

## The Americas and Australia A Nineteenth Century Overview

### THE RISE OF THE UNITED STATES

Eighteenth-century liberalism received concrete expression in the US Constitution. At the same time, the United States maintained a political system in which power was shared between the central government and the states – a system known as federalism. But the Constitution left some questions unanswered. One of those – the question of the nature of federalism and the ability of the central government to enforce its authority in the states – was one of the causes of the American Civil War. In the end, this question was answered in favor of enhanced central government power.

**Political Democracy.** Some aspects of political democracy developed more quickly in the young American nation than in most others. Gender, property and race qualifications were eliminated over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, though changes in attitude did not always keep pace. African-Americans were legally enfranchised in 1870, but various racist devices kept them from the polls for years to come.

**Impressions of a European Observer.** An interesting relationship between what was happening in the United States and the striving for democratic reform in France is seen in the life and writings of Alexis de Tocqueville, a young French aristocrat who toured the United States in 1831 and 1832. Profoundly impressed with what he saw, after his return to France he became a member of the Chamber of Deputies and worked for reform. In 1835 he published his famous two-volume work *Democracy in America*, which became the best analysis available of American political life. America, he told his countrymen, was a land of limitless opportunity and of enviable political equality and wisdom. It had its weaknesses, including slavery and the way Native Americans were treated. Nevertheless, he believed, the American system was an ideal model for the kind of democracy and social equality he saw developing in Europe.

**American Religion.** de Tocqueville also reported that in the United States no religious doctrine displayed “the slightest hostility to democratic and republican institutions.” He also wrote of the impressive way that the Americans seemed to tolerate the various Christian denominations. Further, he proclaimed that there was “no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America.” These were somewhat idyllic assertions, though what was happening to America religion fit in well with the American democratic faith and the general spirit of reform.

### NATIONALISM, AMERICAN STYLE

One kind of American nationalism was eloquently summed up by Andrew Jackson, who proclaimed that America should “go on elevating our people, perfecting our institutions, until democracy shall reach such a point of perfection that we can acclaim with truth that the voice of the people is the voice of God.” This statement expressed the feeling that the United States had a destiny (many saw it as a divine destiny) to demonstrate to the world the nobility of its people and institutions and, in the process, to expand its borders.

**Nationalism in Foreign Affairs.** The young American nation came into dispute with several European powers, including an indecisive war with England in 1812 (which is often referred to as the Second War of American Independence) over the rights of neutral ships on the high seas during the Napoleonic Wars of Europe. War resulted in a new surge of nationalism. Then, in 1823, President James Monroe issued what is known as the “Monroe Doctrine,” stating that the Americas were no longer subject to colonization by European powers. The United States’ own weakness might have made the Monroe Doctrine laughable had it not also been in England’s interest to keep Spain from regaining its colonies.

**Manifest Destiny.** The American population was rapidly expanding westward. Many of the settlers were immigrants seeking new economic opportunities. Between 1845 and 1854 alone, 2.4 million people arrived in America from Europe. Good farmland east of the Mississippi was nearly all taken up. Both old and new Americans were looking beyond the river into the Louisiana Territory (purchased in 1803), Texas, the Mexican territory of California and Oregon country. It was the nation’s “manifest destiny,” proclaimed magazine editor John L. O’Sullivan in 1845, “to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.”

**Expansionism in Action.** Most Americans believed O’Sullivan. They applauded a revolution in the Mexican State of Texas in 1836. Then, in 1845, they accepted Texas into the American union. That

next year their expansionist president, James K. Polk, ended the agreement with Britain for joint occupation of Oregon. He also declared war on Mexico; the war ended in 1848 with the acquisition of practically all the remaining territory west of the Rocky Mountains. From the standpoint of territorial acquisition, the United States' first adventure in imperialism was a raging success. The vast new areas opened for settlement attracted hundreds of thousands of people, provided homes and economic and economic opportunity for poverty-stricken immigrants from Europe, expanded American political institutions from coast to coast and enhanced America's economic growth. The transcontinental railroad, completed in 1869, sped up the settlement process and was the most important boon of the century to national business and commercial activity.

**The Underside of Nationalism.** The consequences of nationalism were not always positive. Nationalistic pride brought on a high degree of antipluralism in a society that should have been able to accommodate a variety of ethnic, cultural and religious differences. American "nativists" often looked askance at groups that were not Anglo-Saxon or Protestant, did not speak English, or seemed to be developing exclusive communities or secret organizations. Irish Catholics, German immigrants, Masons, Mormons and other groups were all targets of political and economic persecution that often became violent.

