

Western Society and Eastern Europe in the Decades of the Cold War

After World War II: A New International Setting for the West

- Europe's infrastructure, its economy, its people were devastated by World War II, to the point that survival itself was in doubt for the first years following the wars.
- The forces pushing toward decolonization became apparent soon after the war. Although violent, costly struggles resulted in some areas, decolonization was generally smooth from the 1950s through the 1970s. Western powers sometimes maintained positive relations with their former colonies. Yet the process also returned waves of embittered colonists to their home countries.
- The Cold War, between the United States and the Soviet Union, was one of the most important factors in the postwar world. The Soviet Union created an **eastern bloc**, including Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary. The United States, led by Harry Truman, was more antagonistic to the Soviet Union than were European powers. Winston Churchill called the division between the two spheres the **iron curtain**. The U.S. **Marshall Plan**, providing aid to Europe, was in part a means of resisting communism. In the immediate postwar period, Germany was the main battleground. The 1947 Soviet blockade of Berlin was countered by a United States airlift to bring in supplies. In 1948, Germany was divided into East and West Germany. The **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**, bringing together the North American and European powers, was matched by the Soviet-led **Warsaw Pact** countries. The onset of the Cold War meant increasing U.S. intervention in Europe. However, the U.S. and the Soviet Union were soon engaged in other world areas. U.S. militarization was one result of the Cold War, while European powers devoted less of their budgets to arming.

The Resurgence of Western Europe

- Following the war, European leaders were greatly influenced by their wartime experiences. Military defeat discredited fascism, and Europe moved to the left, supporting democracy and welfare institutions. Political reconstruction in Germany was initially slow, and was then influenced by the Cold War. Italy and Germany both drew up new constitutions.
- The **welfare state** grew out of the postwar need for reconstruction. In the United States, welfare programs began with the Depression-era New Deal. Typically,

states passed unemployment insurance, public health measures, family assistance, and housing aid. Governments relied on so-called **technocrats**, who were skilled in fields that Europe required for rebuilding.

- Student protests were common in Western countries in the 1960s. Material culture and social inequalities were common targets. In the 1970s, the **Green movement** became a significant political force. Recession was also widespread in the 1970s, reversing the trend toward larger governments.
- During and after World War II, many Europeans desired greater harmony among their nations. By 1958, six European powers had created the European Economic Community, later called the **European Union**. Initially motivated by economic goals, as the union grew, it also added a parliament and judiciary. Europe gained a mechanism for ensuring general peace.
- Substantial economic growth in postwar Europe was helped by agricultural improvements and a shift to production of consumer products. Steady growth occurred in the service industries. Immigration fed the need for labor. Material wealth and spending on leisure and luxuries increased substantially.

Cold War Allies: The United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand

- While the North American allies Australia and New Zealand did not experience the burst of growth that occurred in Europe after the war, growth did occur.
- Canada followed its own path of development, but continued economic cooperation with the United States. Asian immigrants changed Canada's makeup, and French Canadians pushed for autonomy. Australia and New Zealand shifted their alignment away from the British sphere to one dominated by the United States. Australia traded increasingly with Japan.
- In 1947, Harry Truman declared support for those resisting oppression. In part, this meant resistance to communism. A number of U.S. agencies, including the Central Intelligence Agency, the Strategic Air Command, and the military, were important tools that supported the Truman doctrine. The United States invaded North Korea in 1950, after the North Korean communist government had launched a surprise attack on South Korea. Dwight Eisenhower's presidency focused on containment of the Soviet Union, with notable failure in Cuba. The policy of containment resulted in the invasion of Vietnam. Public opposition, and the failure of the undertaking, led to withdrawal in 1973. The U.S. defeat in Vietnam led the country to change its attitude toward involvement in world affairs, but not official policy. Ronald Reagan's presidency, beginning in 1980, continued a policy of aggression toward the Soviet Union. Under George Bush, and to a lesser extent Bill Clinton, the United States continued to lead military actions overseas.

