

# Unit 23

## People Shape the World

### Section 1

#### Unit Materials

#### Questions To Consider

Question 1.

Can the actions of individuals shape the course of world history?

Question 2.

How are the actions of individuals shaped by the historical times in which they live?

Question 3.

What roles have individuals played in modern revolutions and resistance movements?

Question 4.

Which has played a greater role in determining the shape of history: ideas or individuals?

#### The Big Picture

##### How is this topic related to Increasing Integration?

Individuals can use personal charisma or sheer courage to galvanize the support — and win the loyalty — of those around them. Large numbers of people can turn to individuals for leadership, which in turn can be a powerful force for integration.

##### How is this topic related to Proliferating Difference?

Individuals can also be powerful forces that encourage perceptions of difference among peoples. Sometimes this emphasis is because individuals promote resistance to the established order or to outside cultural influences, and these leaders encourage their followers to see themselves as different from the targets of their resistance.

#### Unit Purpose

- Too often in world history, stories of individual lives and individual agency take a back seat to big structures and patterns.
- Individuals are critical to the story of world history, and they have had significant impacts on global events and processes.
- Individual lives often illustrate, in microcosm, the broad patterns of world history.

- Individual agency has frequently been the driving force behind revolutionary and resistance movements.

## Unit Content Overview

Scholars have long debated whether individuals — such as Napoleon or Hitler — were driving motors of history, or if in fact they were simply “thrown up” by pre-existing social forces. Some scholars have argued that individuals function only as results of their particular social networks. Others have argued strongly for individuals’ abilities to transcend their social networks and to create unprecedented changes. Social historians, however, have cautioned against seeing the relationship between individuals and social context in such oppositional terms. Instead, they argue that it is important to understand the ways that social structures and human agency are fundamentally interrelated. That is, persons who act as historical agents are themselves educated, indoctrinated, shaped, and informed by the cultures and societies that they are acting to revise or reshape.

This unit explores the ways that individual stories can help historians understand larger patterns and processes in world history. Indeed, just because world history often focuses on the “big picture” does not mean it should ignore the critical roles individuals have played in shaping the past. The twentieth century alone has many examples of individuals whose efforts and actions have effected dramatic structural changes. Three in particular — Mao Zedong, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, and Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo — are good illustrations of the complex interactions between social structures and the agents of cultural reform. All three acted within the traditions of their respective cultures: Mao was the latest in a line of leaders to spring from the Chinese peasantry; Ayatollah Khomeini reinforced the religious orthodoxy threatened by modernizing efforts that had pressed against his society’s tolerance for change; Las Madres took action in accordance with their vision of their duties as mothers responsible for protecting and supporting their families. The successful agency of each grew from deep personal commitments, which arose from their cultural and social milieus. Moreover, their unique stories reflect the larger global processes that interact with individuals to create the common human experience of world history.

## Unit References

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- Anthony R. DeLuca, *Gandhi, Mao, Mandela, and Gorbachev: Studies in Personality, Power, and Politics* (Westport, Conn.; London: Praeger, 2000).
- Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische, “What Is Agency.” *American Journal of Sociology* 103, no. 4 (1998): 962–1023.
- Matthew Hirsch, “Argentine Mothers Remember Horrors,” <http://www.cornelldailysun.com/articles/2506/23> (April 2003).
- Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong?: The Clash between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (New York: Perennial, 2003).
- Mehdi Mozaffari, “Changes in the Iranian Political System after Khomeini’s Death,” *Political Studies* XLI (1993): 612–13.
- Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

## Global Historical Context

- Time Period: Twentieth century
- The twentieth century was a period of intense modernization, technological innovation, global and regional war, resistance movements, increasing interconnections between peoples, and massive interventions of powerful nations into the affairs of the less powerful. The World Wars, the Cold War, decolonization, and globalization affected the lives of billions of people around the world, although in varied ways. Too often, these events are told without reference to the individuals who experienced them — and from the perspectives of those who succeeded or dominated. However, individual efforts, whether they succeeded or not, can inform the world historian about the structures of the past. Indeed, individual lives can be used to reconstruct the meanings and effects of war, colonial domination, and globalization that so characterized the twentieth century.

### AP Themes

- Examines change and continuity by exploring the ways that individuals helped change their societies, but within the contexts of existing cultural traditions.
- Explores systems of social and gender structure through a look at individuals like Mao Zedong and Ayatollah Khomeini. These individuals sought to define the ways these structures should be organized in the new societies they envisioned. With the case of Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo, the unit examines how traditional gender ideologies can be modified to fit non-traditional needs.
- Discusses cultural and intellectual developments by focusing on the ways ideologies —such as Islamic fundamentalism and communism — inspired individuals to action.

## Related Units

- Unit 17. Ideas Shape the World: How do ideas change the world? This unit traces the impacts of European Enlightenment ideals in the American and Haitian revolutions, and in South America. It also examines the revitalization of Islam expressed in the Wahhabi movement as it spread from the Arabian peninsula to Africa and Asia. It is related to Unit 23 because it explores some of the ideas that individuals used to effect social change in the past.
- Unit 20. Imperial Designs: What lasting impacts did modern imperialism have on the world? The profound consequences of imperialism are examined in the South African frontier and Brazil, where politics, culture, industrial capitalism, and the environment were shaped and re-shaped. This unit is related to Unit 23 because imperialism frequently set the framework of European domination against which twentieth-century individuals would resist.
- Unit 21. Colonial Identities: How did colonialism and eventual de-colonization mutually affect the colonizer and the colonized? From Zanzibar to India, this unit examines colonial and post-colonial identities through clothing. It is related to Unit 23 because it details an earlier period of resistance to colonial domination, in this case through material displays.

