straits, lent its support to Germany and Austria-Hungary after the outbreak of war. The straits would have served as the most direct water route between Britain and France on one side, and their ally Russia on the other. Without the straits, Britain and France could not send Russia arms and products the country desperately needed. To solve this problem, future British prime minister Winston Churchill (1874–1965) stepped forward with a plan. During World War I, Churchill occupied the position of First Lord of the Admiralty, an office that afforded him sufficient power to present a strategy that would allow the Allies to recover the straits from the Ottoman army. Under Churchill’s leadership, Britain sent soldiers by land and sea to attack the Gallipoli Peninsula in early 1915. This peninsula, situated at a key point in the south Dardanelles, would be a good position from which the Allies could press on to the other portions of the straits. Unfortunately for them, Churchill’s strategy was imperfect; the Allies’ grasp on the peninsula slowly eroded. Nearly a year after arriving, Britain’s soldiers had no choice but to retreat.

In the middle of the struggles over the Gallipoli Peninsula, the Allies lost another potential region to the Central Powers. In October 1915, Bulgaria allied itself with Germany and Austria-Hungary. The move came as a surprise to few, since Serbia had been connected to the Allies from the first days of the war, and Bulgaria and Serbia had a very tense recent history. Indeed, Bulgaria still smarted since its 1913 loss in the Second Balkan War and held a grudge against Serbia. This international conflict seemed to provide an ideal opportunity for Bulgaria to take its revenge. Indeed, Bulgaria had the satisfaction of seeing Serbia crumble under the Central Powers’ assault that very year.

**War Around the Globe**

While Europe was the hotbed of international conflict during World War I, it was by no means the only theater of battle. For example, brutal fighting occurred in the Middle East, especially over land belonging to Turkey. In fact, Turkey suffered
badly in the battles in this region while the Allies the steadily won ground. First, Russia and Turkey came to blows over the area known as the Caucasus in 1915. Russia emerged victorious and in retaliation, Turkey chose to blame the people of Armenian descent within its borders, claiming they had acted as spies and helped the Russians. To exact revenge, the Turkish government instituted a campaign of slaughter against the Armenians. Many important individuals in Armenian society died, assassinated by their own government. Many others faced exile. Historians speculate that somewhere between 1 and 1.5 million Armenians died at the hands of the Turkish government.

When Churchill’s strategy in the Gallipoli Peninsula failed, Britain and Russia gave up hope of taking over the Turkish Straits. Instead, they targeted the nearby region of Mesopotamia, also at that time controlled by Turkey. This new plan went into effect a year after the British army had extracted itself from the Dardanelles. In March 1917, Britain’s army successfully captured Baghdad, and the rest of Mesopotamia, for the most part, quickly followed. There, Britain’s army worked quickly and rapidly to round up Arab people who had previously been ruled by the Turks and incited them to revolution. In this, Britain relied on the aid of the popular Colonel T.E. Lawrence (1888–1935).

**Ocean Battles**

Despite the fact that one significant international problem prior to World War I had been Britain’s frustration with Germany’s attempt to build an equivalent navy, the German navy actually did not contribute much to the ocean battles during World War I. The Battle of Jutland was an exception. This two-day battle began on the last day of May 1916, in a portion of the North Sea near the Danish coastline, where Britain had set up an ocean barricade to keep German ships from crossing the sea to Britain. During this battle, Britain had hoped to soundly defeat the German ships and take back the portion of the Baltic Sea it could use to send supplies to Russia. The end resulted in yet another stalemate. Even though British ships had taken many more hits than the German ships had, neither side achieved its goal. The battle resulted in a modified victory for the Allies only in that, afterward, Germany sent its high seas ships to the Baltic Sea and kept them away from the British high seas, which would be small consolation in terms of what came next.

Even though Germany had taken pains to create a large and well-stocked battleship contingent, its underwater-only ships, submarines, would do the most damage in what came to be known as **submarine warfare**. Submarine warfare became particularly lethal because the opponent’s high seas ships could not usually detect a stealth submarine attack. Germany began using its submarines early in the war. In the first months of 1915, the German navy used its submarines, called U-boats, to create an ocean barricade around Britain, preventing food and supplies from reaching Britain by sea. This blockade resulted in the loss of many innocent lives, however, when the German submarines targeted a British ship named the *Lusitania*, which was not a warship, but an Atlantic passenger vessel. Among the nearly 1,200 people who died when the ship was torpedoed by a German U-boat were 128 U.S. citizens whose country remained officially neutral in the war. Still, the sinking of the passenger ship

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**submarine warfare**

stealth warfare conducted by undersea boats
sparked a tremendous outcry from the United States against submarine warfare. This outcry forced the German navy to curb its use, at least for some time, to avoid bringing the United States into the fray on the side of the Allies.

American influence could only last so long, though. One year later, after the Lusitania sank, Germany returned to the strategy of using submarine warfare. This time, Germany saw it as the one key strategy that it could use to defeat Britain; thus, by extension, submarine warfare made a victory against all the Allies seem much more possible. Germany put this plan into action on the first day of February 1917.

On February 26, German submarines targeted and destroyed a British ship called the Laconia. Two of the 12 people killed were U.S. citizens. The United States asserted its authority to protect its citizens abroad, even if warfare was required. Then, just a few days later, on the first day of March, the United States became aware of the Zimmerman Telegram, a piece of correspondence between German and Mexican diplomats that contained strategic points for a possible alliance between the two countries. In the telegram, Germany committed to giving Mexico back three large sections of the American Southwest should Mexico join the Central Powers.

The next month, with anti-German sentiment stoked by U-boat warfare and the Zimmerman Telegram, the United States officially declared war on Germany and entered World War I. Help from the United States would be slow to arrive abroad, however. While 20,000 or so troops of the American Expeditionary Forces had arrived in France by mid-summer 1917, it took nearly a year for the United States to send more than 1 million soldiers and help turn the tide against Germany.

**Extensions**

- Read “The Kaiser’s Comments on the Outbreak of the World War” from *Outbreak of the World War: German Documents Collected by Karl Kautsky* by Max Montgelas and Walther Schücking (No. 401, 1924, pp. 348–350, trans. by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace). Why was the mobilization of the Russian army so significant to the Kaiser? How did the Kaiser feel about England? Why was Great Britain aligned against Germany?

**Summary**

The Balkan conflicts set the stage, and the murder of Archduke Francis Ferdinand plunged Europe into international conflict. The initial struggle between Austria-Hungary and Serbia triggered alliances across the continent and resulted in full-scale war. On the Western Front, Germany invaded Belgium and then northern France. Britain came to the aid of both countries. By 1917, many lives had been lost through trench warfare at the Battles of the Marne, Verdun, and the Somme. Yet Germany and the Allies remained at a stalemate. On the Eastern Front, Germany slowly prevailed over Russia in Poland. Russia, in turn, lost important territory to Austria-Hungary and Germany; then, after its own revolutions, Russia left the war altogether. In the south, Italy joined the Allies, who battled Turkey for a pathway to
the east. Meanwhile, Germany resorted to submarine warfare in an attempt to defeat Britain. However, Germany’s actions caused the deaths of innocent Americans. The combination of submarine warfare and the United States’ discovery of Germany’s secret plots with Mexico resulted in the United States joining the Allies and the war in 1917.

**Looking Ahead**

By 1917, many lives had been lost and neither side—the Allies nor the Central Powers—had accomplished its desired victory. People would become disheartened by the loss of life and the of wartime. European citizens would suffer a variety of terrible hardships, from lack of food to censorship. With the United States joining the war on the Allies’ side, victory for the Allies finally seemed like a distant possibility. By November 1918, World War I would end. Then, it would be time for Europe to put itself back together.

**SELF-CHECK ANSWERS**

1. Gavrilo Princip

2. In the Battle of the Somme, 650,000 Germans died.

3. After suffering its own internal rebellion in 1917, Russia’s new government could not balance engaging in an outside war with governing its new country. Rather than lose to Germany outright, Russia signed the Treaty of Brest-Litvosk with Germany and stepped out of World War I. By the terms of the treaty, Russia lost about 33 percent of its population and a great deal of land on its western border: Finland, the Ukraine, Poland, and the Baltic countries.
World War I’s End and Aftermath

Essential Questions

• What happened in World War I to make people feel dissatisfied with and disappointed by both society and humanity?
• What innovative methods of doing battle emerged between 1914 and 1918?
• What was the war like for those left behind on the home front?
• How did World War I end?
• What policies were set down in the Treaty of Versailles?

Keywords

buffer state  press censorship
demilitarized  rationing
genocide  war bonds
mandate system  War Ministry
no-man’s land  women with yellow hands
over the top

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Set the Stage

By 1917, World War I had been raging for three years, and many European countries had lost hundreds of thousands of citizens. Yet no country had come closer to victory, and the war remained in a stalemate. France’s army had begun to weaken under the strain, and Britain had to step in. Meanwhile, Russia had already exited the war because of its own domestic revolutions. Germany had prevailed over Poland and began to target the British fleet, posing a real danger to the Allies. When the United States officially joined the war on the Allies' side, it seemed as though the Allies might have a chance for victory. Even with a potential victory and end to the war in sight, tremendous, irrevocable damage had already been done, and much more destruction and death would occur before the war ended.

Negative Effects of World War I on Society

In retrospect, it seems clear that the events of World War I served as a catalyst for a widespread change in the way human beings perceived the world. While the change in perception had been building for some time, during the war people began to think about it more clearly and talk about it more often. The general public became so shocked and shattered by the events of the war that they had no choice but to abandon the ideologies and belief systems they had previously held as they began to look for answers, explanations, and hope.

Prior to the war, people living in Europe and the Western world had developed specific patterns of thought and belief systems that had become widely, if not universally, shared. These patterns had been shaped and informed by two specific historic periods: first, by the popular scientific and philosophical breakthroughs of the Enlightenment during the 1700s, and second, by the improvements of technology and manufacturing that developed during the nineteenth century’s Industrial Revolutions. In addition to these changes in technology, many people of the 1800s had begun to accept Darwin’s ideas about evolution and the survival of the fittest.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, even though some aspects of their personal faiths had been challenged by science, many people continued to share a faith that the world and society would continue to move forward, that rationality create a better society, and that every individual had civic privileges. People began to expect they could have more goods and more money, and to aspire to higher classes. This societal change corresponded to the expansion of urban centers, the growth of the middle class in European countries, and the widespread mass implementation of educating young people.

For the most part, all these changes seemed like positive ones, and they helped give people during this time an almost tangible proof that their lives would involve continuous improvement. Generally speaking, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, people found it easy to have faith in a world run by reason and order, a world where the rational physics as expounded by Isaac Newton made
perfect sense. Things they could not explain through reason, they could justify through their belief in a higher power. In other words, between their dual faiths in reason and religion, it seemed as though everything around them had some explanation or another to back it up. Nothing occurred without eventual purpose or justification.

Within this ordered world, people began advocating for even more civil liberties for commoners. Women had started to catch up to men in terms of the rights they held in the world, such as the right to property or the right to vote. Working-class citizens also had begun to receive more privileges, such as fair hours, fair wages, and unionization. Governments had started implementing other common programs of a welfare state, such as creating retirement funds for the elderly and other public programs.

All these factors combined to make life fairly good for most people in Europe and the West at the end of the 1800s. While exceptions to this rule existed for the most part people lived in a world of order and rationality. Yet, some started questioning commonly held beliefs, even as the majority prospered. These critics had become dissatisfied with the popular way of thinking about the world. Contrary to what many other people thought, they did not agree that the world was continuing to move forward in a positive manner. Furthermore, they either had lost faith in the reasonability of others, or had started to worry that reason alone could not explain all of the events in the world surrounding them.

People who already felt this way could find natural justification in some of the shocking and terrible events of World War I. Moreover, even people who had believed wholeheartedly in a reasonable and logical society prior to the war would find themselves questioning everything they knew as the war’s horrific events became fully known. Unfortunately, World War I quickly revealed itself as a war more damaging than any other. The dark side of humanity that the war revealed made many reevaluate society. Without reason, it seemed, people found it difficult to continue politely advocating for or discussing civil liberties. Far greater basic needs seemed to be at stake.

This sad, worried feeling spread quickly. Negativity could be found almost everywhere, as the general populace began to doubt the direction humanity had taken. This negativity would be fostered and grow even more in the decades to come, especially during the 1930s. During that time, many of the fears and worries people had already developed or begun to hold during the First World War took terrible shape. These new realities could be seen in the many tyrannical leaders rising to power in eastern Europe, for example, or in the terrible plummet of worldwide finances that began with the 1929 stock market crash and soon spread into the following decade as the Great Depression.

Postwar, people felt lost and adrift—if they had not lost someone close to them, their neighbors probably had. It seemed that everyone in Europe had been touched in some way by the war, and it became hard for anyone to believe in the general goodness of mankind. A kind of innocence that had existed prior to the war seemed forever lost, and no one knew what to put in its place. Paul Valéry (1871–1945) spoke for many people of his time when he described his interpretation of what
had happened to society as the war concluded. Writing at the beginning of the
decade following the war, he believed that his peers had come not to a crossroads,
but to what seemed like the end of the road. Valéry famously compared the war
that had just passed to a natural disaster, like a tempest, writing that even though
the disaster was over, people kept walking around and worrying that it had barely
started. Valéry worried that people had become psychologically disabled by the
events of the war, and he did not know how anyone would be able to recover from
it. Quite frankly, Valéry did not really understand how any reasonable person could
cope with all the reverberating effects of the war, which had altered so many things
about the world. Several countries had nearly bankrupted themselves trying to pay
for the war, while others had lost and gained entire governing regimes. Civilizations
seemed completely turned on their heads. Nothing remained as it had been.

No area of life in the years following 1918 seemed safe from this worry about
the loss of rationality and the potential lack of human decency. In addition to pro-
essionals who studied the mind and how it works, such as scientists, philosophers,
writers, and psychologists, other great intellectuals of the twentieth century would
also have to adjust to this new worldview. People who had relied on reason and
order would have to find a new way to make sense of external chaos and despair.

