



Frames in Unit 4

Modernity brought about three major transformations in relationships and identity in this period—labor, childhood, and gender. Or rather, people brought about these transformations as they created the modern world. Those people sought to improve living and working conditions and to shape the way society operated. Alone, they would have had little impact. Tied together in networks, however, they created significant change.



00:01

*Bob Bain, PhD, University
of Michigan
A view of the planet from
above*

*Photos of schools – then
and now*

The networks frame represents the ways humans connect and relate to each other as well as the paths through which we exchange not only goods and services, but also ideas, concepts, beliefs, and knowledge.

The long 19th century was an era in which a global network allowed many important ideas to emerge, and in which many beliefs about the world changed dramatically. It was an era in which our fundamental understanding of the world shifted. Out of this era, the modern education system—including your own school—was born, as was the modern university and its disciplines. Now just think about that.

00:43

*Drawing depicts a
meeting, something
that was a result of the
new idea of national
sovereignty;
Another drawing depicts
poor laborers outside a
large factory*

As new ideas developed and spread, political and economic transformation took effect within and among societies, and the shape of our networks changed. The concept of national communities raised questions about people's rights and responsibilities. These included political ideas like national and personal sovereignty. At the same time, the production and distribution system of the Industrial Revolution turned people into wage laborers for the very first time.

It also raised questions about the role of individuals in the economy and the nation. Together, these transformations threatened some very old ideas about networks, about how we should relate to each other.

01:26

*Image of a man fighting
with a policeman

Images of an anti-slavery
petition*

They also created some new ones. We can see this in three types of relationships in particular: labor, childhood, and gender. First, let's talk about labor. The concept of personal sovereignty combined with the Industrial Revolution created a struggle to reform how people worked. Where these trends were strongest, people connected to each other to challenge oppressive institutions. The earliest of these networks was based on a growing awareness that slavery, a long-standing practice across the world, was immoral and should be abolished. This movement started among a few formerly enslaved people of African descent, along with European religious activists and allied political radicals. But it gradually spread to large numbers of working-class people around the globe. The first worldwide anti-slavery convention met in 1840 in London. This convention created a global network of abolitionists. Working together, these groups forced the abolition of slavery across much of the Atlantic world, often against fierce resistance.

*Painting of a meeting of
abolitionists*

02:34

*Photos of picketers
defending fighting for
rights as factory workers

Newspaper ads and
comics discuss labor union
meetings*

The abolitionist movement inspired and connected to other social movements. One such movement sought to create better working conditions and rights for wage-earning factory workers, miners, and other laborers. These workers created networks known as unions. Unions united workers and helped them share strategies to improve their working conditions. These strategies achieved some success in making life better for specific groups of workers. Labor activists around the world then reached out to learn from and organize with each other. By the 1860s, they were meeting in multi-country organizations like the International Workingmen's Association. This group brought together representatives from half a dozen countries. By the end of the long 19th century, labor organizing connected people across all of the world's populated continents.

03:25

*Photos of protests around the world; women fighting for the right to vote
Photographs of Frederick Douglass and Elizabeth Cady Stanton*

Networks, alliances, and connections played a similar role in other struggles. Some of these struggles came even closer to questioning some of the fundamental categories and roles of the era. Women, and their allies, connected across many regions to agitate for political and social rights. In many cases, they built on organizations that had already been created to fight for abolition. For example, in the United States, abolitionists Frederick Douglass and Elizabeth Cady Stanton addressed the first women's rights convention in the United States at Seneca Falls in 1848.

04:02

Photo montage of protests around the world: protests against slavery, child labor, and for women's rights

These networks also contributed to a movement to ensure rights and protections for children, and also to help discipline them. They advocated taking children out of factory work and putting them in schools for much of the year. Reformers-- whether calling for abolition of slavery, better working conditions, women's political rights, or new ways of raising and treating children-- relied on local and international networks. But the changes they called for were often slow in arriving, fiercely resisted, and limited to just a few societies at first.

As we will see, they often conflicted with big power structures, including corporations and governments. Sometimes, they succeeded in getting power structures behind them. Other times, they plotted to overthrow the power structures that held them back. In both cases, these networks of activists fundamentally reshaped the kinds of relationships people had with each other in the decades to come.