You can see this best in the work of the most representative painter of the eighteenth century, Jean Antoine Watteau, with its delicacy and charm, its superficial relations, its shimmering colors. There’s nothing solid or eternal about the people and the scenes he paints. They’re here to enjoy themselves in a trip, in a game, a picnic, a dance; their relations are fragile because pleasure is fragile and transitory, and so is life. It’s interesting that Watteau’s best known painting, “The Embarkation for Cythera,” takes a traditional theme, which is a pilgrimage, and transposes it to a frivolous level. The pilgrimage to Jerusalem becomes the pilgrimage to Cythera, the island of love. Here a group of ladies and gentlemen are embarking for Cythera, and Cythera shimmers across the water like a sort of Jerusalem, just as enchanted but profane. And the whole scene is highly theatrical, which is another characteristic of the rococo and of eighteenth century society. Rococo gardens, for example, were artificial recreations of nature with artificial waterfalls, ruins and wilderness, as they called it, that made gardens into picturesque places for dreaming and rambling. Gardens have always tried to recreate nature, but those of the seventeenth century had been stately, orderly creations—no shadow, no mystery, just straight beds, grand alleys, vast vistas. In the eighteenth century, however, you get irregularities, whimsy, unexpected twists. And this was also reflected in a contemporary fad for exotic things—Turkish fashions, anything outlandish. There was more trade overseas, and the ships that went to the Near East and to China brought back a lot of things now that looked different, and since they looked different, they looked attractive. They looked vaporous, they looked frivolous, they fitted the contemporary protest against the old formality. Like gardens, rococo fashions were as elaborate, as artificial as possible, from the wigs and bows and baskets to the completely useless little shoes. The more useless, the more anti-functional, the better, and this appreciation of the ephemeral in everything is especially evident in music. What, after all, could be more ephemeral than music? Not the notes printed on paper, but the performance which, in that time, could not be captured or preserved. Music is the typical happening, and music was the model of eighteenth century art. It fascinated Watteau, who often painted himself as a musician. It fascinated his contemporaries. The eighteenth century was the great age of music, or perhaps music was the great art of the eighteenth century, especially elegant and witty music as epitomized by Mozart, who died in his mid-thirties just like Watteau.

Even rococo architecture looks musical. Rococo architects built theaters and opera houses designed so that the public could enjoy each other even more than what was going-on on the stage, and opera houses went on being built in rococo style for two hundred years. And they built churches that looked like opera houses. Where churches of the past were mysterious, awesome, rococo churches are a garden of delight. There’s no trace of counter-reformation hellfire; there’s no trace of Puritan sobriety and restraint. Joy has replaced fear, scenery has replaced ritual, display has replaced inspiration. It’s all stucco and gilt and curlicues, and a lot of mirrors to reflect the light. God himself is a delight, and you expect a priest to burst into an aria.

Now, history doesn’t pay much attention to pleasure, and frivolity is not a favorite of scholars, who are made of sterner stuff. But you should remember that the lighter and softer sensibility of the rococo period also went with greater sensibility—sensitivity not just to our own feelings but to the feelings of others. More and more members of the upper classes did not want their feelings bruised, and so they didn’t want to see pain or suffering which were, after all, standard aspects of contemporary life; and it was the more sensitive people of this age, like Madame du Pompadour for example, who began to curtail torture and public executions and the repressive and cruel legislation that had survived for centuries. It was people like these who welcomed penal reform in the last third of the eighteenth century, or at least who welcomed campaigns for penal reform, that tried to fit punishment to crime and to social utility, rather than to age-old horrors like cutting off a hand for stealing a loaf of bread. Some called for reform because they were enlightened, and I shall talk about that next time, but a lot of people wanted or accepted reform simply because their tastes had changed—their manners, their feelings, had become more humane, they were more sensitive. And if you do good for selfish reasons, that’s all right, too.

#135 The Enlightenment and Society

By the eighteenth century, crops were larger, towns and ports were growing, the power of merchants, manufacturers, lawyers, was increasing, and their success nurtured new ideas that would change the world.

The Enlightenment of Society this time on The Western Tradition.

