



Frames in Era 6

How should we understand the changes that took place over the course of the long nineteenth century? Through the communities frame, as a change in the number, type, and shape of states and the political rights of people? Through the production and distribution frame, as a transformation in how people worked and got the stuff they needed? Or through the networks frame, in terms of increased connections among people? In each case, the world began to look a lot more like it does today.



00:01

*Bob Bain, PhD, University
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We use the word “revolution” to describe a lot of the big events and transformations of Era 6, including the Haitian Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the French Revolution. You’ll encounter all of these and more as you work your way through the long 19th century—the years between 1750 and 1914.

*Photo montage of art
depicting revolution
in Haiti, Mexico, Latin
America and the British
North American Colonies*

All of these revolutions signify enormous change, breaking with the past and creating something new. When viewed through each of the frames, we see that in many ways, a new world was created in this era. For example, people were rapidly changing their communities in a variety of ways. Old European empires in the Americas were collapsing. Many revolutions—in Haiti, Mexico, Latin America, and the British North American colonies—resulted in new, independent states.

00:59

*Nation-State: People
have a right to govern
themselves*

*Satirical art shows
colonizers standing on top
of a map, of the United
States and Gulf of Mexico*

Many of these states formed new kinds of communities: nation-states. These nation-states were based on the radical idea that a people—although not necessarily all people—had the right to govern themselves individually and together as a country. Nation-states are a legacy of this era that still endures today. The United States, for example, was a nation-state created in this era. But the birth of nation-states did not mean the immediate end of all empires. In fact, new empires were created in the long 19th century. Existing powers like Britain and France, along with new challengers like Germany, the United States, and Japan, captured territory and conquered people in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific.

01:42

Photos of bustling cities

Changes were also happening at a smaller level to the structures of our communities. More and more people were moving to bigger and bigger cities. City life often meant people had less support from families and neighbors and therefore needed to find new ways to connect and live with others. There was a growing philosophical challenge to religion; from changing ideas about religious communities and freedom. Changes that emerged in expanding networks of philosophers and scientists who created, exchanged, and tested big new ideas. These innovations helped us to better understand our environment, our universe, and ourselves, and challenged older and traditional views.

02:24

*Black-and-white photo of
2 young women protesting
slavery*

We developed a growing sense of human liberties and the rights of workers, children, and other groups. Within these networks, ideas moved faster and people shared them more effectively than ever before—a change that has accelerated ever since. Today’s networks of idea-sharing and communication are faster and more extensive than ever before. All these changes occurred in the context of perhaps the biggest revolution of this era: The Industrial Revolution.

02:55

*Drawing of a large crowd
of people, likely factory
workers, in front of a
large, industrial factory*

Not since humans started to farm had there been as large and important a transformation in production and distribution. The Industrial Revolution changed how we worked and how we lived. It shaped people’s daily lives and schedules, the size of their families, and the food they ate.

It also stimulated the development of not one but two new and competing economic systems: capitalism and socialism. In many ways, industrialization was the economic root of our modern world.

Our lives today— lived mostly in cities, employed for wages, buying what we need instead of making it ourselves— is a product of the Industrial Revolution. These revolutionary changes happened at enormous scale. People around the world became increasingly connected through their communities, networks, and systems of production and distribution.

03:49

*Images of soldiers all
around the globe*

*Drawing of a ship under
attack*

But these changes did not affect everyone equally—and not everybody changed in the same way or at the same time. Nevertheless, the long 19th century created a world that was more globalized than ever before. Now, when a major war broke out at the end of this era in 1914, people in many regions experienced that suffering together. That global war, World War I, broke down—for a time—the global system of production and distribution of goods and led to a great misery. It reduced connections between people and communities as shipping and communications came under attack. Great empires broke apart while some new states were created from the fragments. It proved, and not for the last time, that our societies can be disrupted across all the frames, even in the modern age.