## The Modern World Timeline

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1. Exploration**  | **2. Colonization** | **3. Absolutism & Enlightenment** | **4. Revolutions & Nationalism** | **5. Industrial Revolution** | **6. Imperialism**  | **7. WW1 & Russian Revolution** | **8. Depression and WW2** | **9. Cold War** | **10. New Nations**  |
| **1492** Christopher Columbus arrives to the Americas | **1521**Aztecs conquered by Spanish conquistador Hernan Cortez | **1689**John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government* | **1789-99**French Revolution | **1781**James Watt patents a steam engine | **1884**Berlin Conference | **1918**Treaty of Versailles | **1939-1945**Holocaust | **1945**Atomic Bomb | **1947** India gains independence |
| **Annotations:**  |
| 1. Merchants, especially along the Silk Road, had been important carriers of wealth, learning, and culture in Asia at the time of the Mongolian Empire. During the Crusades, Europeans were exposed to the bounty of the wider world, which prompted the Renaissance, a time of renewed interest in classical learning and inquiry. Seeking direct trade with East Asia, various European explorers successfully found water routes to Asia, which bypassed the Middle East. This led to intense competition among Europeans for control of those sea routes and increased development of commercial activity to support those expeditions (banks, investment, and companies).
 |
| 1. As Europeans competed for control of resources, they began to colonize foreign lands. While Portugal began taking control of Asian trade routes by developing trade ports throughout Africa and Asia, Spain expanded control by conquering whole regions in the Americas to exploit their land for resources and their people for labor. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade also developed to exploit African labor as Native people suffered from diseases introduced in the Columbian Exchange. The West became increasingly powerful as the world economy became globalized and under their control.
 |
| 1. The humanism and inquiry of the Renaissance (14th and 15th century) prompted further intellectual movements in Europe, whether the Reformation (16th century) in the area of religion or the Scientific Revolution (17th century) in the study of the natural world. Heavily influenced by the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment (18th century) tried to apply the idea of natural laws to the social and political world. This bourgeois (middle class) movement not only demonstrated their increasing power, but also a growing discontent with the absolutism of European monarchies.
 |
| 1. The full flowering of the Enlightenment occurred when its ideas prompted revolutions around the world, beginning with the American Revolution. The French Revolution followed with a greater social and political upheaval. The monarchy was overthrown and a republic was formed. It influenced the decline of monarchies and the spread of democratic ideals around the world, especially in Latin America (Haiti, Mexico and South America). With monarchs no longer the unifying factor for a people, a sense of ‘national’ identity developed to bring cohesion to new republics.
 |
| 1. The Industrial Revolution was a dramatic shift in production that had profound social and political effects. It began by harnessing new fuels—coal, oil and gas—with the steam engine, but then found a multitude of applications in various industries. Initially it impacted the textile industry when machines were invented to increase the productivity of spinning thread and weaving fabric. Factories were built in cities to house these new machines and protect their investment. People moved to cities (urbanization) seeking employment because better farming methods made many workers unnecessary.
 |

|  |
| --- |
| 1. The demand for natural resources increased when machines made the production of goods more efficient. Unable to meet their own needs industrialized, European countries looked outward to trade for those goods and further colonize foreign lands. European colonization now moved from the coastlands to the interior to exploit their natural resources. The Berlin Conference divided Africa among European nations for their colonization. It was justified with the idea of Social Darwinism, which taught that Europeans were more civilized and therefore more fit to rule other “uncivilized” people.
 |
| 1. European competition for resources overseas escalated through strong nationalism and military build-up. European nations formed alliances in this increasingly hostile context. This volatile situation exploded with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand II, tipping the continent into a devastating war with an enormous number of casualties. When an armistice was reached, Woodrow Wilson attempted to bring a lasting peace with his Fourteen Points. Nevertheless a harsh settlement was reached with the Treaty of Versailles that crushed the German nation and set the stage for the World War II. The Russian Revolution brought the end of the Russian Tsars and instituted the first nation committed to communism, which also would background the Cold War conflict after WWII.
 |
| 1. Many nations already unhappy with the peace settlement were further disgruntled by the economic downturn of the Great Depression. In this desperate situation many were drawn to the strong nationalism and totalitarian leaders of fascism. Hitler became a powerful unifying figure in Germany, but his fervent nationalism was also expressed in a hatred for “outsiders” like Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, and political dissidents. With his dictatorial power, the Nazis were successful in exterminating many of these people, particularly the Jews, through extermination camps. Hitler was ultimately defeated, but the horror of these events and the war overall, prompted the world to unify for peace in the United Nations.
 |
| 1. World War II was ultimately brought to an end with the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. This weapon embodied the ensuing arms race between the US and Soviet Union in their struggle for power over the postwar world. The Cold War broke out into military conflicts throughout the world that often ignored local issues in their ideological struggle for power. This conflict nearly brought the world into a nuclear war. The military expense drained the economy of both nations, but with greater impact on the Soviets. Gorbachev’s policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* led to an internal collapse of the Soviet Bloc.
 |
| 1. Europe was significantly weakened after two major wars and their colonies were able to gain independence in this context. Many nations were formed during this time, especially in Africa, whether through violent or nonviolent methods. The most notable movement was in India under the leadership of Gandhi. His nonviolent movement demonstrated the oppressive rule of British imperialism, but also the equal humanity of the Indian people. South Africa was the location of another significant movement of people against the colonizing regime of Europeans. Nelson Mandela was among many leaders fighting against apartheid.
 |
| **Thesis:** The Modern Era is a time of increasing globalization. In its early stages, various regional economies around the world were brought together, particularly under the control of European nations. European explorers transitioned from merchants to conquistadors in their desire to control natural resources around the world. This external reorientation resulted in an internal transformation with a rising bourgeois, who were unhappy with the imbalance of power around absolute monarchs. The revolutionary ideas of the Enlightenment marked a new shift in power from monarchs to the middle class, from absolutism to republics, transforming Europe and many of its colonies. It also set the stage for a new level of globalization, but this time to draw the world into the productivity of the industrial revolution. The merchant middle class were investing in new machines and factories that brought extraordinary levels of efficiency, but likewise created a demand for greater resources and new markets. A new wave of colonization was initiated to exploit the natural resources of other regions. European imperialism devastated not only Africa and Asia, but also itself as national competition drew them into two world wars. Those wars weakened Europe enough to see new nations arise out of those colonies and also brought the world into a desire to work for peace. That peace was stretched though as the United States and Russia struggled to replace Europe for domination. The legacy of imperialism continues to impact our globalized world.  |