New Methods of Doing Battle
The chaos and despair so many felt came in large part from witnessing the
destruction that arose as a result of new kinds of weaponry that made killing on
a mass scale easier than anything anyone had seen before. In many ways, the
destruction and high casualty rates of World War I were the result of military
technology that had outpaced military tactics. When World War I dawned, the
men in charge of the opposing armies had been trained in the strategies and tactics
of the Napoleonic Wars. At that time, armies followed two main strategies: one,
swiftly changing course and position to evade the enemy; two, sending tremen-
dous numbers of foot soldiers to attack the enemy and attempting to defeat the
other side with sheer numbers.

Even though armies had begun using more advanced armaments, such as
machine guns and long-range artillery, and had started to use aerial equipment
such as planes for the first time, in World War I both sides believed that they could
simply add these elements to their current theories of warfare. They did not realize
that they might have to alter the theories and strategies themselves. Officers in
charge on both sides believed they could use all their new weapons in full force
upon each other according to their usual practices, by targetting enemies and wip-
ing them out with sheer force. The new weaponry actually worked better, however,
when used defensively, rather than as part of an attack. World War I became a
defensive war, where wave after wave of attacking armies broke apart under heavy
artillery fire, rapid machine-gun barrages, and poison gas. It took nearly 10 million
Europeans’ lives for military leaders to realize that industrialization had changed
the face of warfare forever.

As battles raged in France and Belgium during World War I, the Allies and the
Germans dug in along the front, building heavily fortified trenches as the fighting
became a stalemate. To further protect their trench lines, soldiers on both sides set up protective guards around the trenches, with guns and barbed wire. There would be a large space between the trenches of either side that people commonly referred to as “no-man’s land.” No-man’s land would be an empty, bleak tract with nothing upon it but the fallen bodies of soldiers from both sides.

As the stalemate dragged on, both the Allies and the Central Powers became desperate to break through the other side’s defensive positions. In battle after battle, hundreds of thousands would die to lay claim to just a few miles of territory that simply narrowed, or widened, the tracts of no-man’s land. Each side would propel bombs and explosives into the other’s trenches, hoping to weaken the other side. Then, in a great surge, thousands of foot soldiers would be sent to try to make it all the way over to the trenches on the other side, which became known as going “over the top.” Soldiers going over the top had to make it through no-man’s land, but as they ran across the barren, smoking landscape they became moving targets. It was a deadly, hopeless practice, and it created a ghastly death toll.

As the death toll mounted, the fruitlessness of the battles seemed more and more evident. Later, many people would view this way of doing battle as a tragic symbol of the entire war. It seemed as though both sides were happy to hurl innocent lives at a larger conflict with no thought for the individual victims. Many felt as though their cherished loved ones had perished in vain.

The military officials involved in World War I introduced new kinds of land, air, and sea vehicles in battle. On the ground, tanks were used for the first time, although not in numbers that made it practical to launch large-scale assaults with the armored vehicles. Soldiers on the ground also had to fear attacks from the air, which came from airplanes and from zeppelins. These aircraft dropped bombs on strategic areas. Finally, the naval fleets so experienced in a certain kind of high seas battle now had to contend with submarines or U-boats, which could attack stealthily and were very difficult to prepare against. Using other new military technologies, soldiers protected their trenches with barbed wire. They used flamethrowers and hand grenades to attack each other over no-man’s land, as well as unleashing high-powered artillery and poison gas on their enemies. All these new weapons meant fewer people could kill more people at a time from a greater distance than ever before.

**Effects of War on the Home Front**

World War I affected people throughout Europe and, eventually, across the globe. While the majority of people who died in the war enlisted or signed up to participate in fighting, each country’s civilians also contributed to the war effort. Every country that participated in World War I had to put all of its people to work on the war effort, and each country also had to commit all of its natural resources to fueling the war effort. Both took a tremendous toll on each country by the time the war had ended. Even though the Industrial Revolution had sped up manufacturing and production, and even though the armies fighting in the war had access to more innovative weaponry than ever before, the war gobbled up
vast resources. In the years following the war, as a result, dissatisfied individuals would blame their governments for ignoring their needs and creating conditions that left millions of people starving and homeless. In countries that had previously allowed free-market competition, small business owners and laborers found themselves working together for their country’s common good to produce enough weapons and other key items. In many cases, the ruling bureaucracy in each country stepped into the free market and declared that the economy would be run by the state, not by the people.

Even though they fought on different sides, countries like Germany and Britain approached the problem of producing enough war material in a similar way. Both Germany and Britain created new government positions to oversee manufacturing in wartime. Walter Rathenau (1867–1922), a businessman, took up this post in Germany’s War Ministry. From this vantage point, he helped the German government manage its resources and avoid running out of any. Similarly, in Britain David Lloyd George became minister of munitions in 1915. By the end of the war, Lloyd George would be Britain’s prime minister, but before then he had to work to make sure Britain had enough bomb casings for all of its explosives.

Meanwhile, each country in World War I had to come up with the funds to wage war. Even nations that were relatively well off prior to the war would see funds disappear as national treasuries struggled to keep up with the costs of such an undertaking. Each country only had limited options when it came to trying to solve this problem. Perhaps the least palatable choice, the state could print more money, but that made the national currency worth less. Second, the state could increase taxes on its citizens, which would bring in money but might anger the populace, who were needed for the war effort. Initially, many states employed this tactic. Yet they could not keep increasing taxation when citizens had consistently been earning less and giving up more without inciting an uprising or even revolution. Third, a state could reach out to another country and arrange for a loan. During World War I, the United States loaned substantial sums to two of its allies, Britain and France. The loans would come due after the war had concluded.

The countries involved in the war did have one final option for raising money within their own borders without resorting to the above three tactics: selling war bonds. Each state urged its own people to put their money and savings in war bonds. In effect, this meant the governments could borrow money from their own citizens while promising to pay it back later. People who did not buy war bonds might run the risk of being labeled disloyal to their own nation.

When these methods of raising revenue are included, World War I came with a hefty price tag indeed: more than $350 billion. To make matters worse, each country had printed more money for itself during the war. On a worldwide scale, this meant the value of money had decreased, causing price increases on most goods. Because of this situation, it would take even longer for the countries that had fought in World War I to reclaim their financial losses in the decades that followed.
Unhappiness at Home

Countries involved in the war also had to concentrate their attention on their home fronts and take care of their own people. Political enemies at home tried to take advantage of the war to further their objectives. One instance can be seen in Ireland’s relationship to the rest of Britain during the war. Prior to the war, the Irish had been agitating for greater independence from the rest of Britain. World War I overshadowed the negotiations for Irish autonomy and left Irish nationalists dissatisfied.

Germany saw this potential crack in Britain’s united front and reached out to disgruntled Irish citizens. Germany assisted Ireland by supplying weapons and a small expeditionary force during the 1916 Easter Rising. During that event, a group of Irish citizens revolted against the British government. It took substantial time and energy on the part of Britain to deal with this domestic conflict—time and energy that could have been spent on the Western Front. Ultimately, even with Germany’s help, Ireland did not achieve independence at that time. The problem of Irish autonomy would rise again after the war, however.

Britain had more luck meddling with Germany’s ally, Austria-Hungary. Austria-Hungary held a large empire that encompassed many individual ethnic groups, including Czechs and Poles. Britain and the other Allies subtly pressed members of these individual ethnic groups to agitate for their own autonomy. Britain targeted Germany’s other allies, too, including the Ottoman Empire. There, Britain employed a similar tactic to the ones it has used in the

This image shows the destruction to a post office in Dublin during Ireland’s fight with England for home rule.
Austro-Hungarian Empire—dividing citizens internally according to ethnic profiles. The man known as “Lawrence of Arabia,” Colonel T.E. Lawrence, worked throughout the Ottoman region to get the Arab people interested in separating from the empire and setting up their own nation-state. This resulted in a slow, simmering rise in unhappiness among people living under Ottoman rule. Similar to Germany’s actions in Ireland, Britain’s actions in the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires did not make the difference between a glorious victory and an ignominious defeat in World War I, but they laid the foundation for further turmoil in the years to come.

Other problems emerged on the domestic fronts. In the second half of the nineteenth century, following the Industrial Revolution, the governments in Europe had slowly shifted from representing the very few elite to including more and more of the citizens who lived in those countries. By the time World War I began, commoners had more rights and privileges than they ever had, although no situation was perfect: women did not yet have the right to vote in Britain, for example. Yet once the war started, people had to pause in their individual quests for self-betterment and put their energy into their countries’ war efforts.

The other way people helped their countries was by participating in and accepting the rationing of food and goods, giving up their own wants and needs for the greater purpose of the war. While all countries participated in rationing, Germany was most affected by it. Halfway through the war, in 1916, Germany had basically become a state under control of the military. Kaiser William II no longer ruled in the truest sense of the word. Instead, two men joined together to run the country like a larger version of the German army. These men, Erich Ludendorff (1865–1937) and Paul von Hindenburg (1847–1934), asked a great deal of their citizens. Together, Ludendorff and Hindenburg managed a system in which each citizen received a certain amount of food, a ration, each day. These measurements, detailed in small documents called ration books, became so specific that they would list how much a person could eat in terms of individual calories. Over time, conforming to these serious restrictions meant that many Germans suffered from malnutrition and, through the cumulative years of the war, did not get enough to eat. Sometimes citizens would supplement their food by adding inedible objects, like adding sawdust to their bread dough.

**Rights**

While many individuals had to give up their quests for more rights and privileges when the war began, World War I actually advanced women’s rights in a number of ways. During this war, young men did nearly all of the fighting at the front, which meant that families on the home front lacked the young, able-bodied men who had performed many of the jobs in the villages and cities of Europe. Before the war, women had largely been expected to stay home, raise children, and perform other domestic duties. However, with the men gone, the factories and businesses needed workers so goods could be produced and the war could continue. Many women stepped in to take on these roles.
This advance in opportunity for women also came with a price. Many British women took jobs in munitions factories, making shell casings and explosives. Yet the factory owners and leaders did not take enough care in training and protecting these women working around such dangerous objects. Sadly, many women died in the factories as a result of accidents and dangerous conditions. Other women suffered long-term poor health as a result of exposure to unsafe chemicals. Female factory workers became known as the “women with yellow hands,” because their yellow hands were symptoms of poisoning that resulted from working with TNT at the factories. Their inadvertent sacrifices helped the British government and people realize the important position women had taken up in the workforce and the rights they should enjoy. Because of their losses, these women would serve as inspiration for others in the years after the war—not just in Britain, throughout the world. They would contribute to women eventually winning the right to participate in the voting process.

In most countries, women did not serve in the armed forces in combat. However, Russia made an exception for them. Following the overthrow of the tsar, the Russian Provisional Government organized a unit called the Women’s Battalion of Death. This battalion fought both on enemy lines and home territory. It was not a group organized for show or propaganda. Apart from this group, though, women’s sacrifices during the war remained primarily on the domestic front.

Women did not stand alone in terms of benefiting from wartime activity. Highly trained laborers also benefited from wartime conditions, which enabled people with talent, ability, and determination to thrive. By the end of the war,
trained laborers had been able to achieve more rights for their unions and increase the amount of money they were paid. Even so, laborers and the state did not always get along. Sometimes the laborers would go on strike. Usually these strikes would be answered by temporary compromises on the part of the government, but the state would also usually follow those compromises with promises of much harsher treatment if the laborers did not return to work. This kind of negotiating tactic was not good for the morale of workers. While they managed to keep manufacturing levels high through the war’s end in 1918, after that many workers no longer felt compelled to swallow their pride or abandon their rights in the name of the war. Instead, they stood up for themselves in full force. As a result, several small governing regimes fell when they lost the support of the working classes.

**Suffering**

As in many other wars, nations often put individual, internal rights on hold in their quest to achieve victory. Certainly, nations focused on upholding morale and keeping their citizens in good spirits, in part so those same citizens would buy war bonds and keep funding the war. More than ever, though, governments worried about keeping their citizens loyal. Wartime, as a special, extenuating circumstance, offered governments additional ways of controlling their people as can be seen in one of the most liberal of the Western countries, Britain. Almost as soon as the war started, Britain’s government set up a new law called the Defense of the Realm Act, or DORA for short. It achieved three main goals for the British government. First, it helped the government dictate aspects of the British life. Second, it enabled the government to practice **press censorship** and make sure that the only stories being told in the news were the ones that reflected well on Britain. Third, property was needed for the war effort. Clearly, DORA afforded Britain’s government tremendous rights over its people.

Meanwhile, as in any wartime scenario, most nations created stronger penalties to protect themselves from foreign agents and saboteurs. Even the United States, an ocean away from the war zone, passed laws that limited civil liberties in exchange for the perception of greater security. People who spoke out against the war or the country’s political leaders faced the prospect of jail. On occasion, some countries, like Germany, set up double agents to observe potential protesters or enemies of the state, and report back.

To help maintain the morale of citizen populations, the national governments who waged World War I made wide use of propaganda. Propaganda had two main functions during the Great War. Governments used propaganda to keep people interested in the war effort, supportive of their nations, and committed to their cause. This kind of propaganda relied on images or figures that signified positive pride in one’s nation and urged people to act on their own pride in their nation. Nations also used propaganda to dehumanize their opponents, describing people and soldiers from the other side as cruel monsters out to destroy the world. This kind of negative propaganda had its roots in the way nationalism

3  **SELF-CHECK**

What happened to the women with yellow hands?

**press censorship**

government control over what can and cannot appear in the news and media

There’s Room For You

**ENLIST TODAY**

This World War I poster encourages citizens to enlist in the military cause.
had developed over the 50 years leading up to the twentieth century. At its most effective, propaganda channeled existing prejudice into an agenda for the state.

Occasionally this kind of propaganda and prejudicial practice had terrible consequences, including mass murder and even genocide. In 1915, as the Ottoman Empire battled Russia, a large group of Christians of Armenian heritage became the target of Turkish genocide. The Ottomans worried that the Armenians had close links to the Russians and might feel compelled to help them overthrow the Ottoman rulers. To preclude any such event, the Ottoman Empire ordered a mass attack on the Armenian population within its borders. Hundreds of thousands of Armenians were forcibly removed from their homes and sent to labor camps. Many others were killed outright, including many community leaders. Today, historians estimate that anywhere from 1 to 1.5 million Armenians died in the Armenian Massacre.