And now UCLA Professor Eugen Weber’s continuing journey through the history of Western Civilization.

It’s stupid and absurd to burn people for their ideas, but it’s just as stupid to believe that ideas don’t matter. When you think that ideas don’t matter, you can be tolerant about them, which really means that you're
indifferent. Now, the eighteenth century talked a lot about tolerance, just because tolerance was so rare; and it was rare because then, as today, ideas were likely to have concrete effects on the way society worked, on the way people thought, on the way they lived in society.

Now today, I want to talk mostly about these ideas and their effects, and the first thing to say about them is that, while many philosophers were nobles, eighteenth-century ideas were dominated by the growth of the bourgeoisie in the West, its growing self-confidence and its self-assertion.

Behind this advance of the bourgeoisie was an improving economy made possible by bigger and better ships, more canals for heavy transport of goods, more and better roads. You look at sixteenth-century roads and they’re largely ruts. By the eighteenth century, the main highways, at least, began to look like something we would recognize as a road. Louis XIV had started the improvements, because he wanted his troops and tax collectors to get around faster. By the middle of the eighteenth century, France had a good system of stone-paved roads radiating out from Paris. Spain and North Italy followed suit, the Germans and Russians tried to copy them, and by the end of the century a Scotsman named MacAdam, who had made his money in America, developed a really decent road surface. Side roads, however, remained primitive--dust in the summer, impassible mud in winter.

Land travel wasn’t going to be easy for another hundred years, until the railroads came along; but at least there were bridges now, where only fords and ferries had been, and the price of transport was falling, and those who could afford it could now take coaches, a seventeenth-century invention.

This inspired a new kind of pastime for the rich, something we call tourism. The eighteenth century was an age of travel books, accounts of visits to Paris; to spas to take the waters and gamble and flirt; to Italy to see the antiquities; to Venice, which was a favorite pleasure spot. And since tourists have always liked souvenirs and since there were no cameras, the Venetians developed the first picture post cards for rich visitors, "viduta"--views--which you could by and take home and hang up and talk about. The most famous Venetian painters of the eighteenth century--Canalato, Bellotto, the Guardi brothers--all these had large workshops that turned out masses of pictures of San Marco and the grand canals and other Venetian scenes.

Two of the most popular works of the eighteenth century were, in fact, going to masquerade as travel books. The first are The Persian Letters of Montesquieu, about the impressions of two Persian ambassadors in Paris, and it suggests how curious and absurd the commonplace of one society appear to members of another society which has different customs and takes different things for granted. The Persian Letters came out in 1721. A generation later, in 1759, Voltaire’s Candide presents a more bitter satire. Candide is about the travels and adventures of an innocent young man, a canid young man, who has been brought up to believe that all is for the best in the best of possible worlds, and who finds that the real world is very different from what the philosophers said.

Both books are very funny about very serious matters. More significantly, both are relativistic, which is the effect that travel has on thoughtful minds. This understanding that attitudes vary with individuals and environments, as Montesquieu makes the point, this notion was an important feature of eighteenth-century thought.

And there were other signs of progress. Farming technology improved, agriculture became more productive. Fewer crops were destroyed by armies, and they were better stored, so there was more food, more people stayed alive, and the population grew. Most people still lived off the land, but a healthy agriculture meant a healthy economy in general, more exchange, more buying power, more manufacturers, growing towns, growing ports; and the growing power of merchants, ship owners, financiers, and the lawyers who drew up their contracts. All this happened first in England because England was spared the worst of the wars that pumped resources out of the continental states. She also had important resources of her own. Access to copper, lots of native wood, the water power to turn textile mills, iron and coal to feed the forges and smelt the iron. And England had Scotland, which was a backward country full of forward-looking men. MacAdam came from Scotland, so did James Watt, who gave us the steam engine. When Voltaire went to England, he marveled at what he found. "Trade has made them rich, it has helped to make them free, freedom, in turn, has spread trade further. The greatness of the state is based on this."

