

Learning Objectives By Theme

Theme 1: Interaction of Europe and the World (INT)

This theme focuses on the various factors and motivations that contributed to Europe's interaction with the world since 1450, as well as the impact this interaction had both on Europe and on non-European societies.

Beginning in the 15th century, European nations sent explorers into the world beyond the Mediterranean, establishing new shipping routes, trading stations, and eventually, colonies in many parts of the globe. The motivations for these enterprises were complex and have been the subject of much historical debate. Were Europeans driven primarily by the desire for more direct and secure trade routes, by the pursuit of new commercial wealth, or by religious motivations, such as the desire to convert new peoples to Christianity? Whatever the motivations, these explorations created new, complex trade systems that profoundly affected European prosperity, patterns of consumption, commercial competition, and national rivalries. The activities and influence of Europeans varied in different parts of the world. In India and China, centers of high civilizations, Europeans remained on the periphery in trading stations for centuries. In Africa, Europeans also established themselves on the coasts, trading with the indigenous populations of the interior. European settlements in the new world imported religious, social, and political institutions to the Americas, which would forever transform this region and its indigenous peoples. The encounters with non-European peoples profoundly affected European trade, social life, and ideas, both at the time and for centuries to come.

With their American colonies and the global reach of their seafarers, Europeans helped to create a truly global trading system, introducing new foods that changed the food cultures of China, India, and Europe. At the same time as Europe was experiencing the material consequences of its interaction with the world, European intellectuals began to describe and analyze the peoples and cultures with which they came into contact, and collect and catalogue the flora and fauna they discovered. The use of "race" as a primary category for differentiating people coincided with the expansion of slavery, as Europeans sought a workforce for overseas plantations; this categorization helped Europeans justify the slave system. From the 16th to the 19th century, the transatlantic slave trade became a central feature of the world economy, and millions of Africans were transported via the notorious Middle Passage to labor on plantations in the Americas. The vast and cruel slave system led to various forms of resistance by enslaved peoples and began to generate opposition in Europe beginning in the late 18th century. Abolitionists objected to the system on humanitarian and religious grounds. An important strand of Enlightenment thought—the belief in citizenship, popular sovereignty, equality, and liberty—promoted by the American and French revolutions also contributed to the ideology of the abolitionist movements, and several European states abolished the slave trade in the early 19th century.

However, critiques of colonialism did not have an immediate effect, given that the 19th century was a period of empire building. Driven by the needs of an industrial economy and nationalism, Europeans expanded their territorial control in Asia and Africa through warfare, economic agreements and arrangements, the seizure of property, and, in some cases, immigration. In the late 19th century, the scale and pace of conquest intensified because of asymmetries in military technology, communications, and national rivalries among the Great Powers. In conquered territories, Europeans established new administrative, legal, and cultural institutions, and restructured colonial economies to meet European needs, actions that often led to resistance and opposition in colonial areas. Within Europe, exposure to new peoples and cultures influenced art and literature, and spurred efforts to find a scientific basis for racial differences. Competition for colonies

[AP European History Course and Exam Description](#)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

© 2017 The College Board

[Thematic Learning Objectives](#)

also destabilized the European balance of power and was a significant cause of World War I. In the mid-20th century, the rise of the United States as an economic and military power, the far-reaching consequences of the two world wars, and the Cold War resulted in the contraction and collapse of the traditional European empires—a process known as decolonization. At the end of the 20th century, Europe sought new ways of defining interactions among its own nations and with the rest of the world. At the same time, the migration of non-European people into Europe began to change the ethnic and religious composition of European society and to create uncertainties about European identity.

Theme 2: Poverty and Prosperity (PP)

This theme focuses on the role that economic development, especially the development of capitalism, played in Europe's history as well as its social and political impact.

In the centuries after 1450, Europe first entered and then gradually came to dominate a global commercial network. Building off the voyages of exploration and colonization, the commercial revolution of the 17th and 18th centuries involved a wide range of new financial and economic practices, such as joint-stock companies, widely capitalized banks, and triangular trade—all of which supported an emerging money economy. New commercial techniques and goods provided Europeans with an improved diet and standard of living, and in turn, wealth from commerce supported the growth of industrial capitalism in subsequent centuries.

Commercial wealth helped transform a preindustrial economy based on guild production, cottage industry, and subsistence agriculture into one driven by market operations. Commercial wealth generated resources for centralizing states, many of which, prior to the French Revolution, justified government management of trade, manufacturing, finance, and taxation through mercantilism. Mercantilism assumed that existing sources of wealth could not be expanded; accordingly, the only way to increase one's economic power over others was to gain a greater share of the existing sources of wealth. As a result, mercantilism promoted commercial competition and at times resulted in warfare overseas.