**The Last Year of the War**

For three long years of war, despite immense battles and unprecedented destruction, the stalemate continued on the Western Front. Neither side had broken through, yet millions of people had died. By 1918, both the Allies and the Central Powers had grown somewhat desperate. Thus, in March, Germany attempted another focused attack against the Allied lines in France. With this last advance, Germany hoped to finally emerge victorious, whatever the cost. Instead, Germany’s army found itself confronted by a weakened French army, but the French now had significant support in the form of British and American troops. The United States had joined the war nearly a year earlier, and by 1918 over 2 million American soldiers, affectionately known as “dough boys,” had joined the French and British in the trenches of France. The Americans were led by General John J. Pershing (1860–1948), often called “Black Jack.” One month after the Germans launched their assault, they struggled to fend off a cohesive Allied force under the command of a French field marshal named Ferdinand Foch (1851–1929). A desperate battle ensued.

For months the battle raged, with neither side able to exploit an advantage. By midsummer, however, Germany began to fall back. The unified Allied forces struck back against the German army and slowly, but firmly, began to push it back. In August, the German army received a heavy blow, incurring significant losses at Amiens when attacked by tanks manned by British soldiers, which finally provided the ability to break through the trench lines. The Germans were pushed back some seven miles in a single day of fighting, and more than 15,000 German soldiers surrendered to the advancing Allies. The day, August 8, became known as the Black Day of the German Army.

After the Black Day, the Central Powers’ defeat seemed imminent. The first country to surrender to the Allies, Bulgaria, did so on the last day of September 1918. Soon, Bulgaria’s former allies followed it in admitting defeat and submitting to the Allies. One month after Bulgaria admitted defeat, Turkey followed, signing a peace treaty on October 3. Just four days later, Austria-Hungary ceded victory to the Allies. Thus, only Germany remained at war against the Allies, until November 11, when Germany agreed to an armistice to end hostilities with the Allies. The Allies had won World War I. Yet in a sense, they, too, had lost, since they shared in the
huge numbers of killed or maimed individuals the war had caused. All told, more than 10 million people died during the course of World War I. Twice as many more suffered grave injuries. These numbers included both people officially fighting on the fronts and innocent bystanders.

While the war ended in November, negotiations concerning peace did not fully begin until January 1919, when representatives from around the world gathered in Paris to confer about how to shape global peace in the years to follow. Germany, forbidden from contributing to the negotiations, had no voice in what followed. Russia, now under control of the Bolsheviks, did not participate in the peace conference either. Approximately 32 other countries did participate, however, but only four really mattered. The representatives from each of these countries came to be called the Council of Four, and together they wielded tremendous power. U.S. president Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924), French prime minister Georges Clemenceau, British prime minister David Lloyd George, and Italian prime minister Vittorio Orlando (1860–1952) made up this council.

Wilson hoped to guide the council to adopt a peace plan that included his blueprint for a new world order in which such terrific war could never again occur. His plan became known as the Fourteen Points for the different policy changes Wilson advocated. These included the protection of each country’s access to the high seas, more free markets throughout the world, fewer weapons held by each country, and a shared, honest interchange of international negotiations. The
Fourteen Points also proposed autonomy for different ethnic groups currently subject to imperial authorities. The final point called for the establishment of an organization of countries, the League of Nations. Wilson envisioned the League of Nations as a kind of global mediator that could intercede in international disagreements and prevent another global conflict of the Great War’s magnitude. This point mattered much more to Wilson than it did to the leaders of Britain, France, or Italy. It meant potential trouble for interpreting peace on an international scale.

Indeed, the representatives of Britain and France had other ideas. France had suffered brutally in its struggle against the German army, and France’s Clemenceau wanted to ensure that would never happen again. He wanted to weaken Germany significantly, so that there would not even be a question of Germany rising up to threaten France. Clemenceau blamed Germany for the damages France had incurred as a result of the war and wanted Germany to pay massive reparations. He wanted Germany to finance the rebuilding of France. The other two members of the council had their own agendas, too. Britain’s Lloyd George sought assurances that Britain had a clear playing field internationally and could get back to balancing its empire, which had begun to shrink in the years since 1901. To do so, Britain required a continental balance of power. Italy’s Orlando hoped to reclaim even more land for Italy than ever before, perhaps to make up for the country’s inability to gain more colonies during the large push of imperialism during the late nineteenth century.

**Peace and the Treaty of Versailles**

Thus, the negotiators who assembled at the peace conference in Paris came together as a biased group of individuals, each with his own agenda. By the time it was complete, the Treaty of Versailles had become one of the most important negotiated accords in European history. It would strongly influence immediate events in the decades that followed, as well as the ways countries behaved toward each other for the next 80 years. In its importance and impact, the Treaty of Versailles is similar to an agreement of a hundred years earlier: the Congress of Vienna. Both Vienna and Versailles made large changes to global safety, and both had long-lasting effects.

The treaty addressed the question of land in three separate regions. The former Allies disagreed severely over the first region of land in question, the Rhineland, an area in western Germany near the border with France. Clemenceau worried about his nation sharing a national boundary with its former enemy and wanted to create a buffer state between the two countries in the Rhineland. To do so, the Rhineland would have to be cut away from Germany and made into its own state. Although France fought hard for this point, the United States strongly opposed it. As in his Fourteen Points, Wilson clung to national self-determination and argued that German citizens should be allowed to remain so. Eventually, the negotiators arrived at a middle ground. The Rhineland would become demilitarized for good. German citizens of the Rhineland would remain part of the German state, but France would not have to fear a military invasion from the east.

In the Franco-Prussian War nearly 50 years earlier, France had lost control of Alsace-Lorraine. With the Treaty of Versailles, France reclaimed the region.
Thus, in addition to losing the right to station troops in the Rhineland, Germany had lost another important strip of territory along the boundary it shared with France. France also penalized Germany through its treatment of the region of the Saar. The Saar was the a region full of a desirable natural resource, coal. Under the terms of the treaty, the League of Nations would take over the Saar for 15 years with France controlling the coal industry. This point became added to the treaty to compensate for the losses in coal France had incurred during the war. The treaty dictated that the people of the Saar would be able to participate in a plebiscite to remain in Germany or to join with France after the 15 years had passed.

Each element of the treaty eroded Germany’s empire a little bit more, as other points carved off tiny regions and reassigned them to the nations of Denmark and Belgium. The third region affected by the treaty, Poland, made Germany’s empire even smaller. With the Treaty of Versailles, Poland became a nation once again after having been absorbed into other countries’ empires for so long. To the east, a portion of what had formerly been Germany was given to Poland, including a section called the Polish Corridor. The Polish Corridor served two functions: first, it provided Poland with the ability to access the Baltic Sea, and second, it served as a boundary between Germany and East Prussia. Within the Polish Corridor, a city named Danzig also became separated from Germany as a component of the treaty. Danzig had an important harbor in the Baltic Sea. Even though it was in the Polish Corridor, the people who lived there were primarily German. The Allies felt they had no choice in assigning Danzig to Poland.

In addition to forcing Germany to give up so much territory, the Treaty of Versailles also humiliated the defeated country by setting up a series of military restrictions. Germany’s formerly large army, already depleted by deaths in the war, became limited to only 100,000 soldiers. Germany’s navy was drastically limited under terms of the treaty. It would be permitted only to protect Germany’s coast and only to act upon the high seas. Germany lost all its submarines. It lost any aerial defense or offense, and its soldiers were not permitted to use tanks.

Article 231 of the treaty placed all the blame for World War I on Germany and the rest of the Central Powers. It is often called the “war guilt clause.” Because all the blame fell on Germany, it thus was responsible for reparations. Germany was forced to pay substantial amounts of money to the Allies, particularly France. Despite these harsh and humiliating conditions, Germany’s representative agreed to and signed the peace agreement. Since Germany had not been permitted a representative at the negotiations for the treaty, the first time the Germans really saw it came on June 28, 1919, when German representatives received permission to travel to Paris and formally agree to the treaty. Fighting had ended six months earlier, but only with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles did World War I truly come to a close.

**Other Ramifications of the Treaty**

Swiftly, the Treaty of Versailles also acted to eviscerate the imperial states of the Allies’ opponents, by zeroing in on Germany and the Central Powers’ overseas
colonies in both Asia and Africa. The treaty dispersed the colonies through a new program called the **mandate system**. Under the system, colonies essentially still belonged to other countries as mandates, while the League of Nations would oversee the process of colonial administration. Ideally, the negotiators at the Treaty of Versailles viewed the mandate system as one that would eventually give autonomy to the native peoples living in the former colonies. But even under the League of Nations’ watch, powerful European countries simply took over the colonies assigned to them through the mandate system.

Prior to the war, Germany had had many colonies on the African continent. Yet under the mandate system, the German colonies were split up between France, Britain, and the Union of South Africa. Germany had also held island territories throughout the Pacific Ocean. Japan swept up Germany’s holdings in the north, while New Zealand and Australia took over the ones in the south. The mandate system also applied to other peace treaties, including the August 1920 Treaty of Sèvres. According to the terms of this treaty, Turkey lost the regions it had held around it in the Middle East: Palestine, Iraq, and Transjordan, which all transferred to Britain; and Lebanon and Syria, which transferred to France.

While France’s Clemenceau cared most about ensuring Germany would become too weak to be an effective enemy through the Treaty of Versailles, the United States’ Wilson remained even more interested in setting up the League of Nations. Wilson had originally proposed a system similar to the League of Nations in his Fourteen Points. In 1919, the idea became added to the Treaty of Versailles. The basic idea of the League of Nations was that the countries of the world would gather together in a powerful organization that could intervene in global conflicts. The organization would try to mediate the conflicts in a nonviolent way.

Wilson’s plans for the league became set down officially in the Covenant of the League of Nations. According to the covenant, all the countries that had joined the league would have envoys participate in a larger Assembly, Council, and Secretariat. The Secretariat would organize the small details for the league, the Council would be a small group of long-term envoys connected to the most authoritative nations and other elected envoys, and the Assembly would include envoys from every country in the league. The covenant dictated that all members of the League of Nations would work out of a neutral territory in Switzerland. A Permanent Court of International Justice, also known be as the PCIJ or the World Court, would legally uphold the league. The World Court would have its own bylaws, separate from the covenant, and would work out of an area separate from the League of Nations.

Wilson tried to ensure that the league stood as an important, vital component of all the peace treaties created in Paris at the peace conference in 1919. Somewhat ironically, then, the United States itself did not ever become a member of the league after other European countries had agreed to it. Despite Wilson’s fierce campaigning for it, the U.S. Senate disliked the Treaty of Versailles as a whole and did not ratify it. As a result, even though Wilson had signed the treaty as the representative of the United States, the United States never formally accepted the terms of the treaty—or, in turn, joined the League of Nations.
Italy’s Orlando attended the peace conference with the primary goal of gaining more land for Italy. In negotiations, Italy appeared to be targeting land that had previously belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Austrian delegation present at the conference became very unhappy about all the regions that its country lost to Italy, particularly a region called Trentino, which had many citizens of German descent, and Istria, which had the important harbor of Trieste. Italy also valued Trieste because most of the people living there were of Italian descent. According to Wilson’s ideas of national self-determination, the people in Istria should have been allowed to choose if they wanted to join Italy or another nation that had been created by the negotiators, Yugoslavia. Territorial disputes between Italy and Yugoslavia helped create tension in the decade that followed the completion of the treaty. Italy’s quest for even more territory elsewhere was thwarted when the rest of the negotiators denied it areas on the continents of Asia and Africa.

After World War I, maps of the European continent had to be redrawn to reflect large reassignments of land taken from the many fallen empires and given to the newly established states. The Hapsburg Empire fell. The great nations of Austria and Hungary, which had controlled so much territory, became reduced to two smaller, independent nations. Other parts of the former empire were divided into two new countries, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Germany gave up portions of its land to France, Denmark, and Belgium and to the formation of Poland, which also absorbed territory formerly attached to Hungary and Russia. The Ottoman Empire collapsed as well, separating into Palestine, Iraq, Transjordan, Turkey, and what later became Lebanon and Syria. Russia, too, saw western regions of its country become separated into Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Finland. The age of imperialism was over, and Europe would be forever altered.

**Extensions**

- Read the Treaty of Versailles. Was the Versailles treaty a fair treaty? How did the Versailles treaty generate a roadmap for the twentieth century? How did the Versailles treaty plant the seeds for conflict in the twentieth century?

**Summary**

As the war drew to an end, people became concerned about the world itself, disappointed in the events of the war and in humanity. People began to grow hopeless and disillusioned as they struggled to abandon their prewar belief systems. They seemed devastated by the overwhelming losses incurred during the war, which were due in large part to new means of waging war, like submarines and poison gas. Participation in the war effort led to more rights for women and laborers, while governments exerted much more control than they had in peacetime. In 1917, the United States joined in the war and sided with the Allies in the last great battle in 1918. The Central Powers were defeated. The armistice that ended the fighting went into effect on November 11, 1918. Discussions concerning the peace began in 1919 and resulted in the Treaty of Versailles, which placed blame for the war on Germany and strongly influenced the future.
Looking Ahead

In trying to make sure they had punished Germany hard enough in the Treaty of Versailles, the Allies ended up punishing Germany severely. Ultimately, their actions would lead to the one thing they had tried to prevent: a broken Germany regrouping, rising up, and reemerging as a more terrifying opponent than before. World War I was the most devastating war anyone had ever witnessed. Unfortunately, an even more brutal war would erupt in a mere two decades.

SELF-CHECK ANSWERS

1. Paul Valéry said World War I was like a natural disaster and even though it was over, people had only begun to acknowledge their fear of it.

2. About 10 million

3. Many of them were poisoned and either died or lost their fertility as a result.

4. Bulgaria

5. Clemenceau thought it should belong to France, to keep the French-German boundary neutral. Wilson thought it should remain part of Germany because of national self-determination.
Revolutions Begin in Russia

Essential Questions
• What were the immediate effects of World War I?
• What happened in Russia between 1905 and 1917?
• Who were the people and parties involved in the Russian Revolution?