Culture and Society in the West

- Social conflicts in Europe were eased by greater prosperity, though class and race divisions did not disappear.
- The greatest social changes in the postwar West involved women. Many women employed during the war continued to work after the peace. By the 1920s, women comprised up to 44 percent of the workforce. Yet women's pay was often lower than men's, and women were most frequently employed in clerical posi-

tions. Women won the vote, and increasingly attended universities. Advocates for women's reproductive rights were often successful. These changes are partially responsible for declining birthrates and for children starting school earlier. Divorce became a common phenomenon. The **new feminism**, voiced by Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan, attempted to redefine women's roles. The movement was successful in bringing forward new political issues.

- Despite profound changes in Western society, cultural development often followed well-established lines. The United States was a growing power in intellectual life, as the country drew scholars from many areas. Important European scientific research continued, with such work as Francis Crick's study of DNA. In the arts, styles that had been shocking and ultramodern in the 1920s became familiar in the 1950s. "Pop" art used new media to bring art and popular culture together. Europeans generally took the lead in film. In the 1960s, Godard, Antonioni, and Bergman further developed the art of filmmaking. It is difficult to generalize about the social sciences, with the possible exception of a tendency to collect large databases of information for study.
- European popular culture was heavily influenced by the United States. In particular, U.S. television series gained large audiences in Europe. In popular music, however, the influence generally moved in the other direction. As in the United States, sexual behavior underwent a number of changes; for instance, premarital sex became more common.

Eastern Europe After World War II: A Soviet Empire

- Soviet post-war policy included a wish to protect the country from invasion and a desire to maintain its position as a world power. Pacific islands taken from Japan late in the war and influence in North Korea and Vietnam increased the Soviet sphere.
- While expanding its influence in many areas, the Soviet Union first extended its influence in Eastern Europe. The many young nations of the area had struggled between the wars and then had fallen to the Nazis. The Soviets took all but Albania, Greece, and Yugoslavia by 1948. In the region, the Soviet Union exported its collectivization program, and industrialization, while silencing opposition. The Warsaw Pact formed a separate economic sphere. Some social and economic problems were addressed, but the **Berlin Wall** was erected in 1961, making the Soviet approach to choice clear. Easing of Stalinism in 1956 led to high expectations. Poland showed some independence, with Soviet approval. A Hungarian uprising was viciously suppressed, but overall Soviet control did loosen. A more liberal Czechoslovakian regime was condemned by the Soviet Union. The Polish **Solidarity** movement was allowed to develop, under close scrutiny. While differences continued between countries, by the 1980s Eastern Europe had been transformed by Soviet influence. Conversely, the need to keep east European opposition under control kept the Soviet Union preoccupied.
- Propaganda was used by the Soviet leaders, vilifying the United States. Control of the media, of travel, and of the borders allowed the government to maintain control over its own people. Stalin's organization of the state and society, dominated by the Communist Party, continued with few changes.

Soviet Culture: Promoting New Beliefs and Institutions

- The Soviet government was an innovative attempt to expand the state with popular support, while promoting a new, common, culture. Its attack on the Orthodox Church began soon after the 1917 revolution, and mainly consisted of hampering the church's ability to influence the young. In the area of culture, as well, the government set its own agenda, often in opposition to Western trends. Ballet and classical music were important exceptions. Literature developed with relative freedom, often choosing themes that celebrated the Soviet experience. The author of *The Gulag Archipelago*, **Aleksander Solzhenitsyn**, is an example of a writer that adhered to many Russian values, while criticizing much of the Soviet government. The sciences and social sciences continued to hold a preeminent position, though under government control.
- Industrialization in the Soviet Union, along with most of Eastern Europe, was complete by 1960. Heavy industry was still given priority over manufacturing consumer goods. The drive to increase production had a serious, adverse impact on the environment. Leisure activities became important, and a division between workers and managers followed industrialization in the Soviet Union, as it had in the West. Changes in family structure, including a falling birthrate and increasing women's employment, also resembled Western developments.
- Stalin's death in 1953 jeopardized the system he had created. However, the system was sufficiently entrenched to survive. **Nikita Khrushchev** monopolized power in 1956, and condemned Stalin's methods. More criticism of the state was allowed. Khrushchev brought the Soviet Union close to war with the United States when he refused to back down in Cuba. Khrushchev's failed scheme to open Siberia to cultivation led to his fall from power. The 1960s and 1970s were relatively stable in the Soviet Union.