Voltaire put the idea clearly. Trade makes wealth, wealth favors freedom, freedom favors trade, trade favors a country’s greatness. That’s what he wanted to see in France; that’s what the bourgeoisie wanted to see everywhere, and those bourgeois who had achieved economic power were now also going to claim political power. By the end of the century, one leader of the French Revolution made this very clear: "A new distribution of wealth," he said, "calls for a new distribution of power."
Now, you have to be careful how you use the word "bourgeois," because the terms covers a multitude of sins, or at least a multitude of pursuits. Some bourgeois were businessmen, some were craftsmen, state employees, public servants, lawyers, financiers, manufacturers, and some were men of letters, intellectuals—a term that didn't appear until the nineteenth century, although it was in the eighteenth century that writing became a profession.

So there were different kinds of bourgeois, but they shared common ideas, and this common point of view, which we might call a bourgeois philosophy, didn't present itself as just bourgeois, but as a universal philosophy, something that applied to all mankind. When we talk about human rights today, we are using the language and expressing the principles of the eighteenth-century bourgeois, who talked about liberty and progress and man, and who eventually wrote documents like this one, the Declaration of the Rights of Man, issued in France in 1789. And this was a fundamental change which would again be stressed by American and French Revolutionaries who appealed not to the special rights or characteristics of Americans or Frenchmen, but to the nature and the rights of man, which are universally valid. And if I keep saying "man," you will understand that it is because this is what the men of this time used.

This was very different from what was going to happen later, in the nineteenth century, when the proletariat, the working class, was defined as an independent entity, and workers were invited to adopt a proletarian, a class doctrine that was much narrower. But in the eighteenth century, the bourgeois identified its cause with the cause of all humanity. They were bourgeois, but they considered themselves simply as human, and the interests they pursued were not, as they saw it, class interests, but valid for everyone, so that today when you talk about human rights, you are expressing the principles of the eighteenth-century bourgeoisie. This universalization of specific principles and interests was going to encourage a hypocritical pretense that what was good for the bourgeois was good for everybody, but it was also going to inspire and to justify the demand that what is done to improve the lot of the bourgeois should be done to improve the lot of everybody, and this is another principle that still affects our politics today.

Another novel and important aspect of the time was that these enlightened ideas were going to be more swiftly and more widely publicized than ideas had ever been publicized before, or ever could have been. This, for instance, is a French caricature of the three social orders, with the commoners on top. Not that propaganda, the systematic effort to persuade, was an eighteenth-century invention; it had always existed; but mass advocacy, at least of a secular kind, only came with the better communications and exchanges of the eighteenth century—the broadsheets, gazettes, newspapers and clubs, with more books and pamphlets than ever before; with drawing rooms, cafes, debating societies, and secret societies.

The most important of these secret societies was probably the Masonic Lodges. They had started in seventeenth-century England, but they were spread all over eighteenth-century Europe by the French, who counted over thirty thousand brothers. Most of the great philosophers were Masons, like Voltaire and Diderot, but also aristocrats like the King's cousin, the Duke of Orleans, and a lot of foreigners—Frederick the Great, Mozart, Washington, Franklin. As a matter of fact, if you look at the medallions on the back of our dollar bill, you'll find that one of them is a Masonic symbol.

The first principle of Freemasonry was a cult of humanity. This didn't challenge the power of kings, but it did challenge the dogmas of established religion. The Mason believed in God, but not in any particular God, not in the God of any particular church or revelation; and the Mason believed in reason, and in the natural religion only reason could reveal, so he wasn't impressed by religious rituals, he had his own, which we call Deism. More immediately important, Masonic societies added to the number of clubs which spread the progressive ideas of Paris through the provinces, which provided a sort of capillary system for the new ideas to seep into the attitudes of the upper and middle classes.

And along with ideas, the vocabulary changed radically. This is the time when the word "social" turns from "sociability" to "society," and it acquires its present meaning, as in sociology, as in social science. This is when words like "capitalist" appear, when "nation" and "national" acquired their modern sense. This is when terms like "people" or "populace" shed their pejorative sense as in "the common people," "the vile populace," and they become, as the encyclopedia of Voltaire and Diderot puts it, "the most numerous and necessary part of the Nation."