**Impact of Native Americans.** In addition, territorial expansionism and western settlement were not a blessing to everyone. The American government never knew what to do with the Native Americans who were already on the land coveted by prospective settlers. Under the Indian Removal Policy of the 1820s and 1830s, many tribes were moved west of the Mississippi with the promise that they would be taught agricultural pursuits and never required to move again. The promises were not kept. Later in the century, the Native Americans on the Great Plains and further west continually resisted incursions on their hunting lands. Euro-Americans, however, could never understand their nomadic way of life; in addition to destroying the buffalo (their main source of food, clothing and shelter), they also destroyed large numbers of the people themselves. Those who survived continued to resist white incursions until they were rounded up on reservations. There they carried out a valiant but pathetic effort to maintain a traditional way of life. In 1887, well-meaning reformers persuaded Congress to pass the Dawes Severalty Act, intended to encourage Native Americans to leave the reservations, take up farming, and become American citizens. Many refused to take advantage of this act, since it required them to denounce their native heritage and pledge allegiance to the government of the United States. Those who took up the offer, however, had no experience in private land ownership, and they did not know how to resist fraud. The tragic result was that much of the former reservation land ended up in the hands of white speculators. Land that was left to the Native Americans was largely unsuited for agriculture.

## **THE WAR OF UNITED STATES UNIFICATION**

**Problems and Civil War.** Economic differences between North and South tended to divide the nation. The northern economy was based largely on family farming, commerce, and the New England textile industry. The southern economy, on the other hand, was tied to large plantations, and particularly to the production of cotton. It was dependent on African slavery to provide the necessary labor. The two economies worked together; the South grew cotton, and the North shipped it or used it for domestic manufacturing. However, the American experience was a classic case of conservative feudalism vs. enlightened liberalism, which was causing many political conflicts in Europe as well.

By the end of the 1850s, the issues of central government control began to become intense as the nation focused on the issue of African slavery. Fuel was added to the fire with the Supreme Court's decision (in the Dred Scott case) that slaves, as property, were protected by the Constitution. In other words, Congress could not prohibit the spread of slavery in new lands added to the nation. Then in 1860, the Republican Party nominated Abraham Lincoln, a known opponent of slavery, for President. Fearing that the election of such a man would lead to the elimination of slavery, South Carolina seceded from the union, followed by the rest of the southern states. The following civil war was the fight between these two sides. In terms of loss of life, this four-year war was the most destructive war in which the United States has ever been engaged.

**Changing American Federalism.** Postwar amendment to the Constitution prohibited slavery, prevented states from denying former slaves the right to vote, and defined citizenship in such a way that everyone, including former slaves, was recognized as a full-fledged citizen of the state in which he or she was born. But the Fourteenth Amendment also prevented states from depriving a person of life, liberty or property with due process of law. Federal courts now held the power to review almost any state action, thus permanently changing the nature of American federalism.

**Economic Development.** The North fueled the industrial economy of the United States after the war. Fortunes were made in railroads, oil, steel, and finance. Entering the twentieth century, the United States surpassed all other countries of the world in steel production.

**Urbanization.** The period from 1860 to 1910 also saw the rise of the city. New opportunities for industrial employment attracted large numbers of people from the countryside to the cities. But despite the opportunities, urbanization was not all positive. Rapidly growing cities produced slums, disease, unemployment, and miserable living conditions for those who could afford to live only in crowded, dingy tenement dwellings.

This urban expansion was further aided by a wave of immigration around the turn of the century. From 1880 to 1910, between 17 and 18 million people flocked to the United States, many of them from southern and eastern Europe. While they often faced prejudice and discrimination, this immigrant base set the state for the explosive economic power the United States would enjoy throughout the twentieth century and through the present time.

## CANADA

The Seven Years' War between Britain and France ended in 1763 with the signing of the Treaty of Paris. The former French colony of Canada now became a British colony. This was a shock to French Canadians, as they were now ruled by British governors and their economic life was dominated by English-speaking businesses and merchants.

### BRITISH LEGISLATION

Acquiring a colony in Canada created a complex political situation for Britain. British forms of government were unfamiliar to the former French colony. In addition, the Roman Catholic Church was very strong among the French-speaking population of Canada.