Keywords
dictated peace
gold standard
legislate by decree
proletarian socialist
revolution
redemption dues
soviet
zemstvos
Set the Stage

In the four years of its duration, World War I had fulfilled its name and become truly a global battle. Countries from around the world had participated, their hopes rising and falling as each side attempted to achieve a victory. It was difficult for any country to focus on anything other than the war, so many domestic disputes and internal struggles had been put on hold. Yet in the middle of the war, Russia dropped out of the conflict, plagued by problems within its own borders. Russians did not have fundamental civil rights, like free speech, and resentment of their autocratic government had grown overwhelming. Russia’s internal discord had become so terrible that it could no longer engage in the massive war that so consumed the rest of Europe. By 1919, when peace began to settle over the rest of the continent, Russia’s troubles would be far from over.

Reverberations of World War I

World War I was the largest, most violent conflict the world had seen up to that point. The new manner of warfare left nearly an entire generation of the continent’s best and brightest buried in unmarked graves. After the war’s end in 1918, it seemed as though the Europeans did not know how to move forward and achieve peace again. World War I threatened to bring life as people had known it to a halt. Empires had toppled, and even the nations that had made it through the war on the winning side were shaken and scattered.

Through the new boundaries drawn in the Treaty of Versailles and internal rebellions in many of the defeated countries, several formerly powerful imperial states ended up losing much of the land they had claimed during the era of imperialism that preceded the war. While the Ottoman Empire had been in decline for years, up until the end of the Great War Germany had been a formidable, powerful imperial state. Austria-Hungary, while smaller than Germany, had been developing an extensive series of colonies until they, too, were lost in the Treaty of Versailles. Meanwhile, Russia had been a formidable empire prior to the Great War but dropped out of the war before any of other major powers because of domestic problems. It would take a significant amount of time to figure out what the world would look like without the empires that ruled for so long.

The first major change to these formerly imperial regions came through the Treaty of Versailles, which dictated the foundation of several brand-new nations. In place of the fallen imperial federations that had belonged to Austria-Hungary and Germany, the treaty dictated that much of the land the two imperial powers had absorbed would be reformed into new, smaller countries. While Germany lost some land to its enemy France, it was also forced to give up some areas to the newly formed Poland. Poland also absorbed some land that had belonged to the Hapsburg Empire. Austria became reduced to its own, smaller sovereign status, while several other nations formed, including Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. In the Baltic region, three smaller nations formed out of what had been Hapsburg
territory: Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia. Each of these new countries seemed too small on its own to pose a serious international threat. The Allies were using a policy of division so no one could be conquered. Allied representatives worked to establish more liberal, representative governing regimes in all of these regions.

Despite the intentions of those participating in the peace agreements, the establishment of a series of new, small nations did not fully solve the problems of a shaken Europe. Groups of people continued to rebel, sometimes violently. In what had so recently been known as Russia, another governing regime rose in the new Soviet Union. This regime, unlike the monarchy that had governed Russia so long, practiced an inclusive rule that involved all the citizens of its country.

**Literal and Metaphorical Costs**

In the meantime, as the maps of Europe were redrawn once more, the people who lived on the continent struggled to come to terms with the price they had paid to wage World War I. Due to various circumstances of the war, scholars today are not exactly sure how many people perished as a result of the conflict, both directly and indirectly. Many soldiers who lived through the war had been permanently disfigured. Many suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. Millions of people in Europe grieved for the friends they had lost or the men they had killed, and some continued to suffer from the effects of breathing in poison gas while participating in trench warfare. As many as 10 million soldiers died during the war, whether as a result of combat or disease, and more than twice as many—23 million in all—were severely injured, resulting in an approximate total of 33 million individuals killed or hurt in the war.

Of those 33 million, approximately 6 million came from Germany and nearly as many, 5.5 million, came from France. While on the surface France’s and Germany’s numbers appear nearly equal, the percentage of French deaths is higher. When the war began in 1914, the number of people living in Germany had been approximately 33 percent more than the number of people living in France. The numbers of dead today seem almost unimaginable. The high death count meant that nearly everyone in France knew someone who died in the war. The French, deeply moved by the deaths of so many of their fellow citizens, erected commemorative monuments in cities, towns, and villages.

Following the war, another even more devastating blow to the global population arrived in the form of a deadly strain of influenza that killed approximately 30 million people. That figure tripled the number of people who had died in World War I and practically equaled the total amount of people wounded and killed in the war. Nature and fate seemed equally cruel. In less than a decade, 40 million people had been lost.

In addition to the human losses, Europe’s infrastructure and landscape also lay in ruins following the war. Both France and Belgium, sites of so many battles on the Western Front, lost entire municipalities. The countries would be responsible for rebuilding much of their territory from the ground up, with fewer workers to take on jobs and little money to pay them with. In some cases, the ground itself was still treacherous. Not all the explosive devices used in the battles had gone off, and some lingered in safe-looking farmland. Going back to work thus...
required exceptional bravery. In the Flanders area of Belgium, some explosives still lie buried in pastures even today.

Bankrolling the war had required vast amounts of money, money that could not be raised within any single nation’s borders. The single country that had taken part in the war and emerged with no significant international debt was the United States. After the war, the United States was owed tremendous sums by several European countries, which did not sit well with the Europeans. Up until very recently, they had been accustomed to lending to other countries, not borrowing themselves. The extraordinary amount of war debt, and the financing of the war in U.S. dollars, helped lay the foundation of the modern global economy.

According to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the First World War cost as much as $338 billion. This figure cannot be quite exact, but it gives a fairly good idea of the kind of money it would take to place so many countries in financial jeopardy. Sadly for the Europeans, they had gone from having more money than ever before, as a result of the influx of business and capital that came from a combination of imperialism and the rewards of the Second Industrial Revolution, to becoming poorer than ever.

Of all the countries hit financially by the war, Germany suffered the most. Under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was forced to pay the other countries’ war debt, as well as its own. Germany’s diplomats had had little choice but to agree to the Treaty of Versailles, even though it disadvantaged Germany and its citizens to such a great extent. The general populace of Germany, however, blamed its bureaucracy for giving in.

Any bureaucracy would have had a difficult time balancing international peace agreements with popular feeling at home. Like some other crumbling empires, though, Germany had emerged from the war with a far different political administration than it had before the war—or even during it. This new political administration became known as the Weimar Republic, Germany’s first attempt at a truly democratic government. Unfortunately, the first months under the Weimar government became marked by unhappiness and dissatisfaction among German citizens. This dissatisfaction laid a foundation for discord between Germany and the Allied countries that had punished and humiliated it in the Treaty of Versailles. Although blame for the terms of the Treaty of Versailles could not be strictly laid on the Weimar government, Germany’s people blamed it nonetheless. Germans accused their leaders of succumbing to a “dictated peace.” The Weimar Republic’s failure arrived even more quickly than it otherwise might have, however, because fringe organizations throughout Germany, including radical political factions, pushed at its boundaries and pointed out its flaws.

Germans were not the only ones who found the Treaty of Versailles unjust. People in other countries agreed that the financial burden placed on Germany in an already shaken global financial scene had been too severe. The British financier John Maynard Keynes (1883–1946) stood out for his condemnation of the financial treatment of Germany. In addition to his training in finance, Keynes spoke from an expert position regarding the Treaty of Versailles because he had been present during the treaty negotiations in 1919. That same year, Keynes
would write *Economic Consequences of Peace* in which he claimed that the entire financial structure of the globe would soon collapse. He would be proven right in just over a decade’s time.

Ultimately, the Treaty of Versailles did not achieve peace for other reasons, as well. In part, this came from the United States choosing not to participate in Wilson’s hard-won League of Nations. An organization like the league could not exert its potential power to the fullest without the participation and support of the world’s largest economy. The United States stepped away from European politics in other ways, too. In addition, Russia had undergone tremendous political change and evolved into a new nation, the Soviet Union. Other countries in Europe worried about the new agenda of the Soviets and the practice of communism, and began to question the legitimacy of the reorganized nation. Two of the largest countries in the world, the United States and the Soviet Union, thus became removed from Europe in the years following World War I. The Treaty of Versailles, ultimately, did not do enough to maintain peace in Europe in the years following the war. Just 20 years later, the peace would be broken again.

**Groundwork for Revolutions in Russia (1905–1917)**

Among the many losses suffered in World War I was the collapse of the long-standing Russian monarchy, represented at its end by descendants of the Romanov Dynasty. The last ruling tsar and tsarina, Nicholas II and Alexandra, remained committed to autocracy. But while the previous tsar, Alexander III, had been able to rule autocratically up until the end of the 1800s, Nicholas II had a more difficult time making his subjects conform to his own absolute rule than his father had. By the twentieth century, Russian citizens began to agitate for more rights.

In comparison to other countries, Russian citizens enjoyed far fewer civil rights and freedoms. This lack of liberty in monarchical Russia resulted for a variety of factors. Russia did not start industrializing until the late nineteenth century, so it had a lot of catching up to do. First, Russia worked to bring its rail systems up to speed with the rest of the world. Second, the country started mining coal in greater and greater amounts. Because of the increased mining, Russia could also produce more goods necessary for industrial products, such as forging a type of cast iron and then forging steel. Both cast iron and steel would be necessary materials for a variety of industrial products.

When Russia did enter fully into the kinds of industrial practices employed by the other European nations, it did so primarily because of the efforts of one man, Sergei Witte (1849–1915). Witte advised the Russian government on matters of economy and used his financial connections to bolster industry throughout Russia. One of the most important things Witte did was bring Russia into financial parity with the rest of the world, which he achieved by transferring Russia’s currency to the **gold standard**. Doing so fostered international commerce, since other countries around the world felt that, by sharing the gold standard, Russia “spoke the same financial language” as they did. Russia began to appear more...
financially reliable in international financial circles. Because of that, outsiders invested in Russian business, which, in turn, fostered the growth of technology, business, and industrialization throughout Russia.

Witte also became interested in transportation. The creation at the turn of the century of the Trans-Siberian Railroad could be credited largely to him. Russians could travel all the way from Vladivostok, a harbor city on the eastern shores of Russia, to the major urban center of Moscow. This rail system crossed nearly the entire length of Russia, covering a distance of more than 4,970 miles (8,000 km). In terms of finance, industrialization, and transport, Russia had started to catch up to the rest of the world.

In other areas, however, Russia still lagged. Smaller countries in Europe had incorporated industrialization into much of their citizens’ daily lives, sometimes without a choice. People in those countries flocked in large numbers to their new cities. In contrast, Russia built few cities across its vast territory. Even though production had increased considerably within the country, the majority of its people lived on farms. In fact, by the time World War I began, about 82 percent of the people living in Russia still lived on farms rather than in cities. Their occupations and lifestyles stayed the same as they had been for centuries, and the Russian lower classes did not see the advances that citizens of other countries had enjoyed, and they did not seem to benefit from any of the agrarian innovations that had arisen as a result of the Industrial Revolution. Many farmers in Russia simply could not make enough money to support themselves. While aristocrats and the Romanovs lived in glorious high style, the peasants who tilled their fields had begun to starve.

The farmers became so poor, in fact, that they could not even afford to keep up with the form of rent they had typically been charged, known as redemption dues. Much like landlords charging tenants rent, the few rich people in Russia who actually owned the farms charged the peasants redemption dues, or loans, that required nearly half a century to pay off. The farmers got to live on and work the land that belonged to others, but to do so they had to pay steep prices to compensate for their stays there. The time period for the dues often lasted as long as or longer than a peasant’s lifetime. To make matters worse, farms had become increasingly crowded, as more and more farmers started living on the same plots of land. The few who tried to leave the farms did not have many options and usually ended up traveling to the frontier region of Siberia. Even with some farmers traveling to Siberia, though, Russia’s farmland remained occupied by large numbers of increasingly unhappy citizens. With so many people living in such poor conditions for such a long time, it seemed that unrest was waiting to happen.

Indeed, unrest had begun to build among Russian citizens from a variety of walks of life, not just the poor peasant class who made up the majority of the country’s population. As the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, Nicholas II and his bureaucrats struggled to maintain control over the country. Laws became stricter and their implementation more unforgiving, as Nicholas II worked to maintain the power his father had grasped more easily. In response to these harsher conditions, however, the Russian citizens began to grow restless and
even more unhappy, rather than buckling down and giving in to the administration. Slowly, organizations of rebellious individuals formed.

The first of these organizations formed in 1898, just six years after Nicholas II took the throne, and embraced Marxism. The Russian Marxists who formed this organization, called the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP), based their ideas on those of George Plekhanov (1857–1918), an important founding figure of the Marxist Party in Russia. By forming the RSDLP, these rebels had broken the law. What compelled them to form their new party in spite of the danger seemed to be the desire to gain more of a voice for the masses in the government. To do so, the RSDLP knew it would eventually have to take drastic action. That kind of action could only be taken with a serious body of people to engage in an uprising. The Social Democrats meant to gather such a group by uniting Russian laborers. Within five years, however, this group had itself grown divided into opposing sides, based upon varying degrees of radicalism. The majority faction followed the ideas of a rising political star, Vladimir Lenin, and had become much more invested in a violent uprising. They took the name Bolsheviks, from a Russian word meaning “majority.” The remaining members of the RSDLP who advocated a less radical approach took on the name of the Mensheviks, or “minority” faction.

In the meantime, another socialist organization, the Socialist Revolutionary Party, formed about three years after the RSDLP had formed. In addition to their socialist practices, the two parties had many similarities. Both organizations had grown out of previous political parties. The Socialist Revolutionaries, made up primarily of extremist individuals from the Russian countryside, had their roots in another organization called the Populists. The Populists originally had traveled widely to try to stir up the lower classes so that a mass citizen uprising could be generated. While the Populists had been unsuccessful, the Social Revolutionaries continued to try to implement their ideas. Like their predecessors, the Social Revolutionaries wanted to unite the people to effect change. Their socialist vision included people from all walks of life in Russia working side by side in a more equal government and society.

Two years later, another group formed with a far less socialist ideology. The people involved in this group, called the Union of Liberation, shared a common background of participating in the **zemstvos**, which had given them experience in governing at the small, local level. This group also advocated a more democratic approach, in which citizens of Russia would have a stronger voice in their own government. Less radical than the other groups, the Liberation Party wanted to set up a constitutional monarchy in Russia, somewhat preserving the existing government. The quick formation of so many new political groups, however extremist they seemed, could only mean one thing: change would be coming, and soon.