This transformation of the vocabulary is a sign that ideas are changing, and changing profoundly. A few words dominate the century—nature, happiness, virtue, reason, progress. These words are not new, and they do not mean the same thing for everybody, but there is nevertheless a spirit of the times, a broad agreement on certain basic notions.
It was assumed that through reason and science people could understand nature and harmonize with its laws, thus progressing toward happiness and perfection. But first, they had to know about nature, and the nature of nature—what nature is like. And this natural science was based on the discoveries of the seventeenth century, which had a far greater effect on the thought of the eighteenth century than on its own time. The seventeenth century was the great age of scientific discovery. There were the new instruments that made discovery possible—the telescope, perfected by Galileo, who also invented the thermometer and greatly improved the mechanical clock; while a pupil of Galileo's, Torricelli, invented the barometer. All of these instruments permitted more exact and more extensive observations. Then there were specific discoveries. William Harvey discovered the circulation of the blood through heart and lungs. Anton Leeuwenhoek developed lenses powerful enough to see bacteria and spermatozoa. Robert Boyle worked on the behavior of gases at different temperatures and under different pressures, and became the father of modern chemistry. Tremendous advances were made in mathematics by Isaac Newton and Rene Descartes—advances in logarithms, differential calculus, integral calculus, all laying the groundwork of higher mathematics; and the mysteries of electricity and magnetism were being revealed by William Gilbert and Benjamin Franklin by way of Italians like Allesandra Volta and Luigi Galvani.

But the greatest figure in early modern science was Isaac Newton, who lived from 1643 to 1727. Newton laid the groundwork of modern physics by working out the mechanical laws of motion and especially the law of gravity, the speed with which bodies descend to earth. And the result of this accumulation of discoveries was a radical change in the outlook of educated people. When the seventeenth century opened, serious scientists might still believe in witches; when the seventeenth century closed, this would have been impossible, because no scientist believed in the supernatural forces that witches were supposed to dabble in. In Shakespeare's time, people believed that comets were portents. After Newton, they knew that Newton and Halley had calculated the movement of certain comets and that stars obeyed the laws of gravity just as planets did. So now, human imagination accepted scientific law, and began to reject magic and sorcery. As this book suggests, the mysteries of nature were to be unraveled by humans. In 1600, men had lived in the Middle Ages. By 1700, the mental outlook of educated people was modern.

There weren't many educated people in 1700, but their number was growing, along with schools and books, and propaganda and debate. And as the news of scientific discovery spread on the continent, it also affected their religious beliefs. You mustn't think that seventeenth-century scientists wanted to shake anybody's religious beliefs. Newton himself was profoundly religious and a bit of an alchemist as well, but his discoveries took on a life of their own. After Newton, educated people knew that the solar system was kept going by its own momentum and its own laws. The Newtonian solar system rotated like clockwork according to the law of gravity. Maybe God had set the mechanism to work, maybe God had decreed the law of gravity. But once it started, He wasn't needed any more; and so to some, God became a figurehead, a kind of constitutional monarch, a creator indeed, but with no right to intervene in a universe that worked automatically according to the laws of physics and mechanics. You could still believe that the starry heavens proclaimed the glory of God, but the way the starry heavens worked was revealed by astronomical calculation.

By the eighteenth century, the great discoveries of the seventeenth were digested and their implications drawn. Important medical advances were being made in fighting scurvy, and especially smallpox. In 1783, two Frenchmen, the brothers Montgolfier, demonstrated their discovery that heated gas inside a fabric bag would cause it to rise. The Montgolfier's went to Versailles, and while the King watched they sent up a large balloon carrying a sheep, a rooster, and a duck. A couple of months later, the first manned flight sailed over Paris, and by 1785, an American and a Frenchman had flown across the English Channel. The possibilities of science were obviously infinite. No wonder that everybody who was anybody dabbled in it. Voltaire studied mathematics and brought Newton to the general public; another encyclopedist, D'Alembert, produced vulgarizations of science and philosophy for fashionable ladies; Diderot did chemical and anatomical experiments, and biology fascinated everybody. This is a sketch of Galvani's experiments with frog legs and electricity. So now we're in a world of science, of mechanics, a material world which it's important to exploit, to develop, in order to make people better and better off, in order to make them happy, which is itself a novel notion.

