



AN AGE OF REVOLUTION, INDUSTRY, AND EMPIRE, 1750–1914

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During the early modern era, from 1500 to 1800, peoples from all parts of the world entered into sustained interactions with each other for the first time in history. Commercial, biological, and cultural exchanges influenced the development of societies in all the world's regions. European peoples in particular benefited from increased global interactions because they established the principal maritime links between the world's regions. As a result, they realized enormous profits from interregional trade, and they were also able to establish large empires and flourishing settler colonies in the Americas.

During the period from about 1750 to 1914, European peoples parlayed their advantageous position into global hegemony: by the late nineteenth century, European powers controlled affairs in most of Asia and almost all of Africa, while their Euro-American cousins dominated the Americas. Even tiny Pacific islands fell under the rule of European and Euro-American peoples. Three historical developments—revolution, industrialization, and imperialism—help to explain how European and Euro-American peoples came to dominate so much of the world.

Revolution transformed European and American societies in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Revolution broke out first in North America, where thirteen British colonies rebelled and won their independence. These colonies joined together to form a new republic, the United States of America, which drew heavily on the Enlightenment values of freedom, equality, and popular sovereignty in justifying its existence as an independent land. The success of the American revolution inspired the people of France to undertake a thorough transformation of their own society: after abolishing the monarchy and the aristocracy, they established a republic based on freedom, equality, and popular sovereignty. Although turmoil soon brought down the French republic, Enlightenment values continued to influence public affairs in France after the revolution. From France revolution moved back to the western hemisphere, where the French colony of Saint-Domingue (modern Haiti) and Iberian colonies in Mexico and South America won their independence.

Revolutions had a profound effect on the organization of societies in the Atlantic Ocean basin. First in Europe and later in the

Americas as well, revolutions and the conflicts that followed from them encouraged the formation of national identities. States seeking to pursue the interests of national communities were able to mobilize popular support on a scale never before achieved and often enjoyed success in conflicts with neighboring peoples who had not been able to organize effective national states. The idea of organizing states around national communities eventually influenced political development throughout the world.

While organizing themselves into national states, western European and North American peoples also embarked on processes of industrialization. By harnessing inanimate sources of energy and organizing production in factories, industrialists were able to produce high-quality goods at low cost. Because industrialization encouraged continuous innovation, industrial societies were also able to improve constantly on their economic performance. Industrialization caused a great deal of discomfort and dislocation, as workers adjusted from the rhythms of agricultural society to the demands of factories, machines, and managers seeking efficiencies in production. Over time, however, industrial societies became economically much stronger than agricultural societies, and industrial production brought about general improvement in material standards of living. After originating in Britain in the late eighteenth century, industrialization spread rapidly to western Europe and North America, and by the late nineteenth century to Russia and Japan as well. Even the lands that did not undergo processes of industrialization until the twentieth century immediately felt the effects of industrialization, as demand rose for agricultural products and natural resources needed by industrial societies.

Alongside increased material standards of living, industrialization also brought political, military, and economic strength. Particularly in western Europe and the United States, where it occurred alongside the formation of national communities, industrial-

ization helped underwrite processes of imperialism and colonialism. Industrial lands developed powerful transportation, communication, and military technologies that agricultural societies could not match. Railroads, steamships, telegraphs, and lethal weapons enabled western European peoples to impose their rule in most of Asia and Africa in the nineteenth century, just as Euro-American settlers relied on industrial technologies to drive the indigenous peoples of North America and South America onto marginal lands. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the United States and Japan used their own industrial technologies to increase their presence in the larger world and thus joined western European lands as global imperial and colonial powers.

Revolution, industrialization, and imperialism had effects felt around the world. Western European and North American lands vastly strengthened their position in the world by exercising political or economic influence over other societies. In some lands, particularly the Ottoman empire, Russia, China, and Japan, reformers worked to restructure their societies and increase their influence in global affairs by building national states that harnessed the energies of their populations. In doing so they studied the experience of western European lands and sought to adapt the principles of European political and social organization to their own societies. In the absence of a revolution that toppled ruling elites, however, critics found it very difficult to bring about meaningful reform, since privileged classes resisted change that threatened their position in their own societies. Colonized peoples had even less opportunity to bring about political and social reform, but they frequently resisted imperial powers by mounting rebellions and organizing anti-colonial movements. Revolution, industry, and empire fueled conflict throughout the world in the nineteenth century, and in combination they forced the world's peoples to deal with each other more systematically than ever before in history.