

Period 1: Technological and Environmental Transformations, to 600 BCE

Key Concept 1.1. Big Geography and the Peopling of the Earth

The term “Big Geography” draws attention to the long time spans required for the geological changes that formed the backdrop for the migration of early humans from Africa to cover the globe. The climate changes that brought about the end of the most recent Ice Age forced humans to adapt to a drier climate, one without the large mammals that may have been their prey. Areas such as the Sahara region that had previously been savannah became desert. Early humans were mobile and creative in adapting to different geographical settings from savannah to desert to Ice Age Tundra. People lived in small kinship groups of hunting/foraging bands. Technological advances such as the use of fire, more sophisticated stone tools, and clothing that was stitched together using an awl and strips of hide or sinew characterized this period. By analogy with modern hunter/forager societies, anthropologists infer that these bands were relatively egalitarian. Although there may well have been a division of labor between men and women, the male dominance of later pastoral or agricultural communities probably had not yet developed. Social and political structures were rudimentary. Religion was mostly likely similar to what later became known as Shamanism, or based on spirits of fertility of man and beast. Economic structures focused on self-sufficient bands that could make what they needed to survive. Some trade likely existed between various groups, however, since high-quality flints and shells have been found far from their points of origin.

Key Concept 1.2. The Neolithic Revolution and Early Agricultural Society

In response to changing climate patterns, some groups turned either to Pastoralism or to settle agriculture while others remained successful as foragers or fishers. In contrast to hunter/foragers, pastoral peoples domesticated animals and led the herds around grazing ranges. Pastoralists tended to be more socially stratified and have more male dominance than hunter/foragers because some males accumulated more wealth (animals) than others. Like hunter/foragers, however, pastoralists did not accumulate large amounts of material possessions, which would have been a hindrance when changing grazing areas. Pastoralists’ mobility allowed them to become an important conduit for technological change (by spreading knowledge of new weapons or methods of transportation, for example) as they interacted with settled populations. Other groups moved at different times in different regions toward settled agriculture. Two immediate consequences of agriculture were the settlement of populations in permanent dwellings and the production of a storable surplus of food. The switch to agriculture created a more reliable, but not necessarily more diversified, food supply. Agriculture also had a massive impact on the environment, through intensive cultivation of selected plants to the exclusion of others, through the construction of irrigation systems, and through the use of domesticated animals as food sources and for labor. Populations increased; family groups gave way to village and later urban life with all its complexity. Patriarchy and forced labor systems developed giving elite men concentrated power over most of the other peoples in their societies.

Key Concept 1.3. The Development and Interactions of Early Agricultural, Pastoral, and Urban Societies and Civilizations.

During this period civilizations appeared and expanded in several world regions. While dramatically different, these civilizations all produced agricultural surpluses that permitted significant specialization of labor. These civilizations, based in growing urban developments, generated complex institutions, such as political bureaucracies (including military establishment and religious hierarchies). They also featured clearly stratified social hierarchies and organized long-distance trading relationships. Economic exchanges within and between civilizations, as well as with nomadic pastoralists, progressively intensified. Competition for resources, labor, and luxury items led to increasing conflict and warfare. Surplus food led to several consequences, such as increased social stratification, specialization of labor, increased trade, more complex systems of government and religion, and the development of record keeping. In addition, artifacts or surplus food could be traded, which created a web connecting settled and pastoralist people in an ever-accelerating cycle of exchanging not only goods and resources but also ideas, inventions, and diseases. Finally, the accumulation of wealth in settled communities led to warfare between communities and/or pastoralists, along with new technology of war and urban defense.

Period 2: Organization and Reorganization of Human Societies, 600BCE-600CE

Key Concept 2.1. The Development and Codification of Religious and Cultural Traditions

Human responses to physical conditions from 600 BCE to 600 CE shaped the development of religions and cultural systems in the world's various regions. Religions/belief systems provided a bond among the people and an ethical code to live by in addition to influencing and reinforcing political, economic, and occupational stratification. Religious and political authority merged as rulers, some considered divine, used religion along with military and legal structures to justify their rule and ensure its continuation. Religious leaders frequently allied with political leaders.