Aquinas hadn't talked much about happiness, Hobbes and Locke had hardly talked about happiness; but in the eighteenth century people hardly ever stopped talking about happiness. This had a great deal to do with the relaxation of religious restraints, both Catholic and Protestant, and now there was talk about happiness in nature, happiness in fresh air. This is the time when travel and sightseeing, and also walking, swimming, mountain climbing, are first advocated for fun and profit. Happiness in a natural life—noble savages are happy, noble ladies and gentlemen tried to go back to nature. And Marie Antoinette, the Queen of France, had a special farm built to see what natural happiness may be like; and above all, happiness in virtue, and measure, and reason.
But there was a force even greater than natural happiness, one that was going to color the subsequent history of Europe and of America as well, and that was utility, as we shall see in our next, extremely useful, program.

#136 The Modern Philosophers

There was the patron saint of nature, the prophet of utility, the champion of freedom of expression, the foe of priests and organized religion and the quintessential eighteenth-century thinker—reasonable, skeptical, pragmatic.

The Modern Philosophers this time on The Western Tradition.

And now UCLA Professor Eugen Weber’s continuing journey through the history of Western Civilization.

Last time, we ended on a happy note—or rather the eighteenth-century’s notion of what made people happy. Eighteenth-century philosophers remember, hardly ever stopped talking about happiness, and especially happiness in nature, in fresh air, in living the natural life. There was one French philosopher in particular who became the patron saint of this cult of nature, the bippy of genius named Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It was Rousseau who provided the great slogans of the French Revolution, which came eleven years after he died: "the social contract," "the general will," "men are born free yet everywhere they are in chains;" but it was also Rousseau who provided the slogans for a return to nature, for a shift from reliance on the head to reliance on the heart.

Rousseau called for human beings that were genuine in a world that was genuine—mothers suckling their own babies, parents bringing up their own children. He didn’t actually follow his own advice, every one of his five children ended up in a foundling hospital; but his influence was going to produce a radical change in taste, including a novel appreciation of natural beauty, wilderness, forests, landscapes. Mountains and wild places had been considered a nuisance, but towards the end of the eighteenth century, they become visually exciting, spiritually enchanting. They become landscapes that cultivated people learned to see and enjoy, so that even the author of an essay on the management of hogs can turn away from a field of turnips and expound on the beauty of a distant sea. Nature wasn’t just beautiful, it was innocent, it never led you astray. As Wordsworth was going to put it, "One impulse from a vernal wood may teach you more of man, of moral evil and of good, than all the sages can." That’s also pure Rousseau, and you can see that it doesn’t appear to mesh with the rational and scientific mood of the Enlightenment. Rousseau found the dominant philosophy too crude, too rationalistic, too materialistic. His idea of happiness was dreamy, sentimental, private; where that of mainstream philosophers was public, or if you prefer, social. And so we have two parallel strains of thought, with Rousseau’s being a sort of counter-culture view.

For the mainstream philosophers, happiness was something you had to earn, to deserve, to conquer, not just absorb. There wasn’t only an individual right to happiness, there was a kind of public duty to be generous and make others happy. So private happiness was expected to coincide with public happiness, and in the process, it became a subject of politics. Virtue, which was seen as an important component of happiness, was now related to social harmony. In its own definition, which went back to the ancients, virtue meant mainly strength, but the eighteenth century definition prefers the social model. The virtuous man, above all, useful to his fellows. Virtue wasn’t just private as it might be, let’s say, with a good Christian; it was public and it had nothing to say about God, it was secularized, and as a result, morality in the eighteenth century moved towards reasonable other-directed behavior, reasonable behavior, reason in everything. In the Enlightenment, virtue and happiness, science and nature, were all related to reason, a universal reason which allowed you access to truth and to happiness.

