

**Cold War****Decolonization**

WHP 1200 Unit 8 Frames | World History Project

This period of history is usually viewed through the lens of two different struggles: the Cold War and decolonization. But if examine both struggles using our course frames, then we begin to see how these struggles were intertwined. As new communities or nation-states were formed through decolonization movements, the Soviet Union and the United States sought to establish networks that would extend their ideologies and influence.



0:13

*Image of US and USSR
Flags with text “Cold
War”.*

*Image of people protesting
with text “Decolonization”.*

*Images of Cold War and
Decolonization with
Frames graphics.*

*Cold War propaganda
and Communities frame
graphic .*

1:11

*Production and
distribution frame graphic.*

Text of US economy type.

*Text of USSR economy
type.*

*Communities frame
graphic.*

2:06

*World map of colonialism
in 1945.*

*Images of independence
movements in colonized
nations.*

*World map with modern
flags of each nation.*

Two global struggles dominated the second half of the century, from the end of the Second World War in 1945 to around 1990.

One struggle was the clash between two alliances —one led by the United States and the other by the Soviet Union— in what we call the Cold War.

The other struggle was a conflict between the remaining global empires and their colonized people, who were fighting for independence. This struggle is known as decolonization.

Now these two struggles are often studied separately. But the Cold War and Decolonization are best understood together, as we can see when we view them through our three frames.

The United States and Russia had been the two principal victors of the Second World War. So from one perspective, the Cold War was just a confrontation between these two powerful states—the most powerful communities of the age.

But the United States and the Soviet Union also had two very different systems of production and distribution.

On the one hand, the economy promoted by the United States was capitalist. It relied on a free market, with relatively little government oversight. And people could exchange goods and services pretty freely.

On the other hand, the Soviet Union represented a centralized, communist economy in which the government played a very big role.

Now capitalism and Communism each had their own strengths and weaknesses. But they also each had similar needs. And one of those needs was for raw materials. The battles to control raw materials played a role in the struggles to end colonial rule and helped draw both superpowers into decolonization conflicts.

Still decolonization conflicts centered on the shape of communities as well as issues of production and distribution.

People fighting for independence in Africa, Asia, and across the Pacific and the Caribbean wanted what others had fought for before. They wanted independent nation-states of their own.

Ironically, in fighting against the British, the French, and other western empires, these independence fighters adopted and used many ideas about sovereignty and legitimacy that the British, French, and other empires practiced at home. So decolonization movements used many tools of their oppressors to win their freedom, although they also developed many ideas of their own.

Those fighting for an end to empire were, in many ways, seeking equality in the world of nation-states. They were striving to become a nation among nations.

Images of diplomacy in the Cold War.

But the Cold War superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States, saw these independence battles as opportunities. They sought to further their own interests by enlisting these new states, or independence movements, to join either the communist or capitalist side.

3:06

Images of diplomacy in the Cold War.

Meanwhile, from their perspective, the leaders of anti-colonial movements in each colony knew they would have had little chance in fighting against their imperial rulers alone. So they sought support, not only from the superpowers, but also from each other. They built networks of supporters. They found ways to help each other morally, financially, even by hiding guerilla armies for each other. And as one colony became independent, it tended to help others around it or even far away.

Images of independence leaders giving speeches.

The leaders of decolonization movements also used new technologies like television to appeal for support in the Soviet Union, in the United States and even to influence public opinion in the countries that ruled them.

3:49

Images of world leaders.

So these two global, interlinked conflicts—the Cold War and Decolonization—continued alongside each other for half a century. Yet both conflicts would largely resolve by the 1990s, almost all colonies in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and elsewhere achieved political independence by that date.

Images of post-USSR Europe.

And also by the 1990s, the Soviet Union and its centralized economic system would collapse, along with communist government almost everywhere.

But this was not the end of the human story—no matter what frame you looked through. New issues of community, networks, and production and distribution emerged from behind the scenes even as these two great struggles played out. You'll take up the next chapter in these stories in unit 9.



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