**First Revolution (1905)**

During the early 1900s, Russian instability worsened because of the events of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). During this war, the small island nation of Japan, still relatively new to imperialism, humiliated Russia. In the peace agreements made at the end of the war, a defeated Russia was forced to acknowledge Japanese control of territory Russia had been targeting in the south of Manchuria.
and in Korea. People already unhappy with the state of affairs in Russia became even more irate, and the political regime led by Nicholas II found itself further weakened. Almost immediately after the war, the first of several uprisings occurred: the Revolution of 1905.

On January 22, 1905, a day that soon became known as “Bloody Sunday,” a group of Russian people gathered at the tsar’s Winter Palace in St. Petersburg for a nonviolent protest. A religious man from the Russian Orthodox Church, Father George Gapon, organized the protest as a way for people to make their voices heard to the government, to request change in a calm and diplomatic way. Sadly for Gapon and his fellows, the protest quickly turned violent, as the government ordered the military to fire on the people protesting in St. Petersburg. According to the tsarist government, fewer than 100 protesters were killed, but antigovernment radicals claimed that 4,000 had been gunned down. Today, estimates suggest the actual number was close to 1,000 dead and wounded, including those trampled in the ensuing panic. The incident outraged people throughout the rest of Russia, and other protests quickly followed across the country. Work stoppages soon followed the protests, as Russians tried to give voice to their horror and shock over the events of Bloody Sunday. Citizens from all walks of life in Russia protested the government’s actions on Bloody Sunday, but the military remained loyal to the government, at least for the time being. Exceptions even to this rule occurred, of course. The most notable came from an uprising on one of Russia’s important ships, the Potemkin. This uprising, which took place while the Potemkin was posted to the Black Sea, remained an isolated incident at the time.

Following the nationwide protests, the Russian government took the relatively radical step of abolishing all remaining redemption dues for the lower class. By doing so, the state seemed to be trying to avert an even bigger uprising by the farmers, and it was not the only step the state took. In October 1905, Nicholas II published the October Manifesto, which offered three important reforms to Russian citizens. One, as a foundation, the manifesto pledged that the government would create a constitution. Two, within that constitution would be a promised, government-sanctioned set of civil liberties. Three, the government would uphold that constitution and those liberties by setting up a legislative body, with members voted in by the public, called the Duma. Initially, the reforms set forth in the October Manifesto seemed to pacify the Russian citizens. The tsar and his fellow bureaucrats started to relax into the idea that perhaps the revolution had fully ended in 1906. Without waiting any longer, Nicholas II moved quickly to amend some of the points he had made in the October Manifesto so that, as tsar, he could still employ as much power and authority as possible.

Nicholas II enforced these amendments when creating the new constitution, known as the Fundamental Laws. He manipulated the Fundamental Laws in such a way as to place many limitations on the authority of the Duma. First, the Duma had no authority in two very important areas: the Russian economy and Russia’s engagement in international affairs. Those two areas remained the
province of the tsar as head of the government. Second, the Duma could be dissolved at any time the tsar wished it. Third, if the Duma was dissolved or otherwise unable to convene, then the tsar would have the ability to legislate by decree, or create new laws without any due process involving the people’s representatives. Fourth, the important members of the tsar’s cabinet could not be controlled by the Duma, leaving many other regions or elements of the government outside the Duma’s province. Finally, the Duma lost its position as the sole legislative body in the Russian government. Instead, it became the lower house and had to bow to the authority of a new legislative body called the Council of State. The members serving in the Council of State would be much more moderate than those elected to serve in the Duma. The tsar must have hoped that series of limitations would help him keep the Duma subservient to his own government.

As part of the October Manifesto, participating in groups like the Social Democratic Labor Party, the Union of Liberation, and the Socialist Revolutionary Party became legal in Russia. People in these groups did not have to hide their actions or beliefs for fears of reprisal, and they could start openly advocating for change. Soon, the current parties found themselves joined by two additional parties. These newer parties of 1905 represented less conservative individuals interested in promoting the rights of people in business and other professions. The first new group tied its identity directly to the October Manifesto. While they became known more popularly as Octobrists, their proper party name emphasized the day the manifesto went into effect, since they formally titled themselves the Union of October 17. Of all the political parties in play in Russia during this time, the Octobrists seemed most willing to work with the existing status of the Russian government, as adapted by Nicholas II in the manifesto. They approved of the constitution, the Duma, and the new definition of their civil liberties.

The other new group to form during this time, officially called the Constitutional Democrats and known as the Cadets, diverged from the Octobrists in remaining unsatisfied with the state of governmental change, and continued to advocate for more rights. Even though Nicholas II had established a constitution to work in tandem with his own government, members of the Cadets wanted to see Russia become a true constitutional monarchy. They looked to Britain’s government as a strong, working example of the kind of regime they would like to have in their own country. In Britain, important officials like the prime minister had to answer to the Parliament, not the king. The Cadets wanted to see the same thing in Russia and have their important officials answer to the Duma.

**Second Revolution (March 1917)**
The outbreak of World War I provided an international distraction for those concerned about Russia’s domestic problems. When Germany attacked France, Russia entered the war on the Allies’ side due to its participation in the Triple Entente alliance with France and Britain. At first, Russia seemed able to marshal its military and meet Germany on fairly equal terms. Soon, though, Germany’s
military began overpowering Russia's. Just a few months into the war, in the fall of 1914, Russia lost two important battles, the battles of Tannenberg and of the Masurian Lakes, and its army would continue to suffer defeats when it engaged with Germany.

In the past, Russia's capacity to heavily stock its military with pure manpower had made it a formidable force. Yet in World War I, the more technologically savvy countries had a large advantage. Russia simply could not keep up. The country did not have enough resources in manufacturing to support participation in a conflict of such magnitude. The fact that its people were scattered throughout the countryside only made matters worse.

A little over a year into the war, Nicholas II decided it would be best if the military followed his orders directly. He stepped back from governing Russia more generally to concentrate on military strategy. So Tsarina Alexandra, his wife, took over the government of Russia in his absence. This turn of events ultimately proved devastating for the Romanovs. During Nicholas II's absence from court, Alexandra turned more and more to the counsel of Grigori Rasputin (1872–1916), a self-styled religious mystic known to some as the “Mad Monk,” although he never officially worked for the Russian Orthodox Church. Alexandra believed Rasputin possessed healing abilities that could cure her son and the heir to the Russian throne, Alexei, who suffered from hemophilia, a dangerous blood condition.

Having captured the tsarina's devotion, Rasputin took an active role in government decision making, leading Alexandra down a number of unfortunate paths. Russian citizens disliked the direction the government had taken under Alexandra's—really, Rasputin's—direction, and began to express their dislike and disrespect for the entire royal family. In December 1916, Rasputin lost his life. The exact nature of his death remains a mystery, but it is clear that he was killed by a small faction of royalists, who remained loyal to the tsar and hoped that by eliminating Rasputin they could return Russia's government to a more popular course. By then, however, it was too late. The royal family's grip on the throne had begun to slip and ultimately could not be restored.

The remaining government became shakier and shakier in the months following Rasputin's death. Russian citizens launched a massive protest movement in St. Petersburg, recently renamed Petrograd, in early 1917. The city saw repeated protests and work stoppages as citizens tried to make their feelings known. In addition to their problems with the tsarist government, the Russian people were fed up with the ongoing war. Because of the war, citizens did not have enough to eat, and they had to make other sacrifices for the war effort. Their money had become almost worthless since inflation had risen so high.

The unrest continued. To try to put down some of the potential uprising, Nicholas II exercised his right as described in the October Manifesto to dissolve the Duma and legislate by decree. Yet the people's representatives in the Duma did not appreciate the tsar exercising his power in such a way. So even though they had been released from their assembly, the majority of legislators stayed in the capital. In direct disobedience of the tsar's orders, the Duma convened under its own authority on March 12, 1917. In a private session, it held its
own rapid electoral process and selected a small subgroup to stand for it in the larger government.

Meanwhile, citizens continued to protest in Petrograd, and Nicholas II, as he had before, commanded his forces to get in the city and stop the protestors. It seemed as though Bloody Sunday might be repeated. But in a direct mutiny against the tsar, the armed forces refused to follow his orders. Once in the city, the soldiers sided with the protesters, not against them. No one remained to protect the royal family, Nicholas II ran out of options. Three days after the Duma’s private meeting, Nicholas II chose to abdicate from his throne on March 15, 1917, according to the Gregorian calendar (according to the calendar then used in Russia, the date was March 2). His family had led Russia for more than three centuries, but its end came swiftly. The series of events that led to the tsar’s abdication came to be known in the West as the March Revolution. Because of their use at the time of the Julian calendar, Russians often call it the February Revolution.

Whether people referred to the revolution as taking place in March or February, though, the fact remained that Russia had lost its tsarist regime. A new regime would have to emerge to govern Russia, and that regime grew out of the small group of Duma members who had been elected in the private meeting on March 12. This smaller group transformed into the Provisional Government of Russia. Nearly all the participants in the Provisional Government, including its head, George Lvov (1861–1925), came from more radical parties. A single individual from the Socialist
Revolutionary Party, Alexander Kerensky (1881–1970), represented socialist thoughts and interests. The Provisional Government told people that soon they would have a larger voice in the way they became governed. The new government envisioned an eventual regime that partook of the best components of democracy and republicanism, with its foundation in a firm constitution. It would take several steps to reach that status, however, including voting on members of a new electoral council who would create such a document.

The socialist parties took action around the new Provisional Government by marshaling citizens, especially members of the lower classes, into socialist-friendly organizations. Socialists in Petrograd encouraged the Russian people to find representation in a group called the Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies that stood behind the Provisional Government and its plan to create a new constitution. This primary soviet in Petrograd set an example to Russia’s other urban centers, as well as to laborers in the country, and more and more soviets took shape.

One month into the creation of the Provisional Government, the Bolsheviks’ leader Lenin arrived in Petrograd. Lenin had created a system of ideas called the April Theses and had become determined to implement them throughout Russia. First, he taught the April Theses to the other members of the Bolshevik Party, in the hopes that the other Bolsheviks would help spread his new political gospel: the idea of proletarian socialist revolution, or an uprising by lower class people that would place all the citizens of Russia on equal footing.

The Bolshevik leader and leading figure of the Russian Revolution, Vladimir Lenin, delivers a speech in Red Square in 1918.
The Bolsheviks who called for this revolution spread the message across Russia. Together, under Lenin’s leadership, they founded their revolution on a select group of significant tenets. First and foremost, they wanted an end to the war, which they viewed as a imperialistic struggle in which the poor died for the interests of the wealthy. Second, they wanted to drastically alter the farm rent and ownership system set up throughout Russia. The Bolsheviks believed that the people who should own farmland were the farmers, not the wealthy aristocrats who never worked. Give the farmlands back to the people, they urged. As members of soviets in urban areas, they saw firsthand the malnourishment that had occurred due to the combination of aristocratic land ownership and wartime sacrifice. The Bolsheviks wanted to take nourishment from the farms and bring it to their urban centers. To sum up all these requests, they used the simple slogan of “Peace, Land, and Bread.” The Bolsheviks demanded these three things repeatedly.

In response, the Provisional Government tried to find a compromise. The liberal members of the regime realized that the farmers living on the aristocrats’ farms truly did need property of their own. However, while the Bolsheviks wanted to simply rearrange the properties of ownership on those regions, Kerensky, recently chosen as prime minister, and the Provisional Government—which included some aristocrats in its ranks—did not want to steal from some Russians to give to other Russians. Kerensky thought rearranging ownership of properties would encourage farmers to abandon the military and provoke more discord. Because of that, the Provisional Government could not follow the Bolsheviks’ request for land or bread. The land and bread the Bolsheviks wanted to appropriate belonged to other people, and the Provisional Government refused to take it from them for redistribution.

What’s more, unlike the Bolsheviks, the Provisional Government did not want to end Russia’s involvement in World War I if it meant defeat. Kerensky had great national pride and wanted to protect Russia’s international reputation by staying in the war, rather than leaving it on Germany’s terms. Protecting this national pride became less a question of aiding the other Allies and more a question of refusing to surrender. Under the Provisional Government’s direction, Russia’s troops made a final effort to take back terrain in Galicia against Austrian soldiers. The Russians lasted only a little while in Galicia, though, before the Austrians defeated them, which was doubly humiliating for a government whose own people wanted it to get out of the war.

Failure in Galicia might have led to a rebellion at home anyway, but the Provisional Government didn’t have the chance to find out. In Petrograd protestors began signaling their disapproval of the government, especially as led by Prime Minister Kerensky, and its commitment to continuing the war even more aggressively. This popular uprising became known as the July Days, and those participating in it would find their fury against the government increase when they learned about the Russian defeat in Galicia. The July Days showed just how little the people of Russia supported the new Provisional Government.

Following the July Days, the Bolsheviks’ leader Lenin worried that the rebels had pulled the trigger too soon and without an organized plan of follow-through. Without such a plan, any short-term gains made through the uprising would be difficult to convert to long-term advantages. Somewhat surprisingly, most of the
people in the Bolshevik Party backed up the rebels participating in the uprising. By doing so, they went against Lenin. In spite of that, Lenin would be blamed for the July Days rebellion as much as anyone else. He and the Petrograd Soviet had been right in that the July Days rebellion could not be sustained—the Provisional Government did manage to put the rebellion down. Then, Lenin found himself targeted by the state and had to depart rapidly from Russia to Finland.

Weathering the July Days affected the Bolsheviks in a complex way. They had temporarily disagreed with and then found themselves without their leader Lenin. When life settled down after the rebellion, the Bolsheviks were targeted by the government. The relationship between the Provisional Government and the Bolshevik Party became quite strained, as the former did not feel as though it could trust the latter. However, outside the current government and among the people of Petrograd—and Russia in a larger sense—the Bolsheviks benefited greatly. Common people looked at the Bolshevik Party with new respect after discovering the Bolsheviks’ support of the rebellion. More fanatical groups of citizens, particularly members of the armed forces and laborers, admired the Bolsheviks and wanted to stand behind them. Soon, the Bolshevik Party’s ranks began to rapidly grow.