And reason was also the secret of progress; material progress which went with intellectual progress, and which brought with it moral progress, and with progress came optimism, an invention of the eighteenth century, and also the notion of utility, usefulness, all of which were combined and symbolized in scenes like this one. Utility has been defined by its high priest, Jeremy Bentham, as the property or tendency of something to preserve you from trouble or pain or to procure you some good. So, for the individual, utility was whatever increased one’s happiness or well-being, but for society, utility translated into the rule that the measure of whether a policy was right or wrong was whether it caused the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. This was utilitarianism which combined morality and self-interest into what the utilitarians called enlightened self-interest; that doing good is ultimately in your self-interest as a citizen and that pursuing your self-interest contributes to the common wealth. The promoters of revolution in America were Utilitarians like Benjamin Franklin, and so were the founders of liberal economics like the Scotsman Adam Smith; and you might indeed say that the typical Enlightenment thinker was a utilitarian.

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With reformers like Voltaire or the Italian Beccaria, utilitarianism took the form of what Voltaire called "common sense." It was in the name of common sense that they proposed reforms; "End public executions," Beccaria said; "End arbitrary arrest," he said, "and torture, abolish the death penalty, make trials public, moderate punishments and make them fit the crime, and have one law for all with no exceptions of class." Above all, let's be able to argue about these matters, let's have freedom of thought, let's have freedom of expression. It was on this ground that Voltaire clashed with the Church which would not allow freedom of expression, and from this he concluded that the Church and its priests were the greatest enemies of progress, hence of humankind.

Voltaire wasn't against God, mind you, he probably agreed with a gentleman who prayed, "Oh, God, if there is one, save my soul, if I have one." In principle, though, like most philosophers, Voltaire was a deist. He thought that there was some great power, a divine clock-maker, who wound the world up and then sat back and watched humanity make a mess of it. But Voltaire was against organized religion, which he thought was a tissue of superstition and fanaticism; and he was against priests, who he said, "were engaged in fooling people and misleading them." "You have to have a religion of course," said Voltaire, "you have to have a religion at least to keep your servants from stealing you blind; but you must not believe in priests." That was anticlerical, a powerful fighting creed that preached intolerance against the intolerant, but understanding and tolerance for those who did not conform to the tenets of established religion, a religion which in those days could still condemn unbelievers to a hideous death. Voltaire spent a lot of his life defending men and women who were being mistreated because of fanaticism, prejudice, injustice—like the Calas family and Chevalier de Barre who was tortured and executed essentially for disbelief. And as he struggled against fanaticism, Voltaire also practically created something new which we now describe as public opinion. It was in the great political and anticlerical campaigns of the late eighteenth century that public opinion became a serious factor in literate society and the intellectual, the publicist, the man of letters, was recognized as the dynamic force behind public opinion immensely effective in spreading the message of enlightenment, which was not only rationalistic but also utilitarian and materialistic, a belief in technical and economical progress.

The greatest monument to this point of view is the Encyclopedia which Voltaire and Diderot and their friends published through the 1750s and 60s; seventeen volumes, three volumes of plates, all arranged in alphabetical order, which was another innovation because it abandoned traditional categories and hierarchies for a more equalitarian arrangement which put "theology" after "production," which put "princes" after "locksmiths" because of the letter with which the word began. The Encyclopedia is one long hymn to technical process. The mechanical arts and the inventors get a degree of attention they never got before. Practical men are described as benefactors of humankind. There are endless articles on trades, on techniques like dyeing cloth, or making locks, or making stockings; on everything that is useful. Rank is subordinated to utility, politics is subordinated to economy. Liberty in this context is essentially economic, with political liberty a kind of icing on the cake of free enterprise. And when Diderot writes the article on political man, the article is all about agriculture, demography and wealth, because well-being, health, work, freedom, are all related. The humanism of the Encyclopedia grew straight out of their material. They believed in evolution, progress, in the possibility to change people, in the duty to do so—to do something for their happiness, the greatest happiness of the greatest number. To them, the universe was one great machine where everything was connected. The best and worst aspects of this humanism can be seen in two completely different painters who Diderot much admired. The first is Chardin, the painter of everyday life—clean, direct, intimate, deceptively simple, a sort of eighteenth-century Vermeer. The second however, is Greuze—melodramatic, moralistic, sentimentious and generally soppy. Look at these girls so innocent that you wouldn't trust them near a hayloft. Look at the families gathered around the dying father. Greuze, like Rousseau, represented the sentimental side of the Enlightenment. Remember though, it was the philosopher's appeal to feelings as much as to reason which launched the campaign for less terrible punishment, for a less heavy penal code, for humane treatment of our fellows, so, even second-rate paintings could be useful in a good cause—utility again.

