



Global Society

The World Since 1900

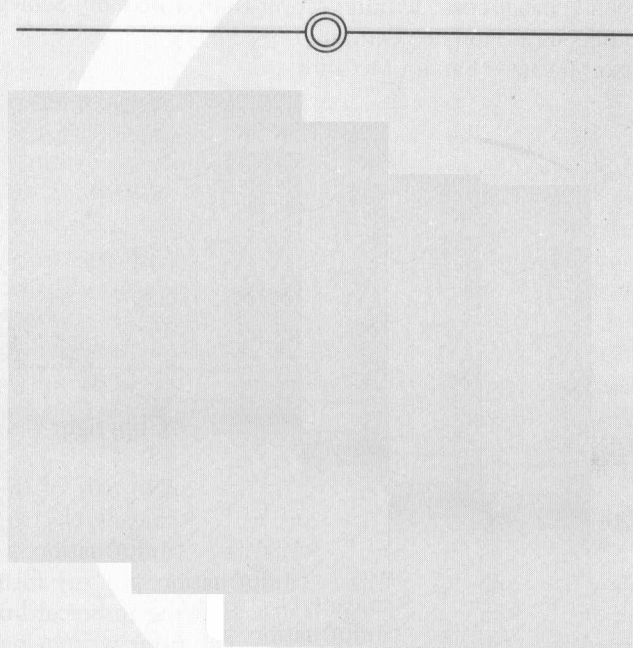
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Preface



Contemporary history is like an autobiography, in that you cannot wait until it is over to start writing it. In general historians like to have a certain distance from their subject, hoping that it will afford more information and greater objectivity. But those who have chosen the “twentieth century” as their field of coverage neither have the luxury of distance nor, perhaps, the taste for it. Houghton Mifflin published Foster Rhea Dulles’s *Twentieth-Century America* in 1945, when most of the twentieth century lay in the future. As the title suggests, Dulles wrote in a time when history was usually told as the story of one nation or another; he had few books of the sort we would now call “world” or “global” history to consult, although he read extensively in the fresh histories of other nations that were then being published in great numbers. As the time of his book’s publication suggests, he considered that the great drama of the twentieth century—the Second World War—had concluded, and that its great lesson was the triumph of freedom over fascism and of nationalism over colonialism. These themes remained fundamental to all twentieth-century histories written afterward.

By the 1980s, a small number of twentieth-century world history texts were in print, and they tended to treat the Cold War as the climax of the twentieth-century story. From this perspective, the narrative of the Second World War emphasized the conclusion of the war, the beginning of the nuclear age, and the partitioning of world resources, affiliations, and perspectives between the USSR and the United States. But the final decades of the century revealed developments that demand yet another revisiting of its major events, this time with a focus on larger trends in world economic and environmental management, patterns in the distribution of wealth and power, and energies creating new cultures and subcultures around the globe.

Our book extends many of the themes introduced in Bulliet et al., *The Earth and Its Peoples* (one of the first textbooks with an integrated narrative of global trends across regions and national boundaries from human beginnings to the present), into a detailed treatment of the twentieth century. We prefer to explain the origins and workings of great changes on an integrated global scale rather than narrate the histories of discrete regions of the world. On the other hand, we are eager to keep the reader mindful of the significance of individual and local experience in the context of greater trends. One of our authors was an author of *The Earth and Its Peoples*, and the two others were welcomed for their fresh perspectives on global history and expertise in the history of science and technology. In designing the book we worked together with Marysa Navarro, a specialist on modern Latin America. Our book emphasizes the transnational dynamics of environmental change, technological development and distribution, and broad cultural trends,

such as the growing awareness of gender and ethnicity. Instead of seeing “nations”—whether governments or populations—as discrete units, we look, when appropriate, within and beyond nation-states to identify those groups and institutions that operate on a transnational level. Competition and accommodation, stratification and equalization, distribution and maldistribution, cultural convergence and cultural differentiation are all at work within a global—rather than national or regional—context. Global processes work themselves out differently in different regions shaping and reshaping distributions of power. The globe does not produce homogeneity any more than does a single society. On the contrary, contact and exchange result in constant cultural production, ending some traditions and creating others, destroying some elites and elevating new contenders, exhausting some resources and generating new ones.

Organization

Because we have resisted allowing a single national history or a succession of constructed political eras to control the narrative, the structure of our book is chronological but not rigid in the assignment of specific years to specific chapters. Broadly, our part structure is built around different phases of globalization.

