20th Century Decolonization and Nationalism

Modified from the work of Susan Graham and Deborah Smith Johnston @ Lexington High School
Global Events influential in Decolonization

• Imperialism

• Growing Nationalism

• World War I

• World War II

• Cold War
World War I

• Promises of self-determination
• Use of colonial soldiers in trenches
• Locals filled posts left by colonial powers during war
• Financial strain on empire
• Treaty of Versailles and Wilson’s Fourteen Points
World War II

- Increased nationalist uprisings following WWI and as a result of the global depression
- Costs of empire
- US support of anti-colonial liberation movements
- Atlantic Charter (1941) “right of all people to choose the form of government under which they live”
- Soviets condemned colonialism
Atlantic Charter, 1941
Cold War

- Provided inspiration for a blend of capitalist and socialist economies and agendas.
- Provided arms to those who sided with one or the other (proxy wars and arms races).
- Encouraged violent recourse for some as a result of the power politics of Cold War competition.
Process of Decolonization and Nation-Building

- Surge of anti-colonial nationalism after 1945. Leaders used lessons in mass politicization and mass mobilization of 1920’s and 1930’s.

- Three patterns:
  1. Civil war (China)
  2. Negotiated independence (India and much of Africa)
  3. Incomplete de-colonization (Palestine, Algeria and Southern Africa, Vietnam)
Case Study #1
China

Mao Zedong, Great Leap Forward, Cultural Revolution, & Tiananmen Square
Nationalism

• In 1911, a group of nationalists had taken over China.
  • The Chinese Nationalist Party was able to overthrow the Qing Dynasty, which had been in power since the 1600s.

• Unfortunately, the new government was failing to provide for the Chinese people and many were living in poverty.

• Many Chinese were angry and became interested in the Communist Revolution in Russia.
Communist Party

• In 1921, a group of young men met in Shanghai to form the first Chinese Communist Party, headed by Mao Zedong.
  • The party promised to improve peasants’ living conditions and won the support of many Chinese people.

• A civil war soon began between the Nationalists and Mao’s communist followers.

• In 1933, Mao led over 600,000 people on the Long March through the mountains for over 6,000 miles to avoid being captured by the nationalist government.
“Revolution is not a dinner party, nor an essay, nor a painting, nor a piece of embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another.”

~Mao Zedong 1927
The Long March

Mao Zedong 1935
People’s Republic

- The Communists and Nationalists had to call a truce during WWII as both were fighting to keep the Japanese out of China.

- The civil war continued from 1946 to 1949, until the Communists, now called the Red Army, took control of China’s government.
  - On October 1, 1949, Mao declared the creation of the People’s Republic of China, a communist country.

- Mao was appointed head of China’s government and had almost complete control over China.
  - He became popular with many Chinese people when he took land from wealthy citizens and gave it to peasants.
  - He wanted to improve living conditions for the poor.
Mao Zedong declares the founding of the People's Republic of China on October 1st, 1949.
Great Leap Forward

• Mao implemented a program in 1958 to organize all farms into collectives where large communes of about 25,000 people farmed together under government supervision.
  • He believed this would speed China’s economic development, so the program was called the Great Leap Forward.

• The Great Leap Forward was a disaster.
  • Chinese farmers did not like the government making all of the decisions and, because they no longer owned the land, they had little reason to work hard.
  • Droughts and floods damaged the food supply that year and made things even worse.

• As a result, about 20 million people died from 1958 to 1960 during one of the largest famines in history.
Women working together during the Great Leap Forward.
The Great Famine
Cultural Revolution

- The failures of the Great Leap forward made many Chinese lose confidence in Mao’s leadership.

- In response, Mao created the Cultural Revolution in 1966 to stop all opposition to the Chinese Communist Party.
  - He urged students to quit school and wage war on anyone who opposed communism.

- The students were organized into an army known as the Red Guards.
  - They attacked, imprisoned, and even killed those suspected of not agreeing with Mao.

- The Cultural Revolution created mass chaos in China for almost 10 years.
  - Many schools and factories were closed, and people were denied healthcare and transportation by the government.
Cover of an elementary school textbook – image shows 3 young Red Guards.
“Destroy the Old World”
Cultural Revolution Propaganda Poster 1967
中国人民解放军是毛泽东思想大学校
Mao’s The Little Red Book

This was a collection of excerpts from past speeches and publications. It was required for citizens to read, memorize, and carry this with them at all times.
New Leader

• Mao Zedong died in 1976 and the Cultural Revolution finally ended.

• China’s new leader, Deng Xiaoping, made many reforms to Mao’s rules, but the government still stuck to its communist roots.
  • He began to allow farmers to own their own land and to make decisions about what they should grow.
  • He allowed some private businesses to open.
  • He opened China to foreign investments.

• Unfortunately, the Chinese people were still not given basic human rights like freedom of speech and religion or the right to a fair trial.
China after Mao

• One-Child Policy adopted – 1979
• Tiananmen Square Massacre – 1989
• Today – issues include:
  • Balancing limited capitalism with communist ideals
  • Environmental pollution
  • Unequal male-to-female ratios resulting from One-Child Policy
  • Control of Tibet
Tiananmen Square

- In 1989, communist governments were under siege in numerous places around the world.

- Over 10,000 Chinese students gathered to protest China’s corrupt communist government in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square.
  - They filled the square for seven weeks, peacefully speaking against communism and calling for a move toward democracy in China.

- On June 4, 1989, the Chinese government sent soldiers and tanks into the square, killing hundreds of innocent people.
  - Countries around the world condemned this violence and began urging China to improve the human rights of its citizens.
Tiananmen Square, Beijing
1988
Tanks Rolling In...