Now, the true home of utility was across the channel in Britain, where there were some important differences. Where continental philosophers looked to enlightened despots and to their centralized bureaucratic states to impose necessary reforms and produce a more efficient economy, the British felt they had an efficient economy precisely because they didn't have much of a bureaucracy, and because they had avoided an authoritarian state. They were protected by the ocean, they were protected by their fleet, and they kept government down to a minimum because they felt that individuals could operate more efficiently when they were left alone and not told what to do.

A good expression of this is Bernard Mandeville's Fable of the Bees which he published in 1723. The fable is about a hive which functions fine until it's converted and regulated so that the bees can live a more virtuous life; and disaster strikes. The bees become sober, austere, charitable; their productivity falls drastically. Their economy becomes a subsistence economy—no luxuries, no self-indulgence, no more time wasted buzzing around flowers,
sniffing around, no more acquisitiveness, no more greed, no more surpluses. So there is no more honey, there is no more wax; it is a catastrophe. And the conclusion: individual vices are good for society, the selfishness of each conditions the prosperity of all. The ultimate version of this view can be found in Adam Smith. In his *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations* published in 1776. In this, Smith argues the fundamental harmony of self-interests. He believes in free trade, competition, production, profit; above all, no regulations. The state is simply there to see that order is kept and natural laws have their free play so that you can have a peaceful contest within a peaceful context for productive activity.

Now, in this sense, utilitarianism, which had formed all the thought of the eighteenth century, was really the doctrine of a country, of a period, of a class that felt that it was on the upswing. But since the doctrine took so many different shapes, it's hard to pick the quintessential eighteenth-century utilitarian. If I had to choose, I would pick an Englishman, even though you probably don't think of him as such—a man named Benjamin Franklin. Franklin was born in Boston in 1706, the tenth son of a soap and candle maker who had seventeen children in all. He began work at twelve, he was trained as a printer, and he began to make money by printing paper currency for Pennsylvania and some other colonies. Like other printers, Franklin also diversified his business by bringing out a gazette and an almanac, which was called *Poor Richard's Almanac*. Almanacs were very popular for vacations because you really didn't have to read well in order to consult them. You could pick up bits and pieces of information and wisdom in dotted form, a bit like the *Reader's Digest*. And Franklin's almanac printed a lot of proverbs and jokes, and it soon became very popular. Franklin then became a public figure—he promoted a fire department, started a lending library, he promoted a school that was going to become the University of Pennsylvania, and he also became interested in science. Everybody was interested in science in those days, but Franklin was interested in useful science. He invented the Franklin stove, which he called the "Pennsylvania fireplace," and which he refused to patent as a philanthropic gesture. And his stoves, which burned the wood that was so plentiful in those days, went on warming farmhouses and frontier cabins for over two centuries. He invented bifocal spectacles, he invented the lightning rod; and when he went into public service it was first as postmaster general of the northern colonies, a job which combined public utility and private profit very nicely. You probably know Franklin better as a diplomat in England and France and, of course, as delegate to the Second Continental Congress, where he helped to draft the Declaration of Independence.