That September, another rebellion against the Provisional Government occurred. This time, it came from the military. The man in charge of the country’s armed forces, General Lavr Kornilov (1870–1918), led this uprising, often called the Kornilov affair. Kornilov tried to overthrow the current government and make Russia into a militarized state. He fancied setting himself up as the supreme ruler of Russia. Had he succeeded, events in Russia might have turned out quite differently. Kerensky and the Provisional Government, caught between two nearly impossible positions, reached out to the Bolshevik Party for assistance against the military coup. Through the aid of the Bolshevik Party and the Petrograd Soviet, Kornilov failed in gaining the government and overthrowing the current regime. While the Provisional Government still stood, Kerensky’s grasp on power had grown weaker. Without the support of the Bolsheviks, the current regime would have crumbled.

**Third Revolution (November 1917)**

The final uprising of this period would be known in the West as the November Revolution and would come from the very quarter the Provisional Government had so recently reached out to, the Bolsheviks. Lenin and the Bolsheviks started plotting their move against the Provisional Government in earnest. Lenin’s plan would work as follows: the secret military branch of the Petrograd Soviet, known as the Red Guard, would spring into action on a specific date. The Red Guard would move throughout Petrograd and take over important areas to limit the movement of the Provisional Government. Then the Red Guard would move to swiftly occupy all major government buildings, including the Winter Palace, the seat of the Provisional Government. The Petrograd Soviet would assume control. The Bolsheviks put this plan into action on November 7, 1917, and it worked as Lenin had envisioned. No lives were lost, and only a few people were injured. Again because of the calendar they used at the time, for the Russians the revolution occurred in October and is often called Red October.
The day following the revolution, a new government headed by Lenin was in place. In opposition to the monarchy and the previous provisional regime, Lenin’s government took the title of the Council of People’s Commissars. Lenin would serve as head of state, although his official title marked him as the chairperson of the council. Two men who would figure prominently in Russian politics in the years to come also held places on the council: Leon Trotsky (1879–1940) and Joseph Stalin (1879–1953). The council turned its attention to spreading its government and voice throughout the rest of Russia, using Petrograd as a base. It took little time for the Bolshevik influence to be felt throughout Russia. One exception came in Moscow, where the citizens disagreed violently with the new regime. In less than a week, however, Moscow also belonged to the Bolsheviks. Under Lenin’s direction, the Bolshevik regime and the council in particular would find that revolting had been the simple part. Governing Russia, which two other regimes had so recently failed in doing, would be much more difficult.

**Extensions**

- Read an eyewitness account of the Bolsheviks’ seizure of power in John Reed’s *Ten Days That Shook the World* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1919, pp. 123–129). How did John Reed describe Lenin? What was his description of the failings of the Provisional Government? Of all the groups vying for power in Russia, why do the Bolsheviks get the victory according to Reed?

**Summary**

People around Europe reeled from World War I as new smaller nations were created and the shape of the world changed drastically. The war cost a tremendous amount in money and lives, and the peace agreements at its end actually increased the chances of future conflict. Meanwhile, Russia had already gone through a significant revolution before World War I began. In that first revolution, the tsar agreed to grant the Russian people more rights, but they remained dissatisfied. Dissenters created political parties to advocate for citizens’ rights. World War I made life in Russia even harder. The tsar’s power crumbled and he abdicated, resulting in a new regime called the Provisional Government. This government withstood two more revolutions before giving way to the Bolshevik Party. At the end of 1917, Lenin and the Bolsheviks ruled Russia.

**Looking Ahead**

As Russia scrambled to deal with its own series of revolutions, it had fallen out of the international conflict known as World War I. When Lenin and the Bolsheviks rose to power, they would take that opportunity to extricate Russia from the conflict, even though it would mean losing a tremendous amount of territory and citizens to the Central Powers, at least for the time being. When the war ended, Russia would not even attend the peace negotiations, as it was caught up in its own domestic troubles. Russia had gotten through three revolutions. Up next lay a civil war.
1. More people died of influenza, 30 million in all. In World War I, by comparison, 10 million people died and 23 million more sustained injuries.

2. She was German, not Russian, and she trusted too much in Rasputin.

3. The slogan, “Peace, Land, and Bread,” particularly appealed to lower and middle class Russian citizens. Farmers in particular wanted to own their own land; almost no one had enough food; and the longer the war went on, the more citizens wanted their country out of the conflict.
Lenin and the Russian Revolution

Essential Questions
- What events occurred during Lenin’s rise to power?
- What happened following the Bolsheviks’ November Revolution?
- What was the outcome of the Russian Civil War?

Keywords
- Communists
- Marxism
- telescoping
- vanguard party
- weakest link in the chain
- world revolution
**Set the Stage**

In Russia, the tumultuous events of World War I would be eclipsed by a series of revolutions as the long-standing Romanov Dynasty gave way to a new regime: the Provisional Government. Yet the Provisional Government did not satisfy Russian citizens, many of whom wanted to get out of World War I, or grant them all the rights to which they believed they were entitled. While Russian soldiers continued to fight in the international conflict, at home a new faction, the Bolsheviks, plotted yet another revolution, offering Russian citizens a peace the Provisional Government seemed unable to provide. The Bolsheviks’ eventual rise to power would pull Russia out of the war completely but also, to the people’s dismay, plunge it into civil war.

**The Rise of Lenin and the Bolsheviks**

While in the years leading up to World War I Russia’s fate had been steered by one man, Tsar Nicholas II, as the war ended another man would emerge to lead Russia into the postwar era: Vladimir Lenin. The tsar came to his position the old-fashioned way, through inheritance. Lenin’s road to power would be anything but traditional. Lenin’s life began in 1870, in a rural part of Russia called Simbirsk. Simbirsk encompassed a small village near Moscow, nestled on the banks of the Volga. Lenin, whose real name was Vladimir Ilyich Ulianov, would grow up far away from the capital city of St. Petersburg (rebranded Petrograd at the beginning of World War I) where he would forge his fate.

At an early age, it seemed as though Lenin’s future held many possibilities. Perhaps Lenin might have ended up like his father, who had risen from poverty and held an important leadership role in the education of young children in the area, as director of public schools. Or maybe Lenin could have ended up in trouble like his sibling Alexander. When Lenin was 17 years old, his brother was accused of plotting to murder Tsar Alexander III. Because of his participation in the plot, Alexander met his death in 1887 as a state-mandated punishment.

Alexander’s death must have affected his brother severely, given the actions Lenin took in the years following the loss. Lenin did, at first, attempt to continue in his father’s path by furthering his own education, taking classes at the University of Kazan. However, Lenin never graduated from Kazan. Early in his college career, he revealed his true passion by becoming involved in campus protests. As a result Lenin was expelled from college, but he remained a motivated and disciplined scholar. He decided to pursue a career as a lawyer and began teaching himself from law books. By the 1890s, just a few short
years after his brother’s death and his own failed education, Lenin earned certification to practice as a lawyer in Russia.

During the 1890s, Lenin traveled to St. Petersburg and began learning more about Marxism, a political philosophy based on the ideas of Karl Marx. Lenin’s growing Marxist beliefs led him to participate in illegal events and protests, although not to the extent that his brother had. Nevertheless, the authorities soon caught Lenin and sent him to a Russian prison. After a short time in prison, Lenin received a sentence of exile. He had no choice but to leave St. Petersburg for Siberia.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Lenin managed to improve his situation slightly by escaping from Siberia to Switzerland. He planned on eventually returning to Russia, but until that day arrived, Lenin stayed busy promulgating his Marxist ideas and reaching out to the Russian community in Switzerland. Lenin achieved this by printing a regular news journal called Iskra, which translates from Russian as “Spark.” Other European individuals risked a great deal by periodically breaking the law and sneaking issues of the Iskra back into Russia. Even in exile, Lenin’s voice continued to be heard.

In fact, even though he had been exiled, Lenin soon made a connection with a Russian political party, the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP). Parties like the RSDLP had to be clandestine and careful, which partially explains why Russian party members traveled to London for a special gathering. Lenin, then in Switzerland, traveled to London to take part in the meeting. During the meeting, the party found itself dividing into two separate factions based on how radical their ideals were. Lenin headed up the more radical side, which grew into a new group called the Bolsheviks. Opposing them was the smaller group of Mensheviks, who advocated less radical change.

Two other issues split the party into Menshevik and Bolshevik factions. First, the Mensheviks wanted to let more individuals join up with their cause. In contrast, the Bolsheviks wanted to keep the party numbers small. Ironically, even though Marxist policies ultimately rested on large-scale social change, the Bolsheviks wanted to keep the party as a sort of exclusive home, where they could operate a command center and exercise a larger degree of control. Second, the Mensheviks wanted to make a slow and steady progress toward eventual rebellion, based on an increasing foundation of business and financial support. As Russia began catching up with the West in terms of transportation and communication, the Mensheviks thought its people would support a large-scale revolt. That revolt could then take place in a logical and thorough manner. Again, in contrast, the Bolsheviks took the opposite approach. They wanted to instigate a Russian uprising right away.

More than a decade after that London gathering, Lenin returned to his mother country in 1917, in the middle of World War I as popular revolution wracked Russia. Lenin returned to a Russia led by the Provisional Government, a regime far more permissive of the Bolsheviks’ practices than the previous tsarist regime had been. In April 1917, Lenin wrote and published the April Theses that laid out his ideas about socialism and Marxism. His piece made it easier for Russians to understand Marxist ideas while simultaneously urging Russian citizens that another time for revolution had come.
As expressed in the April Theses, Lenin made many important contributions to Marxist practices in Russia, and five stood out as especially important. First, Lenin expanded on what Karl Marx had argued about capitalism. Lenin urged his readers to realize that capitalism did not act alone to hold back society, but had tremendous ties to the practice of imperialism. Imperialism, Lenin contended, had made capitalism even more dangerous. Both Marx and Lenin agreed that capitalism acted to give a minority of people the majority of control. For Lenin, this meant that if the Russian people did not act upon their revolutionary desires soon, they would not be able to at all. By integrating capitalism and imperialism and condemning them both, Lenin sharply influenced the ways Russian Marxists understood Bolshevik political beliefs.

Second, Lenin shaped Russian Marxism by changing the focus on where the first great revolution, in a series of worldwide revolutions predicted by Marx, would take place. Marxists aimed at changing the entire world, not just individual countries. Previously, Marxists had believed that the first people to truly, successfully revolt would be the ones living in the countries that had taken their capitalistic practices too far, and who had become the most industrialized. Thus, many Marxists expected such a revolution to take place in a country like Britain, where it did not, or Germany, where indeed, as World War I ended, a revolution did arise. Lenin proposed a radically different idea called the “weakest link in the chain.” According to Lenin’s idea, all the countries around the globe that practiced capitalism had become connected by capitalism itself, forming a “chain” of interlocked, interdependent units or “links.” Lenin surmised that the Marxists could trigger a global uprising by pulling on or breaking some of the “weakest” elements of the chain, thereby affecting the other, stronger links. For Lenin, this made an even greater argument for starting an uprising in Russia, as a weak or underdeveloped link, and then expanding it internationally.

Third, Lenin clung to his earlier beliefs that had separated him from the Mensheviks back in 1903. He suggested the idea of a vanguard party, or a political subgroup that could act as the front line for a larger rebellious cause. Because of the way Russia’s new Provisional Government had set itself up, Lenin believed that a proper revolution could not take place in the country without employing a vanguard party made up of serious and experienced political activists.

Fourth, Lenin went against the Mensheviks yet again by advocating for an immediate uprising. The Mensheviks did not stand alone in their beliefs of exercising moderation and restraint in building up to revolution; other members of socialist parties felt similarly. These more moderate revolutionaries worried that their uprising would be unsuccessful if they attempted it before Russia had fully caught up to the twentieth century in terms of business and industry. For Lenin, in contrast, no time like the present existed for revolution. To set it in motion, Lenin proposed the process of telescoping. His party’s socialist revolution would piggyback on the one that had just taken place.

Fifth and finally, Lenin employed some new simple yet effective revolutionary tactics. Rather than adopting a complicated scheme to target people from different social groups and classes, or getting encumbered by complex lists of citizens’ desired reforms, Lenin had other ideas. He advocated creating plain, straightforward
slogans that large groups of people could pick up, such as chants like “All power to the Soviets!” and “Peace, Bread, and Land!” These short, powerful mantras could be easily and rapidly expressed by large groups of people marching in uprisings. Overall, these tactics showed Lenin to be a savvy marketer who understood his audience. As events shortly revealed, he would be able to implement them with great success.

**The November Revolution and the End of World War I**

Lenin had prepared his fellow Bolshevik Party members for revolution well. Employing the concept of telescoping his revolution into the larger one of March 1917, Lenin gave the go-ahead to his party to strike in November of that same year. It worked. If anything, the rebellion’s success seemed almost too easy. The Bolshevik Party had long been aligned with the small soviets or councils throughout both Petrograd and various parts of Russia. That November, the Russian military elected to abandon the Provisional Government in favor of the Bolsheviks and the soviets. This left the current regime without popular or military backing, and the Bolsheviks had barely any problems forcing it out. At every step, the Bolsheviks succeeded, targeting the most strategic areas of the government for the first night of the rebellion and conquering them with no problems.

Shortly after the rebellion, an important Congress of Soviets occurred, where the members of the councils met and held elections for new members. This closeness of events did not occur by accident; Lenin had specifically ordered his people to move in early November so that, after the revolution, they could quickly become legitimized through the soviets. Indeed, the soviets followed that plan exactly. Through the Congress of Soviets, the Bolsheviks created a new government legislative body called the Council of People’s Commissars. To no one’s surprise, Lenin was elected as the chair of the new council. The Bolsheviks also took this time to expand the success of their rebellion throughout Russia, while simultaneously achieving two goals that had been important to party members. First, the Bolsheviks made sure that people of the lower classes, like farmers, had been able to take the farms they worked on away from their former owners, the aristocrats. The Bolsheviks saw this as restoring land to the people. Second, the Bolsheviks worked to ensure that all the manufacturing plants in Russia became reorganized and led by the laborers, rather than capitalist owners. The Bolsheviks saw this, too, as a necessary means of restoring the masses’ power and rights.