Key Concept 2.2. The Development of States and Empires

As the early empires grew in number, size, and population, they increasingly competed for resources and came into conflict with one another. In quest of land, wealth, and security, some of the empires expanded dramatically. In doing so, they built powerful military machines and administrative institutions that were capable of organizing activities over long distances, and they created new groups of military and political elites to manage their affairs. As these empires expanded their boundaries, they also faced the need to develop policies and procedures to govern their relations with ethnically and culturally diverse populations: sometimes to integrate them within an imperial society and sometimes to exclude them. In some cases, these empires became victims of their own successes; by expanding boundaries too far, they laid the foundations for political, cultural, and administrative difficulties that they could not manage. They also experienced social and economic problems when they permitted wealth to concentrate in the hands of privileged classes and when they devoted resources to the maintenance and protection of far-flung imperial territories.

Key Concept 2.3. Emergence of Transregional Networks of Communications and Exchange

With the organization of large-scale empires, the volume of long-distance trade increased dramatically. Much of this trade resulted from the new demand for raw materials and luxury goods. Land and water routes linked many regions of the Eastern Hemisphere, while separate networks connected peoples and societies of the Americas. Exchanges of technology, religious and cultural beliefs, food crops, domesticated animals, and disease pathogens developed alongside this trade across far-flung networks of communication and exchange.

Period 3: Regional and Transregional Interactions, 600 CE to 1450 CE

Key Concept 3.1. Expansion and Intensification of Communication and Exchange Networks

This era witnessed a deepening and widening of old and new networks of human interaction within and across regions. The results were unprecedented concentrations of wealth and the intensification of cross-cultural exchanges. Innovations in transportation, state policies, and mercantile practices contributed to the expansion and development of commercial networks, which in turn served as conduits of cultural, technological, and biological diffusion within and between various societies. In Eurasia, pastoral nomadic groups played a key role in creating and sustaining regional diversity. Afro-Eurasian cultures gained greater awareness of others through interregional travel and exploration. While sub-Saharan African societies became more involved in larger interregional networks, American societies remained apart. Still, Mesoamerican, Andes, and North American networks deepened and widened in their own regions.

Key Concept 3.2. Diversification of State Forms

State formation in this era demonstrated remarkable continuity, innovation, and diversity in various regions. Many Afro-Eurasian states attempted with various degrees of success to revive older state forms from Period 2. Newer states on the peripheries of Afro-Eurasia sought to imitate these traditions, including patriarchy, while sustaining local distinctions. The expansion of Islam introduced a new concept- the caliphate- to Eurasian statecraft. Pastoral peoples in Eurasia became major innovators in state building in various regions, bringing new innovations while heavily borrowing ideas from other. In the Americas, new regional state networks in Mesoamerica and the Andes developed, borrowing heavily from past traditions and ideologies. In other areas, less-centralized state organizations emerged. In sub-Saharan Africa, various scales of political centralization reflected local and borrowed concepts. In all regions, states competed and often expanded to control vital resources and trade routes. The Mongol Empires of the 13th and 14th centuries achieved remarkable short-term success in this regard. This competition encouraged greater interregional contacts and cross-cultural transmission. At the same time, state expansion fostered stronger regional identities and conformity.

