



WHP 1200 Unit 4 Frames | World History Project

The world in 1750 had many types of communities with different forms of government. But for the most part, people were subjects—they were governed by others and had few political rights. The nation-state was a new kind of government in which a nation of citizens could govern themselves in a particular territory. Throughout the long nineteenth century, the period from 1750-1914, a number of nation-states were formed, and they have since come to dominate the world. But this was also an era in which many people were under the rule of empires, and remained subjects, rather than citizens.



0:13

World map with empires filled in.

Ottoman Empire highlighted on map.

Russian Empire highlighted on map.

Mughal Empire highlighted on map.

Qing Dynasty Empire highlighted on map.

Spanish and Portuguese colonies highlighted on map.

British, French, and Dutch colonies highlighted on map.

The world in 1750 was composed of many diverse kinds of human communities.

Let's start with empires. Empires stretched across vast regions of the world. Now, many of these empires had been around a long time. You encountered some of them in Unit 3.

In Afro-Eurasia, the Ottoman Empire's conquest of the eastern Mediterranean had begun as early as the thirteenth century.

And Russian expansion into Central Asia went back three hundred years.

In South Asia, the Mughals dated their rule about two hundred years back.

And the Qing Dynasty had ruled China and parts of Central Asia for a century.

Similarly, some of the Spanish and Portuguese colonies could be traced back two or three centuries.

At the same time, the British, French, and Dutch overseas empires were somewhat newer.

But lots of people didn't live in empires at all. Many lived in smaller centralized states, most of these were kingdoms of some sort, a form of government that dated back as much as five thousand years.

1:18

Illustrations of small communities and their leaders.

And others lived in even older types of organizations –in small societies where all politics was local. These societies were usually led by councils or chiefs, and people who lived in them were connected by family or a shared sense of place, and, in some cases, these small communities were tied together in confederations of villages all kind of loosely connected to each other. Of course, just because they were older doesn't mean that their forms of community weren't changing or evolving. It just means that in some places, local conditions led to smaller and less centralized governance.

And the small size of these communities also doesn't mean that these people had no sense of community outside their own neighborhood and village. Many people sensed that they shared a language or a culture with people who didn't necessarily live in the same political unit as they did.

Even more, people felt a sense of community with others who shared their religion, even if separated by many miles.

2:21

Image of different religious buildings.

And many of their religions were very old indeed. Islam at this point had existed for a millennium. And the kinds of Hinduism and Buddhism and Christianity and Islam and Judaism that were practiced in the 18th century were each evolved from much older religious communities.

Illustrations of different community leaders.

But one thing most people shared in common—whether they lived in big empire or a little village-based community— was an understanding that they were really somebody else’s subjects. They all shared a sense of not really having much political authority or standing of their own. Instead, they owed their allegiance to a chief, or prince, or a ruler of some sort and that person had the right—or at least the power—to make decisions for them.

But all of that was about to change.

3:16

In the long nineteenth century, the era between 1750 and 1914, new ideas were emerging.

Image of a slave narrative text and definition of individual sovereignty.

The first of these is individual sovereignty—the conviction that a person has a right to control their own bodies and choices;

Illustration of large crowd and definition of national sovereignty.

and this was connected to national sovereignty—the idea that people together have the right to make political decisions and exercise leadership;

Image of soldiers in the street and definition of nationalism.

And these ideas are connected to nationalism—the belief that people, governing themselves, have the right to a homeland.

Community frame graphic and definition of nation-state.

Together this made a new form of community, called the nation-state. Now a nation-state is a state, which is to say it’s a legal unit and a piece of territory. But it’s a state that coincides with a nation, which is a self-governing group of people.

And there’s no doubt that this change was revolutionary, as you will see in this unit. But I still want you to question the story of revolution I just told you, for a couple of reasons.

4:19

First, some people before 1750 had experimented with ideas that sounded quite a bit something like sovereignty and had created governments that looked a little bit like the nation-state. So these ideas weren’t really entirely new.

Illustrations with captions on different revolutions in history.

And also, even after revolutions created the first nation-states in the United States, Haiti, and France and Latin America, the new freedoms that they promised really spread very gradually and unevenly and at first enjoyed only by a privileged few people.

World map highlighting empires and colonies.

And finally, while the long nineteenth century might have been an Age of Revolutions, and it was, it was also an Age of Empires and an Age of Slavery.

Communities frame graphic.

Nevertheless, these new nation-states represented maybe the most important changes in the communities frame in hundreds of years, and as a result they produced changes in areas outside of politics.

5:15

Illustration of the steam engine.

For example, new technologies developed to support larger and larger nation-states. And that meant better methods of organization had to be invented and also new ways of communicating across long distances.

Illustration of Japanese soldiers.

World map with modern flags over each country.

Communities frame graphic.

Production and distribution and networks frames graphics.

And, similarly, the new nation-states needed new military technology to make them stronger than local warlords or nobles who might resist them.

With these advantages, the nation-state was able to dominate all other forms of political organization. And eventually, nation-states came to cover just about the entire world.

And so, for, better or worse, we live in a world of nation-states even today! And seen through the communities frame, that's one way of describing this era.

Can you use the production and distribution and networks frames to tell a different story about this period? I think you can, but we'll leave that up to you.



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