Just a few months later, the Bolshevik party took even more drastic action. The Russians had recently held elections to send representatives to fill spots on the Constituent Assembly, another important legislative body. Yet, despite the recent and successful Bolshevik revolution, members of the Bolshevik Party had not received as many seats as another party called the Socialist Revolutionary Party, which threatened to pose some serious problems for the Bolsheviks. Their response, under Lenin’s direction, came in the form of eliminating the Constituent Assembly altogether. The other parties resisted this move strongly, as did many citizens. As the Russian Civil War began to unfold as a reaction to Lenin’s move to ignore the
will of the people, Lenin and the Bolsheviks re-formed into a new group known more formally as the **Communist** Party. The Bolsheviks would try to take supreme and absolute control of Russia.

Understanding how the Bolsheviks reacted to the Constituent Assembly’s new makeup and the civil war that resulted, though, requires an understanding of the November Revolution. This uprising took place at the beginning of November 1917, and the Provisional Government was ousted quickly and with little bloodshed. Lenin stepped in to create a regime focused on achieving many significant changes in Russian life. The first took place on an international scale. Unlike the Provisional Government, which kept Russia fighting in World War I even though many Russian citizens wanted their country out of the conflict, the Bolsheviks agreed with their fellow citizens that the war should end. Lenin’s regime agreed to a rapid settlement to the conflict, and began planning ways to best extricate Russia from the war.

The other changes occurred closer to home. Prior to the revolutions, Russia had been a society composed of few aristocrats and many peasant farmers; the majority had worked for the pleasure and luxury of the few. The Bolsheviks wanted to change all that. Thus, the Bolsheviks appropriated the farms that had previously belonged to the rich and successful members of society and bestowed them instead to the members of the lower classes that labored on those properties. At manufacturing plants, authority and power shifted from the few in managerial positions to the many laborers the plants employed.

Other changes would be even more drastic. The new government wanted no distractions from its inexperienced authority, so it targeted the two echelons of society that still possessed some power throughout Russia: religious organizations and aristocratic people. The Russian Orthodox Church posed a major threat to the Bolshevik government because of its traditional influence over the country’s citizens. In previous centuries, the church had become closely intertwined with the aristocratic, ruling regime. The Bolsheviks wanted to move religion farther away from the government. To do so, they claimed the Russian Orthodox Church had become resistant to social change. The Bolsheviks started shutting down places of worship, as well as the places where monks and nuns lived and worked. The government also started seizing church property.

The Bolsheviks hobbled the church’s power in other ways. It became illegal for official members of the church to share religious ideas with others. Moreover, the government refused to acknowledge church weddings as valid. People could only get married legally according to a government ritual. The church’s loss of power soon spread to the aristocracy. Individuals of the aristocratic levels of society found themselves without the status symbols of their class, as the Bolsheviks did away with the power of people like counts or lords. An aristocratic position became worth nothing.

Finally, the Bolsheviks changed the way Russians wrote by making the shape of Cyrillic letters less complicated. And the regime abandoned the former calendar Russians had used for centuries, the Julian, in favor of the Gregorian system used by Western countries.
The Bolsheviks soon had the opportunity to make other legislative changes as well. Lenin had deliberately selected the beginning of November as a strategic time for the Bolsheviks to make their play and take down the Provisional Government. One of the reasons he had selected that time was because of its proximity to a planned electoral process. The Provisional Government had laid the groundwork for a voting process that would add members to the new Constituent Assembly at the end of the same month. By swooping in and taking over the government prior to the voting, Lenin hoped to quickly gain legitimacy for his new regime through the voting process. Unfortunately for Lenin and the new Bolshevik regime, the results of the votes did not fully legitimize or give authority to the Bolsheviks. This happened because, at the time, a large gap still existed in Russia between the smaller number of people who lived in urban centers and the far larger number of people who lived in rural or isolated areas. The Bolsheviks had successfully targeted and won over many of the people living in the urban centers, but winning over the widely spread out lower class would take more time. Many of the people living on farms throughout the Russian countryside supported the Socialist Revolutionaries. Members of this party received nearly double the amount of representation in the new Constituent Assembly as the Bolsheviks. This kind of majority in the Constituent Assembly ensured that the Socialist Revolutionaries could keep the Bolsheviks from governing.

Because of this dynamic, the reign of the Constituent Assembly was short lived. The assembly came together in the Russian capital of Petrograd for the first time in 1918, and its first meeting was also its last. Since the Bolsheviks could not hope to control the assembly, they simply eliminated it. The Bolsheviks’ next move, under Lenin’s direction, came in the formation of an elite, clandestine law enforcement team. This team took on the name of the Cheka and worked silently but mercilessly on behalf of the Bolsheviks to keep the revolution safe. The combination of these two actions showed that despite Lenin’s earlier claims to reform society on behalf of the people, he had become much more interested in safeguarding power for himself and his party. One man at the top still controlled the fate of the many in Russia.

Lenin exercised his control firmly in March 1918 when he achieved the long-awaited goal of extricating Russia from World War I. Doing so required a series of discussions with the German government and culminated in a peace agreement, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, that severely cost Russia. According to the terms of the treaty, Russia would lose a great deal of its territory in the west, as well as the citizens who lived there: a substantial amount of its population and land mass. The regions that would be lost included a new group of small countries in the Baltics called Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia. Russia also had to agree to give up Poland and Finland entirely, and to cede control of parts of several other regions, including the Ukraine, Transcaucasia, and Belorussia. Despite the high costs of these conditions Lenin agreed to them.

Lenin backed up his claim that Russia had no other recourse in accepting the treaty, because it simply could not afford to continue fighting in the war given conditions at home with another, more wishful idea. He believed the treaty would be temporary, since Germany’s power would be, too. Lenin believed that
Germany’s power would fade when the socialist ideas and reforms present in Russia spread out as part of the world revolution and encompassed Germany. Germany would become consumed by its own revolution, and Russia could reclaim the lands it had lost.

**Russian Civil War and Rebirth**

Lenin’s swift strategies and clever planning of the November Revolution had taken the Provisional Government by surprise, and bought the Bolsheviks some time to set up and delineate their new regime before facing organized opposition. While others struggled to come to terms with the change in government, the Bolsheviks moved ahead and rapidly started making changes to Russia’s bureaucratic fabric. This included disbanding the Constituent Assembly, then signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and withdrawing from World War I in March 1918. Soon after, though, members of other political parties, including the Socialist Revolutionaries, began plotting against the Bolsheviks.

By the middle of 1918, the Bolsheviks had begun calling themselves Communists. From their position at the head of the Russian government, the Communists entered the civil war with many elements of support. First, the Communists’ center of power also happened to lie in Russia’s capital city, Petrograd. While this did not give the Communists widespread power over more rural areas, it meant they could reach many people quickly and enjoyed more authority in urban centers. Second, the Communists had made inroads into controlling manufacturing plants and other
businesses when they turned them over to the workers, who they called proletariats. This meant they had better access to products, weapons, and technology than their opponents. Third, because of the combination of being based in urban centers and having better access to manufacturing, the Communists could send messages and move food or weapons among themselves much more quickly than their opponents. Finally, the Communists organized an army to defend themselves fairly quickly. The party installed Leon Trotsky (1879–1940) as the commander of this force, which became known as the Red Army. Trotsky received the official title of Commissar of War and, through the Red Army’s success, soon revealed his aptitude for military strategy.

In comparison, the side fighting against the Communists had much to overcome. This side became referred to commonly as the Whites, in opposition to the Reds. The Whites had a more difficult time organizing themselves to compete with the Red Army. Not only did the Whites lack the benefits the Communists could rely on, they did not possess a common underlying political ideology. Certainly, they shared many common ideas, but they did not have a platform that united them. Instead, they represented a mélange of many lesser political ideologies, with a majority of Socialist Revolutionaries, but also comprising the Mensheviks (formerly of the RSDLP), Cadets, and other individuals who had remained loyal to the deposed tsar. People who remained undecided about the civil war in other respects worried that the Whites’ overall plan would be to reinstate the tsar and put the government back the way it had been, especially when other Allied countries interceded to help the Whites.

Despite these significant setbacks, the White Army surprised many by initially winning significant territory, especially in more rural regions of the country. At first, the Red Army had every right to be worried. As early as July 1918, the White Army closed in on the region of the Ural Mountains, which worried the Bolsheviks because the deposed royal family had been living in Ekaterinburg, a town near that region. It seemed as though the White Army was determined to free the royals as a first step in a long line of restoring the autocracy. To put a stop to it, the Communists in the Urals had the entire royal family executed, including the children.

Despite this brutal act, the White Army pushed its troops into the far reaches of Russia, reaching the Caucasus, the Ukraine, the Baltics, and Siberia over the next two years. However, the Red Army pushed back, gaining victories over the branches of the White Army one by one. In the Caucasus, Piotr Wrangel (1878–1928) and his troops lost to the Reds; in the Ukraine, General Anton Denikin (1872–1947) had to admit defeat. General Nikolai Yudenich (1862–1933), fighting in the Baltics, had to concede that region to the Red Army, just as Admiral Alexander Kolchak (1874–1920) had to give up in Siberia. By 1920, all of the most important White Army leaders had been vanquished by the Red Army. Yet the war continued as the White Army refused to give up for two more years.

In the meantime, Russia had to contend with international affairs, as Japan, Britain, France, and the United States all stepped in to try to affect matters in Russia’s domestic problems. Japan stepped in during the battles in Siberia to try to help the
White Army. The other three Allies, acting against Germany, all deployed forces to Russia in an attempt to protect some natural resources that Germany coveted. Many of the Allies aided the White Army against the Red Army. But this aid came more as a gesture than a thorough helping hand; the Allies did not act significantly against the Communists to help the White Army revolt completely. Ultimately, then, this interference mattered more because of what it was than what it accomplished. The winning side, the Red Army, would enter into the next years with anger against the Allies for crossing its borders and attempting to meddle in what it saw as a private matter. This attitude would affect the way Russia approached international relations with the other Western countries for years to come.

**Civil War Consequences**

The civil war had serious consequences for Russia. The Communists had only recently regained the territories they had lost as a result of signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany. Nearly all the regions Russia had regained after the official end of World War I would reengage with Russia to secure their own autonomy, and about half of them would succeed. Indeed, four countries—including Finland and the three newly created territories of Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia in the Baltics—managed to successfully withdraw from Russia and emerge as autonomous entities. Another country, Bessarabia, did not achieve its own autonomy but fell instead to the control of Romania. The Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia all went to battle for their autonomy, but ultimately did not succeed. More changes would come in 1920. Prior to that point, Poland had bowed to pressure from larger, more powerful countries like Russia and Germany. But in 1920, the tables turned, and Poland attacked Russia. Perhaps because Russia had become weakened by the ongoing war between the Red and White Armies, Poland gained enough ground to make significant demands by March of the following year, when the two countries agreed to the Treaty of Riga, which granted Poland significant territory that had formerly belonged to Russia.

In the meantime, the Communists utilizing the Red Army continued to reshape Russian society according to their ideals. In particular, they promoted a temporary set of policies, called War Communism, which gave the government even more power over the entire nation. First, the government used War Communism to seize control of many businesses and manufacturing firms. The government also took over other important organizations used by civilians, such as those that provided coverage against disaster and death, and financial institutions. In addition, the government forbade people from marketing or exchanging goods without going through the state. It soon became evident that the Communists wanted the government to be connected to every important aspect of the economy.

The ideas of War Communism did nothing to help defray the financial and other costs of the civil war. It is important to remember that even before the civil war began, the Russians had encountered severe shortages of food and supplies from fighting in World War I. The government soon started employing a policy other regimes had previously rejected, demanding that farmers give up their hard-won foodstuffs to people in urban centers, where food shortages had become severe. Naturally, this
caused animosity between farmers and other citizens who saw themselves losing the products of their labor, often without fair compensation.

Even with a special committee called the Supreme Economic Council set up to watch over Russia's finances, the country struggled to make ends meet. Russia's entire financial system threatened to collapse altogether as, one by one, each element of its infrastructure started to give way. The collapse of one area would lead to the collapse of another, as nothing existed to artificially bolster the economy. First, the output of food and other products from farms throughout Russia slowed down substantially, followed all too quickly by decreased output from factories. Even if food and products had been produced at a higher rate, Russians would not have had the money to afford them. Trains and other means of travel slowed down and threatened to stop altogether, which in turn severely hampered the Russians' ability to send messages back and forth to each other across great distances. All of this separated the urban centers from the surrounding farmland of Russia even more. The urban centers, isolated from the farmlands, quickly began to run out of supplies, and starvation loomed.

The Communist government dealt with this dilemma mercilessly, punishing those who disobeyed their commands. The Communists used currency with very little actual value to purchase desperately needed products, and then punished people who attempted to protest the blatant unfairness of such exchanges. Public feeling worsened, particularly in agricultural and rural areas, because of unfair treatment, lack of food, and increasing poverty. Soon, the problems between social classes that Communists had hoped to eradicate returned with a vengeance. This new Russia had become divided into farmers accumulating valuable products, like food, living out on the land and city folk who saw their finances slipping daily for lack of food, the very thing the farmers hoarded.

Ultimately, the Communists emerged victorious from the civil war. This victory came about because of a complex concentration of elements. Foremost among those elements was a shared political ideology. This Bolshevik ideology, to which most Communists subscribed absolutely, had a transformative power. It filled the Red Army with determination and conviction. The Communists drew on the Russian civilians' dislike of the White Army's willingness to involve foreigners or outsiders in Russian matters, even as they employed the Cheka to do their dirty work. The secret police spied on the White Army with great success. Moreover, while breakdowns in sending and receiving messages affected both sides of the war, the Communists had a more central location than the White Army and found it easier to exchange communiqués among themselves.

In contrast to these elements, the White Army could not present a strong front. They did not share a political ideology and had to endure infighting within their own ranks. As a result, they could not meet the Red Army with as much conviction. The White Army had also become far more scattered and widespread than the Red Army, given its connection to a larger population. When transport broke down and messages could not be exchanged, the White Army became forcibly separated into isolated groups. As of 1922, it seemed that the Communists had defeated the White Army and held Russia firmly in their grasp, even though pockets of rebellion persisted.
After stabilizing the government, the Communists set out to punish their former enemies and extinguish any possibility of a further rebellion. In doing so, Russia hoped to set itself apart from France in terms of postrevolutionary behavior. Some of the French rebels became more lenient after their victory and permitted some of their opponents to live. In contrast, the Communists wanted to eradicate all their opponents. This era became known as the Red Terror. The Communists justified it by painting the targets of the Red Terror as opponents of the state and the working class. Once again, they used the Cheka to do their dirty work. The targets of the Red Terror did not get chances to defend themselves or even appear in court. Once accused, they could be immediately executed. Many members of the White Army, as well as members of the aristocracy and the upper classes, died during the Red Terror. Later, historians speculated that the numbers of the dead could have reached more than 2 million. The Communists’ brutal policies became supremely effective. Following the end of the civil war, the Communists would not encounter any further problems with potential revolutionaries supporting previous regimes or political parties.

