

MODERNITY AND WAR: 1894-1914

Belief in human progress was a cornerstone of modern society at the turn of the twentieth century. Advances in science and technology influenced all facets of life—in industry and in the home. But that progress also gave rise to destructive forces. European powers used advances in human thought and technology to gain control over rival nations and people, which led to protests and eventual war as Europe exploded in a frenzy of hatred. 1914 witnessed the outbreak of World War I, a war that would end the optimism of the late nineteenth century and set the stage for a half-century of turmoil and destruction.

KEY TERMS

abstract art	militarism	relativity theory	suffragists
anticlericalism	mobilization	reparations	<i>transformismo</i>
anti-Semitism	Modernism	revolutionary	<i>Volkish</i> thought
cubism	nationalization	Scramble for Africa	Zionism
genocide	pogroms	self-determination	
Impressionism	Post-Impressionism	socialism	
	psychoanalysis	Social Darwinism	

KEY CONCEPTS

- Global powers used growing nationalism to justify imperialism, which in turn led to political rivalries and eventual war that, in the end, reshaped the political landscape of Europe.
- Tremendous economic growth across Europe at the turn of the century fostered competition for resources and markets, leading to imperialism and an arms race.
- In the era leading to World War I, new ideas regarding science and philosophy challenged the notions of progress associated with Enlightenment thought.

For a full discussion of the period between 1894 and the outbreak of World War I, see *Western Civilization*, 8th and 9th editions, Chapter 24.

MODERN SCIENTIFIC AND ARTISTIC THOUGHT

Scientific progress throughout the nineteenth century had suggested that the world is rational and orderly and that all problems could be solved through the application of scientific research. But new discoveries at the end of the century shook the foundations of science. Marie Curie's discovery of radium in 1902 and Max Planck's quantum theory in 1900 challenged Isaac Newton's longstanding theories. The work of Albert Einstein was a further complication for Newtonian physics. Published in 1915, Einstein's theory of relativity held that space and time are relative to the observer, rather than absolute. His theory would open an age in physics of new discoveries and greater uncertainty.

In the field of philosophy, the usefulness—even the possibility—of rational thought was questioned. Friedrich Nietzsche held that society's embrace of the rational had stunted human potential. By abandoning Christianity and giving free rein to emotion and instinct, one could become a superhuman.

Another important figure was Sigmund Freud, who developed his ideas on the human mind into a type of research called psychoanalysis. He theorized that human behavior is controlled by repressed experiences that can be resolved only through the analysis of subconscious memories. As Darwin's

theory of evolution became widely understood, it was soon applied in other fields. Herbert Spencer argued that social progress was a result of the "struggle for survival;" the fittest prospered at the expense of the weak. Soon extremists would use Spencer's ideas to justify nationalist and racist agendas.

These ideas found their way into the literature of the day. Many novelists incorporated Darwinian theory into their own work. This was especially true of the French novelist Emile Zola, the leading proponent of the literary movement called Naturalism, which portrayed characters caught up in social forces beyond their control. The earlier optimistic realism was gone.

A transformation in art had begun in the 1870s. The Impressionist movement, which originated in France, rejected the goal, set during the Renaissance, of rendering reality. Instead, the Impressionists embraced nature and worked to capture the appearance of changing light and fleeting moments. Claude Monet, one of the best-known Impressionists, spent a lifetime painting the same haystacks and seacoast and water lilies in different light.

In the 1880s, French artists including Paul Cezanne and Vincent Van Gogh formed a new movement, Post-Impressionism. They used color and line to express inner feelings and portray subjective reality. Modern art had begun.

At the turn of the century art broke with realism, pushed by the rise in popularity of photography. The philosophical

and psychological milieus encouraged experimentation. Pablo Picasso created a unique form of art known as Cubism, in which reality is viewed from various vantage points and rendered in geometric design forms. Soon, with the advent of abstract art, reality was abandoned altogether and gave way to pure shapes and color.

NEW DIRECTIONS IN POLITICS

Anxiety arose throughout Europe late in the nineteenth century. The mass politics that had emerged earlier created turmoil that disturbed even liberals. Previously silent voices clamored for representation. The working class turned to socialism to represent its needs, while rightwing nationalists turned to racism.

With the rise of liberalism in Europe, women sought rights and privileges previously granted only to men. Foremost among these was the right to vote. Feminists in Britain began to push for voting rights as early as the 1840s. As the century progressed, feminists such as Emmeline Pankhurst turned to more radical methods.

AP Tip

Women's history is often the topic—directly or indirectly of Long-Essay questions on social history.

After decades of progress, European Jews again experienced anti-Semitism at the end of the century, as Social Darwinism encouraged efforts to deny Jews rights. Extreme nationalism, especially in Germany and Austria, gave rise to political groups that exploited anti-Semitism. Jews in Eastern Europe faced pogroms (organized massacres), in which residents of entire villages were slaughtered. Many Eastern European Jews emigrated to the United States, Canada, and Palestine. In Palestine, Theodor Herzl led a nationalist movement, Zionism, to establish a Jewish state in the Middle East. Mass politics benefited many Europeans, but also led to conflict. For example, the rising influence of the British working class forced the Liberal Party to enact legislation that addressed the needs of labor. To gain the workers' support, Liberal leaders pushed through Parliament a social welfare program radically opposed to the liberal concept of *laissez-faire*.