Key Concept 3.3. Increased Economic Productive Capacity and Its Social Consequences

With the deepening and widening of old and new networks of human interaction in this period, travelers of many types transported both new and familiar commodities across hemispheric, not global, trade routes in greater numbers. The intensification of trade and communication networks enhanced the status of urban areas, a trend that in turn put new strains on the productive capacities of agricultural laborers. Increasing cross-cultural contact and conflict facilitated the dissemination of ideas as well as commodities, especially those produced by Asian manufacturers. East Asia and Dar al Islam were the intellectual and cultural engines of the Eastern Hemisphere in this period, while merchants, missionaries, and military personnel (including Mongols) became the conduits. Invaders, missionaries, and merchants brought new ideologies and religions into ever-widening regions. Social and gender structures, traditionally slow to change, were challenged by these regional interactions. Various groups wrestled with these dilemmas, and the results were often syncretic adaptations.

Period 4: Global Interactions, 1450-1750

Key Concept 4.1. Globalizing Networks of Communication and Exchange

The interconnection of the Eastern and Western Hemispheres made possible by transoceanic voyaging marked a key transformation of this period—one that was closely related to other important changes within world regions. Technological innovations helped to make transoceanic connections possible; new technologies were also linked to productive and demographic shifts. Changing patterns of long-distance trade included the global circulation of some commodities and the formation of new regional markets and financial centers. New circuits for commodities opened new pathways for the spread of religion and other elements of culture as well as the migration of large numbers of people. Germans carried to the Americas decimated the indigenous peoples, while the global exchange of crops altered agriculture, diets, and populations around the planet.

Key Concept 4.2. New Forms of Social Organization and Modes of Production

Although the world's productive systems were heavily centered on agricultural production throughout this period, major changes occurred in the organization of agriculture, including a surge in productivity resulting from new methods in crop and field rotation and the introduction of new crops. While not eclipsing agriculture, economic growth related to proto-industrialization, urbanization, and new commercial patterns, especially in long-distance trade, had a significant impact on societies during this period. Political and economic centers within regions shifted, and merchants' social status tended to rise in various states. The increasingly bureaucratized taxation systems of centralized states required agricultural producers to supply the greatest share of state revenue, a condition that at times led to food riots, rebellions, and challenges to political order by both peasants and elites. Social and political instability were features of the age. Demographic growth— even in areas such as the Americas, where disease had ravaged the population— was restored by the 18th century and surged in many regions, especially with the introduction of American food crops throughout the Eastern Hemisphere. New forms of coerced and semi-coerced labor emerged in Europe and the Americas and were associated with new varieties of ethnic and racial classifications though older forced labor systems continued to expand.

Key Concept 4.3. Types and Varieties of Colonialism and Empires

Empires during this period were divided into two main types. European “empires” were more maritime than territorial. As agents of European powers moved into existing trading networks in the Indian Ocean and undertook conquest and settlement in the Americas, they had to adapt forms of governance and sometimes invent new bureaucracies to try to accommodate and contain overseas commerce and subjects. These efforts were influenced by their contacts with land-based empires and political structures, their rivalries with each other, and the strategies of peoples with whom they interacted. The second type of empire included the land-based empires of Ming and Qing China and the Ottomans. Supported by tribute and tax-collection systems, these empires developed different strategies for territorial expansion, the incorporation of cultural and religious minorities, and displays of imperial power through art and architecture. The decline of states in interior West Africa, such as the Songhai Empire, and the formation or strengthening of coastal West African polities reflected the beginning of a shift in long-distance trading patterns away from long established trans-Saharan routes and towards those in the newly created Atlantic world. Though much smaller than the Eurasian land-based empires, African polities shared certain characteristics with larger empires.