Market demands generated the increasingly mechanized production of goods through the technology of the Industrial Revolution. Large-scale production required capital investment, which led to the development of capitalism: based on Adam Smith's 1776 work, *The Wealth of Nations*, this economic system prioritized private investment by individuals and institutions.

The growth of large-scale agriculture and factories changed social and economic relations. Peasants left the countryside to work in the new factories, giving up lives as tenants on landlords' estates for wage labor. Improved climate and diet supported a gradual population increase in the 18th century followed by a population explosion in the industrial 19th century. Industrialization generated unprecedented levels of material prosperity for some Europeans, particularly during the second industrial revolution (1850–1914), when an outburst of new technologies ushered Europe into modern mass society.

According to its critics, capitalism led to an unequal distribution of wealth and opportunities: it created interconnected financial markets that periodically crashed, which could lead to widespread repercussions. Capitalism's emphasis on free trade shifted production from expensive to inexpensive regions, like the overseas colonies in Africa and Asia, which had the impact of reducing or holding down the wages of workers in Europe. In the 19th century, these criticisms found expression in socialism—a new social and political ideology that called for state ownership of property and economic planning as a means to promote equality. Throughout Europe, socialist-inspired parties and organizations called for reforms and in some cases the overthrow of the capitalist system.

The devastating impact of two world wars and the Great Depression transformed pre-1914 economic patterns and complicated the task of governments in managing the unstable economic situation. Soviet Russia and its post-World War II satellites represented one path, communism, which pursued a policy of planned economies that collectivized agriculture in the name of forcing rapid industrial growth, and which ultimately experienced economic and political collapse. Nations in Western Europe, Scandinavia, and parts of Central Europe modified laissez-faire capitalism with Keynesian budget and tax policies and in some cases an expanding welfare state. Consumerism, always an important factor in economic growth, took on even more importance in the second half of the 20th century when Western European

Thematic Learning Objectives

nations experienced what was termed an economic miracle. The post-World War II period also witnessed the movement toward European economic unity and a common currency, as well as the creation and challenges of maintaining social welfare programs.

Theme 3: Objective Knowledge and Subjective Visions (OS)

This theme focuses on the creation and transmission of knowledge in Europe's history, with particular focus on the relationship between traditional sources of authority and the development of differing world views.

Starting in the 15th century, European thinkers began developing new methods for arriving at objective truth—substituting these methods for appeals to traditional authorities—and then gradually moved away from belief in absolute truths to increasingly subjective interpretations of reality. While some thinkers argued that direct inquiry (philosophical and scientific) was the principal way to formulate truths and representations of reality, many early modern Europeans continued to rely on religious authority and ancient texts for their knowledge of the world and as a standard of value.

Scholars of the natural world created new theories of knowledge based on observation and experimentation, along with new institutions to put the new theories into practice. Science came to be viewed as an objective source of truth about the natural world. At the same time, many of these natural philosophers retained religious worldviews as they explored these new approaches to scientific inquiry. Artists, musicians, and writers also employed empirical and quantitative methods to express the notions of space, time, and sound in new cultural periods, many of which, such as the Renaissance, continued to draw on classical subjects and influences.

During the Enlightenment, certain segments of the European population came to accept the world as governed by natural laws, accessible through systematic observation and articulated in mathematics. The results of this intellectual movement were impressive, producing a new understanding of the universe (often designated as Newtonian mechanics) and systems to organize and advance the growing body of knowledge of plants, animals, and minerals. Under the influence of the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, intellectuals and activists attempted to employ a similarly scientific approach to the questions of political, social, and economic reform, resulting in the development of such ideologies as conservatism, liberalism, nationalism, socialism, and Marxism. Those in the fine arts and literature both applied and commented on these methods in their depictions of European life during this period of rapid change.

Over time, the new method for acquiring knowledge through observation and experimentation raised questions about the relationship between the observer and the observed. Beginning in the 19th century, new theories called into question the supremacy of reason and the possibility of finding objective truth in favor of subjective interpretations of reality and the importance of nonrational forces. In physics, quantum mechanics and Einstein's theories of relativity, which took the observer into account, challenged Newtonian mechanics, and in psychology, Freud emphasized the importance of irrational drives in human behavior. Beginning in the 19th century and accelerating in the 20th, European artists and intellectuals, along with a portion of the educated public, rejected absolute paradigms (whether idealist or scientific), replacing them with relative and subjective ones, as exemplified by existential philosophy, modern art, and postmodernist ideas and culture. The emergence of these ideas created a conflict between science and subjective approaches to knowledge. Europeans continued to engage in science and to regard the results of science as being of universal value, while postmodernist thinkers emphasized the subjective component—the role of the actor—in all human activities, including scientific ones. These ways of thinking often coexisted with more traditional religious institutions, whether in the form of churches or new religiously affiliated political parties, which continued to exert influence over the daily lives of Europeans.