In France, there was resistance to the republican desire for a more democratic society by the army, royalists, and the church. The Dreyfus Affair, which gripped the nation in the late 1890s, brought the conflict to a head. Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish army officer, was accused of selling army secrets, and in 1895 was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment. Soon after, evidence emerged proving his innocence. Radical republicans used the Dreyfus Affair to force the elimination of many of the privileges traditionally granted to the old order. In Russia, the minister of finance, Sergei Witte, worked to improve weak industrial production. Tremendous industrial growth, based primarily on the expansion of railroads, was unleashed, and by 1900, Russia was the world's fourth largest producer of steel. The growth of factories led a radical

working class to embrace socialism. Government repression forced it underground, where the socialists began advocating for terrorism.

In 1904, Russia went to war against Japan over territorial expansion in the Far East. Much to the surprise of most European leaders, the Japanese won. Political and social discontent in Russia increased as both the middle class and workers pushed for greater reform. In St. Petersburg in January 1905, workers marched to the Winter Palace to present the tsar with a list of grievances. Soldiers opened fire on the peaceful marchers, sparking a revolt throughout Russia by workers, peasants, and the middle class. After months of disturbance, Tsar Nicholas II issued the October Manifesto, granting civil liberties and increasing the political franchise. Reform was short-lived, however, as Nicholas later curtailed many of the very reforms he had granted.

THE NEW IMPERIALISM

In the 1880s, European powers began a new search for foreign territory in Asia and Africa. Intense rivalries drove the extraordinary expansion of colonial empires. Governments had two main desires: military logistics and prestige. Britain, for example, needed fueling stations for its navy and territorial outposts that were vital to protecting overseas interests. National pride was also a central factor. As domestic turmoil increased during the late nineteenth century, governments used imperialist gains to distract attention from the unrest at home.

Other forces contributing to this “new imperialism” included Social Darwinism, religion, and economics. The “white man's burden,” a racist justification of imperialism, held that the white man had a moral duty to take his superior culture to the inferior native. Economic motives also played a role, as European industrialists continued to seek out natural resources in regions abroad.

THE SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA

European states had little control over the African continent before the 1880s, limiting themselves to a few long-established trading outposts. The British then began increasing their presence in South Africa, where they confronted not only native Zulus but also Dutch colonists called Boers, with whom they went to war in 1899. The Boer War ended in a British victory and allowed for the formation of the Union of South Africa.

By 1890, other European nations had joined the “Scramble for Africa.” Portugal, France, Italy, and Belgium all claimed territory. Europeans used their superior military force to overwhelm and slaughter the defenseless Africans, and by the end of the century had partitioned the entire continent, with the exceptions of Liberia and Ethiopia.

NEW IMPERIALISM IN ASIA

As with Africa, European states had had a presence in the Far East since the sixteenth century. Famous trading entities, such as the British East India Company, had dominated large territorial areas for many years.

Subjugation posed problems, however, as the British discovered in India. In 1857, the British East India Company faced a revolt by native Indian soldiers serving with the British army. On hearing rumors about the use of animal fat on British rifle cartridges, these *sepoys* killed over 200 English women and children, sparking a reprisal that led to the destruction of Indian villages. In the wake of the rebellion, control of India was transferred from the East India Company to the British government, and Queen Victoria became empress of India. Elsewhere, the French were in Southeast Asia, the Dutch were in Indonesia, the Germans were in some of the South Pacific islands, and the Americans were in the Philippines. Except for American trade privileges, Japan managed to avoid being colonized, but became a colonial power when it annexed Korea in 1910.

China's decline during the nineteenth century presented opportunities for Western nations. The British gained Hong Kong in 1842 and soon acquired trading rights in many other Chinese cities. Other Western states were eager for influence there too. The rivalry prevented a complete conquest of China. Instead, the territory was divided into spheres of influence with an "open-door" trade policy. China resented Western dominance. Beginning in 1900, the Boxer Rebellion was an attempt to force all foreigners out of China. After a number of Western government officials, businessmen, and missionaries were killed, an army of British, French, German, Russian, American, and Japanese troops put down the revolt and demanded further concessions from the weakened Chinese rulers. Soon after, the Manchu dynasty was overthrown by Chinese revolutionaries, who created the Republic of China in 1912.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR WAR

In the fifty years before World War I, Europe had remained remarkably peaceful, primarily because of the diplomacy of Germany's Otto von Bismarck. But after his removal from office, changes were made that threatened the stability and eventually brought about war. The decline of the Ottoman Empire upset the balance of power throughout Europe. Russia and Austria were especially interested in controlling Ottoman territory in Eastern Europe. Bismarck worked to reduce Russian influence while negotiating the Triple Alliance (1882), which committed Germany, Austria, and Italy to maintaining the European status quo. Emperor William II negated a great deal of Bismarck's efforts to keep Europe from war when he dismissed Bismarck in 1890. To give Germany its "place in the sun," he embraced confrontation. The Kaiser severed ties with Russia, which then entered an alliance with France, and he threatened Britain, which then formed the Triple Entente with France and Russia.

The rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century was especially problematic for Austria, which sought control over its Slavic-speaking territories. In 1908, when Austria annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina to prevent the formation of a larger Serbian kingdom, Russia encouraged the Serbs to go to war.

Only after William II interceded—even threatening war against Russia—did Serbia back down. Still, the Serbs pushed for greater power in the Balkans. Sides were drawn as Germany continued to back Austrian efforts, while Russia lent increasing support to the Serbian cause. By 1914, this was a point of national pride: Austria was fixed on crushing Serbian desires, while Russia was set on promoting them.