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. What phrase did Winston Churchill coin to describe the division between free and repressed societies after World War II?
(A) the red menace
(B) the iron curtain
(C) the Berlin Wall
(D) the Cold War
(E) the Marshall plan
2. What was the focal point of the Cold War in Europe immediately following World War II?
(A) Hungary
(B) Czechoslovakia
(C) France
(D) Germany
(E) Italy
3. Which of the following was consistent with the political viewpoint of the Christian Democrats?
(A) totalitarian government
(B) democratic institutions and moderate social reform
(C) abolition of trade unions
(D) nationalization of all industries
(E) suppression of the Catholic Church
4. What work by Simone de Beauvoir signified the beginning of the new feminism in 1949?
(A) *Patriarchal Society*
(B) *The Feminine Mystique*
(C) *The Second Sex*
(D) *Fear of Flying*
(E) *The Solidarity of Women*

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5. Which of the following nations did NOT remain independent of direct Soviet control by 1948?
- (A) Greece
 - (B) Albania
 - (C) Yugoslavia
 - (D) Poland
 - (E) Turkey
6. The independent labor movement in Poland that challenged Soviet dominance was called
- (A) Comintern.
 - (B) Solidarity.
 - (C) Izvestia.
 - (D) Pravda.
 - (E) Perestroika.
7. What Soviet leader emerged to take primary power in 1956?
- (A) Joseph Stalin
 - (B) Mikhail Gorbachev
 - (C) Yuri Andropov
 - (D) Nikita Khrushchev
 - (E) Yuri Gagarin
8. Postwar Soviet society resembled Western society in all of the following ways EXCEPT:
- (A) a falling birthrate.
 - (B) women entered the workforce in significant numbers.
 - (C) women's domestic roles were more idealized in the West.
 - (D) women increasingly received higher educations.
 - (E) leisure activities absorbed ever more available income.
9. Which of these statements are true about the Russian Orthodox Church under Soviet rule?
- (A) Orthodoxy was embraced as a vehicle for communist propaganda.
 - (B) The Orthodox Church was outlawed in its entirety.
 - (C) The government secularized the church as an agency of the state.
 - (D) The Orthodox Church survived, but was not allowed to instruct youth.
 - (E) Orthodoxy became an underground movement.
10. Nikita Khrushchev fell from power because
- (A) he failed to win more countries for communism.
 - (B) he failed to satisfy Stalinists, and over a new Soviet venture in Siberia.
 - (C) his missile policy in Cuba earned U.S. hostility.
 - (D) his repressive measures angered Russians desiring reform.
 - (E) the launching of *Sputnik* angered Soviet isolationists.

Free-Response Question

What were the key influences on Western cultural developments in the mid-20th century?

ANSWERS AND EXPLANATIONS

Multiple-Choice Questions

- **1. (B) is correct.** Winston Churchill first used the term to describe the increasing division between the two spheres.
- **2. (D) is correct.** Tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States first formed in struggles over post-war Germany.
- **3. (B) is correct.** The Christian Democrats sought moderate reform and democratic government.

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- **4. (C) is correct.** De Beauvoir’s work, *The Second Sex*, was one of the monuments of the new feminism.
 - **5. (D) is correct.** Most of southern Europe escaped Soviet control.
 - **6. (B) is correct.** Solidarity was the name of the worker’s movement that opposed Soviet rule.
 - **7. (D) is correct.** Nikita Khrushchev assumed political control in the Soviet Union in 1956.
 - **8. (C) is correct.** All of the phenomena occurred in both societies, except that women were expected to enter the work force, and there was no real distinction between men’s and women’s work.
 - **9. (D) is correct.** Under Soviet rule, Orthodoxy was allowed to continue, but was not allowed to instruct the young.
 - **10. (B) is correct.** Khrushchev was removed from power because he disappointed staunch followers of Stalin, and because his expansion of agriculture in Siberia was a failure.

Free-Response Essay Sample Response

What were the key influences on Western cultural developments in the mid-20th century?

While some traditional cultural influences continued in the 20th century, new impulses were also important. Figurative art and the novel were developed along lines begun in the 19th century, and traditional music and dance forms were still the subject of study. However, inspired by industrialization and the development of popular culture, such “pop” artists as Andy Warhol embraced new materials and new tastes to create a different aesthetic. Political ideology was less important than in the past.