**The Quebec Act.** The Quebec Act was passed in 1774 partly to deal with these issues. Quebec had the largest French-speaking population in Canada and was therefore the center of French cultural influence and potentially the focus of the greatest difficulty for the colony's new British overlords. The Quebec Act gave Quebec an appointed governor and council and made the Roman Catholic Church the established religion there.

**The Canada Act of 1791.** The Quebec Act was designed to placate French Canadians. But especially during the War of American Independence, more and more English loyalists moved to Canada. French-speaking Canadians felt they were being overwhelmed, while English-speaking colonists wanted the kinds of representative assemblies to which they were accustomed. In an attempt to ward off further tension, the British Parliament passed the Canada Act in 1791. This act divided the colony into Upper Canada (mostly English-speaking) and Lower Canada (mostly French-speaking). Each half had its own legislature. Although the new political arrangement did help to diffuse some of the immediate tensions, in the long run Anglo-French antagonism continued to be a major feature of Canadian political, economic and social life.

### SELF GOVERNMENT: THE DOMINION OF CANADA

As Canada struggled to define its national identity, it also moved closer and closer to self-government and independence.

**Union Act of 1840.** A variety of issues led to a series of insurrections in Canada in 1837. In America, the British had already seen what could happen when colonies rebelled. Though they were able to suppress the rebellions in Canada, they realized that a long-term solution would require governmental reform rather than merely calling out the army. Lord Durham was therefore sent to Canada as governor. His 1839 *Report on the Affairs of British North America* became a landmark along the road to self-government. Durham's recommendation that Upper and Lower Canada be reunited with a single legislature, an appointed governor and a greater degree of control over their own affairs formed the basis for the Union Act of 1840. London continued to control foreign affairs and some other matters, but Durham's report set a precedent on which the British could draw as it wrestled with the problems of self-government in its other English-speaking colonies in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

**North America Act of 1867.** The Union Act did not solve all of Canada's problems. Anglo-French rivalry continued, as did concern about possible domination by Canada's neighbor to the south, the United States. In an attempt to create an even stronger union, in 1867, the British Parliament passed the North American Act. Under the terms of this act, the recently united Ontario and Quebec were once more divided into separate provinces. They joined New Brunswick and Nova Scotia in forming the Dominion of

Canada, with Ottawa as the capital. A parliamentary form of government was adopted, the use of both English and French was guaranteed by law, and all matters except foreign affairs were left in the hands of the Canadians. The British government appointed a governor-general to be the head of state and maintain Canada's close ties with the mother country.

**John A. McDonald.** Canada's first prime minister under the new federation was John A. McDonald. The most important Canadian political figure in the last half of the nineteenth century, McDonald was determined to strengthen the Dominion further by expanding across the continent, and by 1873 this had been accomplished in a number of ways. The Northwest Territories were purchased from the Hudson Bay Company in 1869. In 1870, the province of Manitoba was created from a portion of this purchase. British Columbia (on the Pacific Coast) joined the Dominion in 1871, followed two years later by Prince Edward Island.

**Canadian Pacific Railway.** McDonald and his government were convinced that the eastern and western portions of the Dominion had to be tied together by something more solid than the new political arrangements. McDonald had persuaded British Columbia to join the federation in part by promising a transcontinental railroad. Such a railroad seemed the best way to unite regions with diverse interests. The Canadian Pacific Railway was completed in 1887 and other lines followed.

**Impact of the Railroad.** In addition to linking Canada's eastern and western provinces, the railroad also spurred settlement along its path. As towns grew and people and goods moved along the lines, two more provinces – Alberta and Saskatchewan – were added to the Dominion in 1905. The railroad made it easier to move Canada's mining and timber resources. It also facilitated the westward movement of the wave of immigrants who made their way to Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

## RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES

The relationship between Canada and the United States continued to be marked by tension. The War of 1812 against the United States was one of the few events of the early nineteenth century that could unite Canadians. After the war, border conflicts and trade disputes continued. There was also a fear in Canada that its rapidly growing neighbor to the south might dominate Canada as well – economically and culturally, if not politically. These fears meant that even the Canadian transcontinental railroad had to be seen as a mixed blessing – it contributed to the growth of the Canadian economy, but it also helped like the Canadian economy to that of the United States.

Political and cultural links with England, a strong French presence in Quebec and concerns about its relationship with the United States made it difficult for Canadians to forge a distinct, clearly defined national identity.