Theme 4: States and Other Institutions of Power (SP)

This theme focuses on the development of various forms of government and civil institutions since 1450 and the social, cultural, and economic impact of political change.

After 1450, the old ideal that Europe constituted a unified Christendom was weakened by the rise of sovereign states. These states asserted a monopoly over law and the management of all institutions, including the church. The growth of secular power played a critical role in the success of the Protestant Reformation, and states gained increasing influence over religious affairs. With the military revolution of the early modern period, states and political leaders sought new and better sources of revenue, and it spurred the expansion of state control over political and economic functions.

European polities took a variety of forms—empires, nation-states, and small republics. Absolute monarchies concentrated all authority in a single person who was regarded as divinely ordained, whereas in constitutional governments, power was shared between the monarch and representative institutions. Early modern advances in education, publishing, and prosperity created public opinion and civil society independent of government—developments that supported and were promoted by Enlightenment theories of natural rights and the social contract. Political revolutions and industrialization shifted governance from monarchies and aristocracies to parliamentary institutions that both generated and embodied the rule of law while gradually widening the participation of citizens in governance through the extension of suffrage. The late 19th century saw the proliferation of political parties and the rise of mass politics. European states became more responsive to public opinion, and newly expanded government bureaucracies played an increasingly important role in the lives of average Europeans. After World War I, under the pressure of political and economic crises, totalitarian regimes threatened parliamentary governments.

The European state system, which originated in the Peace of Westphalia and shaped diplomatic relations through World War I, assumed that the continent would be divided into independent sovereign states and that war and diplomacy would be the normal means of interstate relations. In the 19th century, the goal of establishing and maintaining a balance of power was challenged by the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, the emergence of new nation-states such as Italy and Germany, the transformation of traditional empires, and shifts in the alliance system. Overseas competition and the growing influence of nationalism undermined diplomatic efforts to stave off war in the first half of the 20th century. In the 20th century, new international organizations (the League of Nations, the United Nations, NGOs) attempted to develop international law and modes of dispute resolution that would promote peace. After the catastrophe of two world wars, Western European states turned to the prospects of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), while in Eastern Europe, the Warsaw Pact allied communist nations with the Soviet Union.

Theme 5: Individual and Society (IS)

This theme focuses on changes to family, class, and social groups in European history, on how these have changed in form and in status, and on the impact of such changes for both the individual and society.

Early modern society was divided into the three estates: clergy, nobility, and commoners (the latter including merchants, townspeople, and the overwhelming majority, the peasantry). Within those estates, family and landed wealth shaped social practices, as did religious beliefs and practices. Access to resources and opportunities remained unequal even within estates, and the poorest members of society served as both objects of charity or problems to be controlled. With the advent of the Reformation, new Protestant denominations challenged each other and the Catholic Church, establishing new religious practices and social influence.

Marriage and family life were constrained by the values of the community and closely prescribed norms. Gathering resources to create a new household often required young adults to work and save for a period of years, and a late age of marriage for commoners (the European family pattern) tended to limit demographic growth. In preindustrial Europe, women's and men's work was complementary rather than separate, since peasants worked communally to bring in the harvest, oversee journeymen and apprentices, keep financial records, and market products. Women played active roles in movements of cultural and social change, while gender norms continued to stress women's intellectual inferiority and their duty to obey fathers and husbands. Women's access to institutional power remained limited, even as the Protestant Reformation placed new emphasis on the role of women in the family as mothers and assistants in religious instruction and schooling.

Demographic growth spurred social change in the 18th century. The Enlightenment brought a new emphasis on childhood as a stage of life, and the ideal of companionate marriage began to compete with arranged marriages. The French Revolution formally ended the division of society into three estates and continued to challenge traditional society throughout the 19th century, though remnants of the old order persisted into the 20th century. The Industrial Revolution created a division of social classes based on new criteria of capital and labor. The revolutionary emphasis on liberty galvanized many excluded groups to take an active role in politics, and the language of natural rights spurred the development of movements of equality, such as feminism and the end of feudalism and serfdom. The growth of the middle classes in the 19th century tended to anchor men and women in separate spheres and elevate women's role in the home into "the cult of domesticity." Early industrialism negatively affected the working classes and, more generally, shifted the family from a unit of production to one of consumption.