Meanwhile, even as the civil war ended, the Communist regime had been forced to admit that Russia’s current financial situation could not continue. The year prior to the Red Terror saw a significant military uprising against the government. This uprising took place in February and March 1921 and involved naval forces stationed at Kronstadt. Since Kronstadt had previously been on the Red Army’s side, this uprising hit Lenin and the Communists hard. The government realized at last that something had to give way and that the current financial state in Russia simply could not be sustained. Lenin created a new means of approaching finance in Russia called the New Economic Policy (NEP). Despite the Communists’ passionate desire to abolish capitalism, the naval uprising had made Lenin realize that Russian society could not yet succeed without it. As a result, Lenin compromised by returning to some capitalistic practices and incorporating them into Russian finance, all the while stressing the temporary nature of such capitalism. Lenin wanted to use capitalism only to make the Russian economy stronger. Once Russia’s financial strength had returned, capitalism could be abolished for good.

Lenin then embarked on another series of steps to help strengthen Russia’s finances. To bolster popular public opinion, Lenin halted the current policy of taking food from the farmers and other rural dwellers to give to people in urban areas. To support this change in policy, Lenin implemented other financial plans to swell the markets. Instead of having to give up their food to the urban dwellers, farmers would simply have to pay taxes on it. However, the tax would be collected in grains, rather than money. The government could then redistribute the grains. Whatever the farmers had left over after they had paid their taxes and fed their families they could then exchange for other goods or money. This more positive approach to farming and taxation enabled farmers to work toward greater harvests, which in turn increased Russia’s trade and production. Lenin also set up legislation that helped lower class farmers increase their production. They could temporarily lease farms to plant on, as well as undertake harvests on their own, and they gained the right to take on laborers to work all the land in their control.

Slowly, these elements combined to increase and stabilize the Russian economy. Russian finances got yet another boost from overseas entrepreneurs. In return
for special deals, these entrepreneurs helped boost Russia’s finances back up so that the country could enter more securely into international finance. Five years after the Red Terror, in 1927, the Russian economy had recovered substantially.

**Extensions**
- Watch the silent film *Ten Days That Shook the World*. This film chronicles the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. How could this film serve as propaganda for a Communist government in Russia? Of the characters involved, who is the most compelling and why?

**Summary**
As the tsar fell from power, Lenin saw his own political fortunes rise. His early training in the law and Marxist thought prepared him for the job as the leader of the Bolsheviks after that group splintered from the larger RSDLP. In the April Theses, Lenin strongly influenced the practice of socialism in Russia and laid groundwork for revolution. After the successful November Revolution, Lenin and the Bolsheviks made many reforms to Russia. They removed the Constituent Assembly and decreased the power of the church and the aristocracy. In March 1918, Lenin made a peace treaty with Germany, and Russia left World War I. The country then plunged into a civil war, in which over 2 million people died. By 1922, the Communist government had taken firm control of Russia.

**Looking Ahead**
As Russia dealt with civil war and then attempted to rebuild its economy, other countries watched closely. Downtrodden members of former empires saw the positive (for some) outcome of the Russian Revolution with envy and aspiration. Soon, other countries would start trying to mimic the Russians’ success. Lenin’s projected vision of a world revolution would begin to come true, at least temporarily. It would begin nowhere else but within the boundaries of Russia’s formerly bitter enemy, Germany.

**SELF-CHECK ANSWERS**
1. The connection between capitalism and imperialism; the idea of a “vanguard party”; the belief that capitalist nations had become “weakest links in a chain”; the concept of “telescoping”; and new plain, bold strategies for revolutionary groups to follow when explaining their wants and needs
2. By taking away its lands and goods, by closing its places of worship, by making it illegal to share religious ideas, and by invalidating religious marriages
3. The Red Army was made up of Communists, formerly Bolsheviks. The White Army was made up of Cadets, Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries, and royalists. The Whites received aid from Allied countries, including Britain, France, Japan, and the United States.
Russian and German Revolutions

Essential Questions
• How did the German and Russian revolutions (in 1918 and 1917, respectively) compare?
• What happened in the German Revolution of 1918?

Keywords
authoritarian
monarchy
liberal provisional
republic
Set the Stage

Russia's revolution in 1917 toppled a dynasty that had ruled the country for more than 300 years and had become one of the few remaining monarchies in the West. The years that followed the revolution would trace a bloody trajectory in Russia. However, immediately afterward, in 1917, people in other countries admired the Russians for liberating themselves from an oppressive government and creating real political change. Other nations' citizens would try to emulate the Russians by attempting their own revolutions grounded in Marxist ideology. The first country to do so would be the beleaguered nation of Germany.

Similarities and Differences Between the Russian and German Revolutions

Russia offered other countries in Europe an example of a successful governmental uprising following a humiliating surrender in World War I. After both Austria-Hungary and Germany submitted to the Allies, the people of both countries began to agitate for social change. The uprising in Austria-Hungary differed substantially from the one that had taken place so recently in Russia, however. The uprising in this formerly powerful empire concentrated on two principal elements: individual nation building and government by electoral representation. The old imperial nation wanted to transform into individual, autonomous zones that represented all citizens. Four years earlier, it would not have been possible. Austria-Hungary, then led by the Hapsburg Dynasty, had basically entered into the war to safeguard its massive imperial state. It had been the rumblings of desire for autonomy from smaller regions such as Serbia that had laid groundwork for eventual war. In short, Austria-Hungary had gone to war to protect something that no longer existed. Its imperial state was dissolved at war's end.

Thus, Austria-Hungary split into disparate parts. Austria and Hungary separated from one another and formed their own small nations. Another new country, Czechoslovakia, emerged from the rubble. Meanwhile, the Serbian people, strengthened by the war, formed another new nation: Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia included Slavic peoples from the southern region of the former Hapsburg Empire. Thus, just like that, the Hapsburg line disappeared. In its place, several small nations began concentrating on creating their own governments. They had many more problems ahead of them. Yet in a world where distinctions among classes of people had mattered so greatly for such a long time, as soon as World War I had ended, the separation of classes became less important. People in this region of Europe worked together across classes to form their new nations. Problems between classes would persist, of course, but, momentarily at least, class warfare was replaced with a desire to build new and improved countries.
While events in postwar Austria-Hungary bore little similarity to the Russian Revolution, that would not be true of events in Germany. The German Revolution of November 1918 had many similarities to the Russian Revolution that had preceded it.

The Weimar Republic is the name given to the federal republic and parliamentary representative democracy established in 1919 in Germany to replace the imperial form of government. It was named after Weimar, the city where the constitutional assembly took place. Generally speaking, Germany and Russia both went from one similar state to another similar state during the revolutionary process. At first, each country had been ruled by a system of authoritarian monarchy, which resulted in a few pleased people at the top of society and a great deal of unhappy people in the middle and bottom of society. The people in Germany and Russia all finally became fed up with this kind of government, which did not represent them, and most of each country’s populations participated in a substantial rebellion. After these rebellions, both countries ended up with a new form of government that can best be described as a liberal provisional republic. Both governments proclaimed themselves as temporary, both remained committed to gradual change, and both seemed to promise representation by election to the people. Moreover, each of these liberal provisional republics centered on socialist politicians with beliefs that tended more to the side of “slow and steady” change. In opposition to each of these governments, both countries watched as unions of laborers and members of the armed forces began to spring up.

The similarities between events in Russia and in Germany ended with the provisional republics. In Russia, at this point, more extreme rebels such as the Bolsheviks persevered and eventually launched a second revolution. Russia’s Provisional Government fell to the Bolshevik, later Communist, regime. In contrast, in Germany the more cautious members of the Social Democratic Party triumphed over the communist revolutionaries. The German communists, in retrospect, would believe they had failed and a wealthier middle class had triumphed. Russia’s Bolsheviks had succeeded in large part because of Lenin’s leadership; Germany did not have a Lenin to guide its fellow Marxists.

**Results of the German Revolution**

The absence of a leader like Lenin was not the only reason Germany’s revolution did not take the same ultimate path as Russia’s. Many other factors combined to keep Germany’s government more moderate. Russia’s Marxists simply had become more radical than the Germans. Germany had a political party known as the Social Democrats, which presented a mixture of socialist and Marxist ideas, and had existed prior to World War I. In Germany, though, this party was more radical in name than in action.

The German Social Democrats, like early revolutionaries in the United States, wanted to bring democracy to their country. The people in this party also wanted to establish more individual rights, or civil liberties, for people in Germany. Rather than abolish capitalism outright, they wanted to slowly ease
away from it as they moved to another financial system. All these goals marked them as very different from the Bolshevik rebels. Additionally, the German Social Democrats remained very invested in keeping their nation united and secure—unlike Lenin, who did not hesitate to release territories in treaties or plunge the Bolsheviks into civil war. In other words, they doubled as German nationalists. As such, they remained unable to tolerate any hint of internal trouble in their own country, such as the possibility of yet another revolution or internal war.

In Russia the Bolsheviks had found aid and common ground with the councils, which represented both laborers and members of the armed forces. With the councils behind them, the Bolsheviks had been able to approach revolution with some confidence. In Germany, the opposite was true. People in the German councils favored a moderate approach. In the successful, large-scale uprisings in history, the majority of them moved forward because they had the backing and support of the masses. They found their strength in numbers. It took many people to make new politics. Without that kind of mass support in Germany, future revolutionaries would be isolated and alone.

Russia’s Provisional Government had formed after an internal struggle when the country’s ruler abdicated. At the time, Russia had been engaged in World War I and had been losing, but had not yet been decisively defeated. In contrast, the
German Social Democrats who ruled Germany after the November Revolution began their administration on the exact same day that Germany ceded victory in World War I to the Allies. The Social Democrats’ regime would be forever linked to the end of World War I.

Initially, in some ways this connection became a positive one for the Germans. By the time Germany acknowledged its loss in the war, its armed forces had become depressed and distraught. In ceding victory with dignity, the government brought its armed forces back together and gave them back their self-respect. Many of the more powerful figures in the armed forces had traditional, moderate backgrounds, and it empowered them to share their values with the government.

This connection to the military in fact preserved the provisional, moderate regime, which was tested soon after its emergence, in January 1919. Just as Lenin had inspired the Bolsheviks to revolt against the provisional government, so too did two German extremists, Karl Liebknecht (1871–1919) and Rosa Luxemburg (1870–1919), attempt to gather followers and revolt against their own provisional government. Lenin had the support of an army; Liebknecht and Luxemburg worked against it. Faced with possible rebellion, the German Social Democrats acted immediately to bring in the sympathetic armed forces on their behalf. The rebellion ended almost as soon as it began, as the two leaders surrendered to the armed forces and were summarily executed, a far different fate than Lenin’s. The fact that Liebknecht and Luxemburg died for their ideas split the Social Democrats in two. The more radical members of the party left it as an act of protest, and set up a Communist party of their own, one that shared similar ideas to those of Lenin.

Yet despite the cruelty the more liberal party members had endorsed, the fact that they had prevented a Bolshevik-style rebellion probably preserved Germany. True, the government handled the uprising with great violence. Had the rebellion continued, however, Germany would have probably ended up in great danger. In January 1919, Germany occupied a vulnerable place on the world stage, with its former enemies watching it closely as they prepared the terms of peace. In Russia, a successful revolution by the Bolsheviks would be followed by intense civil war. What if the same thing had happened in Germany? Given other conditions, it seems likely that had the army not stopped Liebknecht, Luxemburg, and their followers, Germany would have been set on a path toward internal discord, torn between two separate but equal opposing parties. That would have left Germany vulnerable to Allied interference. As one condition of the November 1918 initial peace treaty, the Allied forces had left troops in part of Germany while they completed the Treaty of Versailles. It would have taken very little time for these troops to reach Berlin, the German capital, and if the Allies had entered in the middle of a civil war, Germany as a nation might have never recovered.

Scholars have frequently criticized Germany’s government during this time for its overly harsh, cruel treatment of its rebels and for its political party’s abandonment of Marxist tenets. However, it seems likely that the terrible actions this party endorsed also worked to keep its nation together.
Extensions
- Read “Oh! How—German Is This Revolution!” by Rosa Luxemburg in *The Class Struggle* (Vol. III, No. 4, August 1919). How does the penal system in Germany in 1918 demonstrate bourgeois brutality? How does Luxemburg feel about capital punishment? Why? What is the first demand of Luxemburg to the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Council?

Summary
Russia’s revolutionary movements inspired uprisings in many other countries. Austria-Hungary dissolved into a group of independent, republican nations: Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. Its revolutions seemed very different from Russia’s. Initially, Germany’s 1918 revolution seemed eerily like the Russian Revolution of 1917, as both countries transferred from monarchies to liberal republics. Yet while Russia endured another revolution and became a Communist country, Germany’s revolution stopped with the liberal republic. It would continue to change according to moderate terms, after cruelly averting another potential Communist rebellion.

Looking Ahead
Germany weathered the potential radical rebellion and come through with its moderate government still intact. Life would be good for a short time, and a new government, the Weimar Republic, would rise. Yet by the summer of 1919, when the terms of the Treaty of Versailles had been revealed, Germany would be plunged into despair, devastated by the harsh terms of the peace. Many citizens would blame their government for those terms, although in that matter of international negotiation, the Weimar Republic had been powerless. Wounded by the Treaty of Versailles, Germany would fall under the spell of a new politician who promised revenge for the humiliating peace. Another inevitable conflict loomed.

**SELF-CHECK ANSWERS**
1. Autonomy for individual nations, government by electoral representation within those nations
2. The German Social Democrats wanted to phase out capitalism slowly, while the Bolsheviks wanted to abolish it right away.
3. Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg; both were executed