## AUSTRALIA

In 1770, Captain James Cook “discovered” Australia and claimed it for King George. Such action was typical of both European and, later, American imperialism. National self-interest on the part of technologically and economically powerful nations led them to simply take over other lands, regardless of the feelings or desires of the native peoples. The assumption seemed to be that less advanced people had no claim to an area if that was necessary to the political and economic interests of the great Western nations. This was the price of “progress.”

**Australian Aborigines.** The land that Cook claimed for his king was already inhabited by perhaps 300,000 aborigines spread across the continent. Their economy was a meager one, based largely on hunting, gathering and fishing. They had been relatively undisturbed by outsiders before the arrival of Cook, but they became the first victims of European settlement in Australia.

The impact of British imperialism on the Australian aborigines was not much different from the impact of European imperialism on native peoples in the Americas or Africa. As the land was taken over by white intruders, the aborigines were unable to maintain either their traditional culture or their traditional economic activity. Disease, alcohol, dislocation, slaughter and racial mixing led to a rapid decline in the aborigine population.

**A Penal Colony.** At the time of Cook's voyage, Britain was experiencing a serious problem with overcrowded prisons. Until the time of American independence, Britain had sent thousands of convicts to penal settlements in its colony of Georgia. With that option no longer available, Australia seemed to be a perfect substitute.

Accordingly, in 1788 a fleet of British ships unloaded its cargo of convicts at Botany Bay. Captain Arthur Phillip, who had been appointed governor of the new penal colony, headed the expedition. Conditions were extremely difficult, food was in short supply and morale was very low. But though the early years were difficult, the colony survived and a number of settlements were established, including one at Port Jackson (modern-day Sydney).

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

To the first European settlers and explorers, Australia did not appear very hospitable. But although economic exploitation was not the primary reason for the settlement of Australia, the island's movement from colony to nation was facilitated by the settlers' ability to sustain a growing population.

**Sheep and Wheat.** It was not Australia's fate to remain a penal colony. In addition to prisoners, free settlers began to immigrate during the early nineteenth century. Their immigration was encouraged by the availability of land, which also encouraged freed convicts and discharged prison guards to stay. But when Australia's terrain and climate proved to be conducive to sheep ranching and farming, the island colony had discovered the products that would give its economy a significant boost. Convicts were even moved from prisons to sheep ranches to provide manpower.

**The Australian Gold Rush.** In the 1850s, the discovery of another Australian resource – gold – not only brought a wave of immigration, but also fostered the settlement of new towns in the southeastern regions known as New South Wales and Victoria. Improvements in transportation, communications and other public institutions such as schools and libraries were also encouraged by the influx of settlers.

## **POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT**

Though British settlers dominated it, Australia was actually a number of separate colonies. Within a decade of the passage of the Australian Colonies Government Act of 1850, all of the colonies except Western Australia had adopted some form of representative self-government.

**Establishment of the Commonwealth.** This development did not necessarily guarantee unity. In fact, each colony continued to go its own way, making it difficult to achieve any kind of unified economy or political system. Perhaps motivated by the recognition that division made them vulnerable to outside forces, by the turn of the century that separate colonies had agreed to form the Commonwealth of Australia. The new federation officially came into being on January 1, 1901. Ten years later, membership was expanded to include the Northern Territories.

**“White Australia.”** Rapid immigration to Australia gave rise to new settlements and paved the way for unification of the colonies, but it also led to racial tensions, emphasizing a theme that repeated itself often in various parts of the world. Asians flocked to Australian gold fields, as they did in North America. They were met with prejudice and hostility. Labor unions feared that the “yellow” immigrants would lower wages and decrease the standard of living. White settlers pressured the government to exclude Asians, Pacific Islanders and other “undesirables.” The result was the passage of the Commonwealth Immigration Restriction Act of 1901. No more Asians could enter.

## **LATIN AMERICA**

The colonization of Latin America, led, by the end of the nineteenth century, to political and economic dependence on Europe and the United States. Though independence was gained for most Latin American countries, it did not always bring with it the kinds of political, economic and social changes that would promote stability.

### **AN OVERVIEW OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

Latin American republics took various directions after their wars of independence, though there were enough common experiences to allow a few broad generalizations.