By the late 19th century, a new mass society had emerged defined by consumerism, expanding literacy, and new forms of leisure. The “woman question” that had emerged in the 17th century took on a new intensity as women sought economic and legal rights. World War I profoundly affected European society by conclusively ending the residual hold of old elites on power and democratizing society through shared sacrifice, and women obtained the right to vote in several European nations. Between the wars, Soviet communism theoretically endorsed equality, though women often performed double duty as laborers and mothers; on the other hand, fascist regimes re-emphasized a domestic role for women and created states based on a mythical racial identity. After World War II, the welfare state emerged in Western Europe with more support for families, choices in reproduction, and state-sponsored health care; economic recovery brought new consumer choices and popular culture. By contrast, in the Soviet bloc, where individual choices were directed by the state, family life was constrained and economic life was dedicated to heavy industry rather than the production of

Thematic Learning Objectives

consumer goods, though basic needs were provided within an authoritarian context. The end of the Cold War and the rise of the EU brought some shared social values to light and created more pluralistic European societies, but contested issues, such as the role of immigrants—whether former colonial subjects, migrant workers, or refugees—have yet to be resolved.

Theme 6: National and European Identity (NI)

This theme focuses on how and why definitions and perceptions of regional, cultural, national, and European identity have developed and been challenged over time.

Since 1450, Europeans have understood their place in the world based on their membership in various and sometimes overlapping entities, ranging from small local groupings to fully developed nation-states and multinational organizations. Questions concerning identity have remained constant, even as shifting political, social, economic, religious, and cultural developments, such as the intensely patriotic calls for greater national unity in the 19th century, have brought new units and affiliations into being. In the early modern period, Europeans identified with language groups and political units of varying sizes, such as the Renaissance-era city-state. Early modern Europeans also identified with emerging nation-states such as a unified Spain under King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, imperial dynasties such as the Habsburg Holy Roman Empire, and the idea of a unified Christendom.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, monarchs like Louis XIV of France and Peter the Great of Russia built upon a common language and cultural identity in their respective countries to foster the development of national cultures centered around the creation of new types of institutions. In England, after a civil war and period of political experimentation, a system of government emerged where the power of the monarchy was checked by an increasingly bold Parliament. These countries also created national symbols that inspired loyalty in their subjects, though senses of national affiliation were always subject to challenges and change, and were not equally powerful across Europe. Meanwhile, the intellectual movement of the Enlightenment, coupled with French revolutionary ideals, offered a different vision of European identity based on a shared belief in reason, citizenship, and other Enlightenment values.

In the 19th century, countries like Germany, Italy, and the Kingdom of the Netherlands were unified through wars, political negotiations, and the promotion of intense feelings of national belonging. At the same time, Romantic writers and artists fostered and built upon feelings of loyalty to the nation, producing works appealing to a common language or cultural identity. However, in the multinational empires that dominated central and eastern Europe until World War I, nationalism also served as a divisive force. At the same time, regional identities based on units either greater or smaller than that of the nation-state—e.g. Basque, Bavarian, pan-Slav, Flemish, or Irish—remained popular and influential throughout much of Europe. And even at the height of nationalism, for many workers socialism and the international struggle of the working class competed with nationalism as a framework for identification and loyalty. Especially with the growth of mass politics and media, western Europeans could also identify as part of a larger global entity, whether “overseas France,” or the British Empire and in the 20th century the British Commonwealth—each of which was assumed to have a unique mission and position in the world.

After World War I, with the exception of the emergent Soviet Union, Europe was dominated by nation-states. In central and eastern Europe, some states were riven with conflicts, and minorities that found themselves in vulnerable positions turned to the international League of Nations for protection. During World War II, Germany sought to create a pan-European empire based on an extreme version of German national identity and power. During the second half of the 20th century, as Europeans recovered from the strain of two world wars, Western European empires fractured and transformed into new political units. As they reconceived their role in a postwar world, Europeans could now identify with larger transnational organizations, such as the European Coal and Steel Community, or the community of countries assembled under NATO or the Warsaw Pact. Europeans have increasingly identified as members of the EU, even as regional and national affiliations continue to call into question the idea of a shared European identity.

[AP European History Course and Exam Description](#)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

© 2017 The College Board

Thematic Learning Objectives

This reconception of Europe has not been without difficulties, as Britain's late entry into the European community and subsequent decision to leave the EU illustrate. Europe as a concept has been and remains complex, evolving, and subject to changing perceptions, regulations, and legal frameworks. European identities since 1450 have been a fluid concept, with overlapping and non-competing identities enduring even in the age of nation-states. As new national entities form, merge, and in some instances disappear, these developments help shape popular understanding of what it means to be European.