Period 5: Industrialization and Global Integration, 1750-1900

Key Concept 5.1. Territorial Expansion and National Identities

The period was marked by tensions within and between empires, resulting in regional warfare and intensified efforts at diplomacy. Transoceanic empires continued to develop, and European influences spread to almost all regions of the world. Early in the period, competition over imperial expansion led to the loss of overseas territory by the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, and French, and the ascendance of British imperial power. Nearing the end of this period states that had never held global empires, such as Germany, the United States, and Japan, gained transoceanic holdings and influence. Older, land-based empires in Eurasia contended with the problems of sustaining control over their diverse territories. Nationalism as a political force emerged early in this era in the Atlantic World and spread to other places. During the 19th century, nation-states formed in various regions and engaged in formalizing their borders through frontier warfare and diplomacy. Ideologies developed that justified both expansion and resistance, while in colonial societies new hierarchies reflected changing racial and cultural norms, and prompted the beginnings of anti-colonial movements. At the same time that European imperialism increasingly claimed continents, nationalism became a global movement with new groups and states declaring their rights to political autonomy. Nationalist sentiments also led to the strengthening and consolidation of some states, the restructuring of others, and the weakening of a few former powers along with the forging of new communal identities.

Key Concept 5.2. Ideologies, Revolutions, and Reform

The period after 1750 was marked by revolutions, including colonial revolts against distant governments and other struggles that led to profound internal changes in the emergence and governance of nation-states. Enlightenment ideology played a large role as both impetus for and justification of revolutions, while republican and democratic ideals became influential in calls for political and social change throughout the world. Political parties were formed to promote ideals of constitutional law in regions with traditionally absolutist governments. Revolutions in the Atlantic World resulted in political change in the Americas and Europe and produced radical social change in Haiti. Most anti-colonial rebellions in other parts of the 19th century world were unsuccessful but laid the basis for the formation of 20th century nationalist movements that became successful. A sense of enhanced spirituality in some late 19th century rebellions appeared as groups confronted modern military methods. Liberal political principles embraced suffrage, abolition, and gender equality.

Key Concept 5.3. Industrialization and Global Capitalism

Industrialization, a process that combined economic growth and technological innovation, was under way in Britain in the early 18th century and spread to Germany, France, Japan, and the United States by the end of the 19th century, prompting major social transformations. New systems of production substituted mechanical devices for human skills and grouped laborers into factories where raw materials were processed cheaper and faster. Once under way, industrialization triggered a chain reaction of continual technological innovation as invention in one industry necessitated invention in others. In addition, factories needed more and more workers to maintain high levels of production and profit and they attracted many rural laborers to urban centers. The shifts in the methods of production created changes in traditional societal structures: new social classes were formed as the owners whose capital financed the equipment and machinery became powerful and wealthy and moved their families away from the urban areas. Profits were reinvested into new businesses, sometimes in other parts of the world, thus setting up new patterns of global trading and new destinations for the subsequent growth in population. For the lower classes, the results were often disastrous in the short run. Wages were low, work hours long, and living conditions unhealthy. Newly forming working classes became the focus of new expressions of social discontent. As the new technologies developed and spread, the technological gap between Europe and the rest of the world widened. By the end of the period, European countries had become superior in weapons, medicine, manufacturing, transportation, and communication technologies. This superiority enabled Europe to engage in extensive colonizing at the end of this period.

Key Concept 5.4. Global Migration

This period was characterized by long-distance migrations of people on a new scale. Global migration patterns with huge social consequences resulted from the end of the Atlantic slave trade, the large-scale movement of European populations, and the movement of laborers from Asia to the Caribbean and the Americas. As industrial capitalism gained momentum, the rising population in Europe sought outlets in the Americas, Australia and New Zealand, and the temperate parts of Africa. Involuntary migrants also contributed to global movements of populations. Africans were taken to Spanish and Portuguese America (after the abolition of the British slave trade), European convicts and political rebels created new worlds in the Atlantic basin and Australia, and the Irish escaped famine by fleeing to America. Other influences affected the global movement of peoples. In North America, an emigration society moved numbers of African Americans to Africa. Following the abolition of slavery, thousands of laborers from India, China, and other Asian countries enabled British plantations, mines, and other public works in Africa and the Caribbean islands to continue supplying raw materials to Europe. Migration had a significant impact on both donor nations and receiver societies, and it created a demographic dispersal that changed the racial and ethnic complexion of the world. As laborers moved in large numbers across borders, nation-states organized to mark and define their borders, inventing passports and other forms of limiting and regulating citizenship.