**Dictatorial Republics.** Unlike the United States and Canada in the nineteenth century, the Latin American nations did not achieve a high degree of political stability. The new states called themselves republics, but the general populace had no experience with self-government. The revolutionary leaders, usually Creoles, were also inexperienced in political leadership. Conditions were ripe for political or military strongmen to concentrate power in their own hands, rewriting or ignoring constitutions in the process. These strongmen, called *caudillos*, were usually military leaders or men with strong ties to the military. “Revolutions” occurred regularly, but they brought no significant changes. Power continued to be concentrated in the hands of a privileged few, who had no intentions of sharing it.

**Economic Life.** Latin American wars of independence freed the states from direct colonial control, but they also disrupted the economic life of most countries. Slavery was eliminated over the

course of the nineteenth century, sometimes aided by the independence wars. Freedom did not automatically translate into economic opportunity for former slaves, but the possibility of assimilation and improved social status was generally better than for the former slaves in the United States.

**Economic Colonialism.** Economic conditions improved somewhat in the second half of the nineteenth century. Much of this improvement was due to exports and increased foreign investment. The tradeoff was that both of these factors increased dependence on foreign economies. The economic subservience of Latin America was most dramatically demonstrated in cases of intervention by the United States and Britain in order to protect their economic interests in Latin American countries (i.e. Panama Canal and the United States). Among the enterprises fostered by foreign investment were mining, railroads, and the production of sugar, rubber, bananas and coffee.

**The Land Problem.** Another characteristic of the nineteenth century was the continuing concentration of land into the hands of a few. Sometimes this happened when large landowners appropriated the holdings of families who were unable to prove ownership of the land they were farming. Many natives were driven from their lands, while those who stayed were often barely able to keep alive. Debt and dissatisfaction spread among the native population.

**Immigrants.** Latin America also experienced the same influx of immigrants as the United States. And as in the United States, immigration was part of the larger economic development that led to industrialization and urbanization. In contrast to some other parts of the world, immigrants generally assimilated well into Latin American life. Blacks and natives remained at the bottom of the social scale, perennial victims of prejudice and attitudes of superiority.

## **MEXICO**

Mexico provides an example of some of the problems that plagued many Latin American states in the nineteenth century. In Mexico, most of the nineteenth century was a time of political instability and economic stagnation. The country was ruled by a series of autocratic caudillos, the strongest of which was Antonio López de Santa Ana. He was finally driven into exile in 1835. Mines, which could have provided a major economic boost, were not run efficiently. Furthermore, with a poor transportation system and scarce capital, much of the economic infrastructure of the country was in poor condition.

**Foreign Intervention.** Mexico's political and economic instability made it susceptible to foreign intervention. American colonists in Texas declared their independence in 1835. In 1846, the United States and Mexico went to war over a border dispute. In the treaty ending the war, the United States gained most Mexican territory north of the present border. In one of the most audacious examples of intervention, French troops invaded Mexico in 1862 to support the claim of Austrian Archduke Maximilian to be emperor of Mexico – a claim supported by the Roman Catholic Church. Maximilian was ousted by insurgents within five years.

**Apparent Stability.** Like many other Latin American states, Mexico called itself a republic. But in fact, its presidents were dictators. In 1876, Porfirio Díaz played on popular discontent and led a revolt that made him president. His dictatorship lasted until 1911. Díaz curried the favor of the church, the landowners and the army. He thus enforced a kind of stability in the country (which was attractive to foreign investors), but below the surface there was discontent, poverty and hunger among farmers and workers.

## **BRAZIL**

Brazil should also be mentioned because, unlike the other areas of Latin America, Portugal colonized it. Brazil retained the Portuguese language and cultural heritage after independence. It was also one of the most stable Latin American countries.

**Pedro II.** As was the case in many Latin American countries, Brazil went through a period of initial political instability immediately after independence. But from 1840 until nearly the end of the century, it was relatively stable under the rule of Pedro II. In 1889, several factors contributed to the overthrow of his monarchy. Pedro lost the support of the church, the army and the people. He was forced into exile in 1889, and a new Brazilian republic issued its first constitution in 1891.

**Abolition of Slavery.** As in the United States, the most serious political and social problem in Brazil was the continuation of slavery. All other republics had abolished shortly after independence; the War of Unification settled the question in the United States. Brazil was therefore isolated on this issue. But the Brazilian economy depended on sugar and coffee production, both of which used slave labor. At the same time, pressure continued to grow for the abolition of slavery. This pressure finally bore fruit, as slavery was legally abolished in 1888.