## Section 2

### Video-Related Materials

#### **Video Segment 1: Mao Zedong (Revolution and Resistance in China)**

This segment explores the extent to which Mao Zedong personally shaped the course of China's communist revolution. Although Mao was born into a peasant family, as a teenager his education exposed him to many Western ideas. Mao was attracted to communist ideology, and in the 1920s he joined the newly created Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The CCP was heavily influenced by Russian communism, and thus sought to build its support within the urban working classes. Mao, however, believed that the peasantry was the real revolutionary force in China, and he shifted the focus of the CCP to that group. In 1934, in response to pressures from the competing Nationalist Party and from invading Japanese forces, Mao and a hundred thousand CCP members made an arduous march from Jiangxi to a remote northwestern province. By the time this "Long March" was over, Mao had become the undisputed leader of the CCP. From then on, his ideas and policies dominated the party. From its base in the northwest, Mao's Red Army successfully overcame both the Japanese and the Nationalist Party, and in 1949 Mao declared China a communist nation. From then until his death in 1976, Mao used the force of his personality to transform Chinese society by collectivizing agriculture, promoting heavy industry, and discarding ancient Chinese traditions. Although his policies cost the lives of millions of people, he was able to create around himself a frenzied "cult of Mao" that inspired millions of people to do his bidding. As a result, it seems clear that Mao himself was an important agent of change in twentieth-century Chinese society.

#### **Video Segment 2: Ayatollah Khomeini (Revolution and Resistance in Iran)**

Some individuals use traditional rather than new ideas to create revolutionary change. This segment explores one such figure, Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini, who used traditional Islamic ideas to oppose the secular, Westernized regime of Reza Khan and his son, Reza Shah. Khomeini was born into a religious family, and as a young man in the 1920s he became a teacher and authority on Islamic law. Khomeini came to believe that only God could make law, and that society should be based solely around these laws. In the 1950s and 60s, the United States and Britain allied themselves with Reza Shah in order to secure their interests in the Persian Gulf. The Shah's brutal policies towards Shiite Muslims, however, encouraged many Iranians to turn against both the Shah and the West, and to look instead for guidance and support from Shiite religious leaders within Iran. Khomeini rose to prominence in this context, as he assumed a critical leadership role in denouncing the policies of the Shah and in urging people to remain true to Islam. Even when he was exiled in the 1960s, Khomeini continued to gain support in Iran among the millions of people who saw the Shah's government as illegitimate. In 1979, the Shah's continued policies of repression and Khomeini's continued popularity resulted in mass demonstrations that led to the Shah's abdication. Khomeini stepped into his place, and he set about ruling Iran according to the principles of Islamic law. His anti-imperialist, fundamentalist ideas were critical in shaping the course of Iran's history in the late twentieth century.

#### **Video Segment 3: Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo (Revolution and Resistance in Argentina)**

Sometimes, individuals can band together to effect dramatic social change. This segment explores the example of Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo, a group of mothers who challenged the Argentinean government's brutal policies of torture and murder. After several decades of political turmoil, in 1976 a military coup seized power under the leadership of General Jorge Rafael Videla. Once in power, the military government began removing — through kidnapping and assassination — all "threats" to the regime, especially intellectuals, leftists, and socially active young people. Eventually, the numbers of "the Disappeared" reached thirty thousand. The mothers of the Disappeared began to ask questions about the locations of their children. When going to the police and church authorities led nowhere, the mothers rallied together — at great

personal risk — to protest. Each week, Las Madres gathered at the Plaza de Mayo, bearing white handkerchiefs embroidered with the names of their lost children. In 1978, when the World Cup was held in Argentina, Las Madres attracted international media attention and spurred worldwide demonstrations of solidarity. When the military government finally fell in 1982, the newly elected civilian government created a commission to investigate the fate of the Disappeared. Although none of those responsible were punished for their crimes, Las Madres have become heroes in Argentina, the military has lost all respect among the people, and in 2003 the government sought once again to bring the murderers of the Disappeared to trial. Moreover, Las Madres are still fighting to keep the memories of their children alive.

### **Perspectives on the Past: What Is the Human Cost of Change?**

How does shifting public opinion influence the ways individuals are remembered? Historian Susan Glosser argues that while many Chinese people adored Mao Zedong during his lifetime, after his death people began to acknowledge the tremendous human cost of his policies. Currently, Mao's legacy is regarded with ambivalence — on the one hand, he was critical to China's World War II victory against the Japanese. On the other hand, his revolutionary policies resulted in famine and millions of deaths.

## **Video Details**

### **Who Is Interviewed**

- Susan Glosser
- Richard Bulliet
- Peter Winn

### **Primary Source Materials Featured in the Video**

- Mao Zedong, Chinese leader
- Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Iranian religious leader
- Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo, recipients of Nobel Peace Prize
- Rene Epeilbaum, Argentine mother

## **Program Contents**

<b>Begins</b>	<b>Ends</b>	<b>Contents</b>
00:00	01:36	Show tease, show opening credits
01:37	03:07	Program overview/introduction
03:08	08:04	Video Segment 1. <i>Mao Zedong (Revolution and Resistance in China)</i>
08:05	16:15	Video Segment 2. <i>Ayatollah Khomeini (Revolution and Resistance in Iran)</i>
16:16	25:30	Video Segment 3. <i>Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo (Revolution and Resistance in Argentina)</i>
25:31	26:31	Perspectives on the Past: <i>What Is the Human Cost of Change?</i>
26:32	28:25	Show close and program credits