

From: The Modern World Global History since 1760 Course Team <noreply@coursera.org>
To: jeeproject@yahoo.com
Subject: Starting Week 5
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Dear jeffrey epstein,

Welcome to the new students who are still joining the class! For example, in the last ten days about 3,500 students submitted a quiz answer for presentation 1.1, the one that starts off the course. Plenty of time to catch up, including with these weekly announcements, archived on the site, and the terrific worldwide conversation going on in the discussion forums.

For those of you who are now transitioning from Week 4 to Week 5, a simple way to think about this transition is that Week 4 is about transformation and Week 5 looks at how societies around the world worked out the initial consequences.

There is such a wealth of detail and events that we cover every week that it may help to focus on just a few key questions. I'll offer you one for reflection in Week 4 and another as you dive into the new presentations now being posted.

Week 4: Consider this question: Why the massive innovation in Western Europe and the European offshoots?

Hypothesis one: This emphasizes geographical luck and material circumstances. Through good fortune, the Europeans had more coal, more access to resources in the Western Hemisphere and in colonies, and could thus fuel an industrial revolution. This includes access to more arable and well-watered land. The more sophisticated version of this hypothesis would notice that material circumstances stimulated human creativity to take advantage of these circumstances.

Hypothesis two: This emphasizes the conditions of knowledge production and knowledge conversion. Conversion? That is how the knowledge gets converted into wide-scale investment in and construction of transforming stuff like steamships, railways, telegraph connections, universities, arsenals of advanced weapons, etc. etc. Remember that there is a lot more to innovation in a society than an initial invention. This hypothesis tend to focus attention on (and judge) different cultures or forms of governance.

Noting that word "judge," it is not hard to see why people might get in arguments between these hypotheses. This course has already leaned heavily on hypothesis one, especially in the scene-setting of Week 1. But I do argue that there is a necessary complement -- some version of hypothesis two. But just what is that magic, intangible elixir?

I don't see an easy answer. Consider my use in one of the presentations of the three illustrations of innovation/development: steam engines, usable electricity (e.g. telegraph), evolutionary biology. The origins of innovation (which is a much bigger notion than mere "invention") in these cases each seem different enough to defy easy generalization. I offer a few suggestive observations, but urge you to reflect on this too. For instance, is some sort of democratic revolution, some elements of "liberal" culture or governance as I describe, a precondition to sustainable large-scale innovation by societies? Which elements stand out to you?

Week 5: As you go through the presentations, keep this in mind: Why all these civil wars?

Between about 1854 and 1871, there were at least five massive sets of civil wars I'll discuss. Probably the largest, at least in loss of life, was the one in China. There was another in Japan. There was another in India. Another in the United States. And the wars of national unification that forged the kingdom of Italy, the German empire, and

a new "third" French republic featured an intense mixture of internal and international conflict.

So the question to keep in mind: Are all these internal upheavals occurring around the world, mainly during the 1860s, just a coincidence? You'll see I argue, following the work of historians like Chris Bayly and others, that they are not a coincidence — they are the consequences of analogous global forces. So then you might wonder: What connects them, then? Then off you go into the presentations!

Best wishes,

Philip Zelikow

The Modern World: Global History since 1760 Course Team

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