Period 6: Global Fragmentations and Realignment, 1900 to present

Key Concept 6.1. Dissolution of Global Empires

The 20th century saw the collapse of land-based empires as well as the European-dominated colonial order that had been constructed in the previous two centuries. In the first part of the 20th century Western imperial continuity prevailed, and the Bolsheviks managed to reconstitute most of the Old Russian Empire within the boundaries of the Soviet Union. In the interwar period attempts at imperial expansion led, in part, to the Second World War. The second half of the 20th century saw European flags replaced by those of independent nation-states all around the world. The dissolution of the colonial order was sometimes achieved through negotiation and sometimes through armed conflict. In these latter cases the departing colonial power refused to concede power to local nationalists without a fight. The achievement of stable new regimes in the emergent nation-states was complicated by internal and external factors, such as ethnic and religious conflicts, secessionist movements, and territorial partitions. Despite the appearance of Non-Aligned Movement, many new nations were subject to the polarizing influence of the Cold War “superpowers.” The governments of the United States, Soviet Union, and People’s Republic of China all attempted to use the breakup of the European empires to advance their political, military, and economic interests, with violent consequences for Central Africa, Southeast Asia, and other regions. Finally, the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics after 1991 marked the end of the older Russian Empire as nation-states replaced the Soviet system in the Baltic, the Caucasus, and Central Asia.

Key Concept 6.2. Global War and Conflict

The 20th century was the bloodiest era in human history. WWI and WWII dominated international affairs in the first half of the century as industrial states competed for global influence and power. The Cold War rivalry between the USA and the USSR, while never producing direct military conflict, consumed global political affairs. The collapse of formal global empires throughout the century also produced intense regional and local conflicts throughout the era. Sometimes peacefully, but often with violence, groups struggled for greater autonomy. Even after decolonization, certain factions continued to resist foreign influence and interference in local affairs. Often, decolonization sparked ethnic and religious conflict among newly liberated populations as colonial borders frequently bequeathed new countries with rival populations of multiple identities. Global conflict was not limited to traditional warfare between states. Non-state actors such as terrorist organizations used violence and other means to promote their causes. New technologies and new modes of mass production contributed to the high levels of human casualty during the twentieth century as various actors on the international stage developed weapons of mass destruction and other organizational means to institutionalize violence. Genocide became a widespread phenomenon during this era. The glory and bravery associated with hand-to-hand combat-more prominent in earlier centuries-affected civilian and gender attitudes toward war. Women's participation in home-front work during the world wars brought some new political and economic rights to them by mid-century.

Key Concept 6.3. New Global Institutions and Processes

The 20th century saw the rise of new supranational institutions that challenged the role of nation-states and territorial empires as the primary agents for global economic and political interaction. The decline of European-dominated global empires, global war, and the crisis of capitalist institutions in the first half of the century, led to new multilateral and regional institutions after WWII. Equally important was the growth and spread of private multinational corporations and financial institutions and their efforts to develop and expand stable multiregional markets for commodities, services, and entertainment. Private nonprofit actors known as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) also emerged to promote human rights and other social justice causes. International sports and arts movements facilitated the spread of global popular culture. Advances in transportation and communications technologies intensified existing networks and created new ones. Scientific advances had a powerful though double-edged effect. On the one hand, the technological consequences of science promised new possibilities for the improvement of the human condition. At the same time, technological advancement seemed to threaten humanity with escalating violence and possible annihilation. The characteristic ability of the human species to remake its environment reached unprecedented levels of efficiency allowing for great advances in agricultural and industrial production while also threatening delicate ecological balances at local and global levels. New artistic and intellectual developments merged through cross-fertilization. At the same time, however, many felt that their own cultural traditions were under siege, and some responded to the rush of new cultural information in a defensive or even xenophobic manner.