Part I: Old and New Empires, 1900–1919, explores the systems of imperialism, world trade, and politics that prevailed at the beginning of the twentieth century. It covers not only the slow chaos of the disintegration of the great empires based in Europe and Asia, but also the emerging cultural sensibility of the “modern,” the “international,” and the “progressive” as people learned of a wider world through rapidly changing technologies. New political programs—mostly national in orientation—combined with communications have a global reach to stimulate creative energies on all continents. Widening ambitions and notions of justice prompted activists of many sorts to work for reform or revolution, encouraged by international examples and contacts. The First World War, begun as the result of imperial competition and age-old balance of power politics, ended in the dissolution of old empires and birth of new international movements. Well beyond Europe, societies had to adapt to multiple importations as new elites came to power. For the first time in history, the Pacific region became a focus of strategic calculation by the world’s most powerful governments.

Part II: Struggles for Supremacy, 1919–1945, treats the tumultuous attempts to restore global order following World War I. We see nation-states struggling not only to control parts of the world left ungoverned or unexploited by the decline of the empires, but also to deal with waves of economic dislocation. Powerful new technologies for the production of goods spread globally, while old patterns of exchange and distribution broke down. The loss of a largely unified world market in a period of depression pressured political elites to innovate for their own survival. Scientists reshaped the world of ideas as growing numbers of engineers remade large parts of the material world. Hard times went along with demographic advances, with shifts in gender relations, and with cultural innovation. Local solutions to global problems, as invented in Europe and Asia, aggravated existing

tensions and led to distinct wars between Japan and China, in one venue, and between the German government led by Hitler and his European neighbors, in another venue. Only after the USSR and the United States became combatants in these conflicts did a Second World War emerge—enormously more deadly and certainly more worldwide than its earlier namesake. From the time of the participation by the USSR and the U.S., the elements were in place not only for concluding the war but also restructuring global patterns of power and distribution and tackling environmental problems.

Part III: Rise and Fall of the Bipolar Order, 1946–1981, deals with the politics, economics, and culture of the Cold War. We point out that even while the bipolar order was being established by the U.S. and the USSR, it was being subverted by leaders in Latin America, Africa, and Asia who were seeking a fuller independence from former or current colonial masters. Unlike the imperial systems still in place at the beginning of the century, the superpowers of the Cold War era regarded emerging states as sovereign nations, to be enlisted as clients either through persuasion or coercion. For their part, the new nations negotiated the narrow path between the superpowers as best they could. China and India, in particular, struggled for leadership of this “Third World” of nations hoping for safety and prosperity outside domination of the superpowers. By the time of Nixon’s visit to China in 1971, the bipolar order was markedly weakened and was soon to be superseded by new patterns of competition for dominance. Though neither the superpowers nor the nonaligned nations triumphed, their jockeying for position stimulated international investment, technological borrowing and adaptation, and competition over resources. Globalization of both production and consumption changed ways of life on all continents. Mass marketing and television reached citizens in the village, as well as the metropolis. Cheap travel brought tourists to the ends of the earth. In many regions of the world—particularly Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Africa—the stresses of population growth, urbanization, and manufacturing for export undermined existing social relationships and wreaked environmental havoc at the same time as rising wealth empowered new elites.

Our final two chapters in **Part IV: Emergence of New Global Systems from 1981** are neither summaries nor predictions. In this section, we consider the “global society” that has emerged from the previous parts of the story at work. The bipolar international system has been replaced by a multi-centered order operating within a highly competitive, global economy whose defining characteristic is rapid change. While new electronic technologies have opened access to information and international communication, differentials in the distribution of wealth and well-being remain extreme. International organizations of many sorts negotiate problems of resources, environmental management, capital investment, health, education, and security with mixed success. Dissidence and resistance also take on new global forms, exploiting the same avenues of media and technology used by the more formal powers. While some groups, and indeed some nations, still influence world political and economic development disproportionately, in the global society, effective change is increasingly the result of coalitions and compromise. Whether the new patterns of global society will enhance or degrade general welfare

cannot be known now. We hope we have illuminated the degree of, and the reasons for, the dramatic transformations that have affected so many of us in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Features

To build upon the book's coverage of the environment and technology, we have included a feature called "Global Technologies." This feature explains the development of a new technology and examines its effect on history. Some of the topics covered include: electric lighting, cryptography, antibiotics, television, and the Internet.

An *Instructor's Manual* is available free to instructors using this text. It offers chapter summaries and outlines, suggested classroom discussion and lecture topics, and helpful guidelines for teaching a twentieth-century world history course. In addition, a free student website accompanies this text. The site offers self-testing quizzes, chapter and topic review sections, and web exercises for further exploration of global topics.

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