But even when he was engaged in important national and international affairs, he kept working on basic things like draining swamps, improving watering troughs for horses, curing smoky chimneys, getting streets cleaner. And when he was criticized for paying attention to such trifling matters, he answered, "Human felicity is produced not so much by great pieces of good fortune that seldom happen, as by little advantages that occur every day." He explained that if you teach a young man to shave himself and to keep his razor in order, you contribute more to his happiness than if you do something more grand, because, I quote him, "He escapes the frequent vexation of waiting for barbers, their dirty fingers, offensive breath, dull razors. He can shave when he pleases, and with a good instrument." In his autobiography, Franklin insists that, "God helps those who help themselves." A person's fate is largely determined by his or her acts, he declares, and if you want to win, learn the rules of nature, especially human nature—a subject in which Franklin is just as realistic and pragmatic as in every other. In a way, his *Poor Richard's Almanac* serves as a guide through the hazardous territory called life. How can you depend on others when you can't depend on yourself? Why blame wolves for eating sheep, when men eat a lot more than wolves do? "The better you understand the world," says Poor Richard, "the less you like it." But Franklin didn't despise his fellow men, he just didn't exalt them. They were fallible, self-deluded, cruel, thoughtless; and yet they were capable of enlightenment, of improvement. So, even though the world was a rough place where the strong ate the weak and privilege was in the saddle, the world could be made more bearable by small, gradual remedial acts, by self-discipline, by self-confidence. "As for God," said Franklin, "He was best served by doing good to men." And so Franklin suggested that, if you survived a shipwreck, you were better advised to build a lighthouse than a church.

Above all, Benjamin Franklin was skeptical and pragmatic, never pompous, never solemn, never systematic about his philosophy. He championed a lot of useful projects—freedom of the press, freedom of speech, popular education, equality of opportunity and fairer treatment for Indians and Blacks. And there was something paradoxical about this practical man, who sometimes sounded like Hobbes, working so hard to improve this lousy human nature of ours. But he did it because he thought that we might still be coaxed and persuaded into courses of action that might make us, that might make our society, a little less stupid, a little less vicious, a little more—how shall I put it?—a little more human. So here was the gist of eighteenth-century thought in action—reasonable, utilitarian, pragmatic, reformist, not revolutionist, persuaded that God helps those who help themselves—and it was to express itself dramatically and effectively by 1776, in the American Revolution, as we shall see in our next program.
The American Revolution

They were self-governing colonies, ignored by the mother country year after year until new laws were passed to bring them under control. Now they were breaking the laws--and meant to keep on breaking them.

The American Revolution this time on The Western Tradition.

And now UCLA Professor Eugen Weber's continuing journey through the history of Western Civilization.

In 1492, Columbus found a new land across the Atlantic, or at least a land new for Europeans, and the world of Western man was increased by two continents. Then, in 1507, a German mapmaker published a map of the world incorporating the new discoveries, and he called the new lands America, after Amerigo Vespucci, a Florentine navigator in the service of Spain. He could have called them Columbia, after Columbus, but America the new lands remained, and the American dream was born to fire the imagination of those who didn't like the reality they saw around them in Europe, the violence and the corruption of the Old World.

In America, naked savages shared what they possessed, they had simple needs, they led harmonious lives, they were naturally good. America was a world that had escaped the fall. It had never known original sin. It was a golden world, truly golden, because it was full of treasure--gold, silver, land for the taking, not to mention tobacco. The happy noble savage never existed, of course, and those inhabitants who did exist were soon wiped out by war, disease, and exploitation, but noble American savages peopled European utopias from the sixteenth century to the twentieth. American utopia became a part of European consciousness.

In the great open plains, American life was seen as closer to God and nature, simpler, more human. You could enjoy the purity of pioneer life, grappling with nature, coming to terms with it. You could find not just treasure but freedom, liberty, true democracy. These concepts have haunted European imaginations since the first discoveries and they've become part of the political rhetoric of America itself. Freedom and democracy were going to take a little time, however, because the first dream of America was really about riches. It was the hope of riches that drove hard, cruel, persistent men to conquer and settle new lands across the Atlantic, to fight over them, to kill, loot, exploit, enslave, finally to organize new societies on the ruins of what they found and took.

The new societies came first in South America and the Caribbean, where Spain founded an extraordinary empire. The empire was bureaucratic, prosperous, stable, sophisticated, no more oppressive than Spain, less heavily taxed than Spain, more advanced than Spain, and certainly more advanced than the less attractive lands to the North. Where the North was muddy villages, the South was an urban culture--this, for instance, is Mexico City. The North was logs, the South was stone, fine cities, great churches, universities and libraries. There was also a social life to match Milan or Madrid, a merchant class Lisbon or Seville, and public money for urban improvements, for painting, lighting, water supplies for planting trees along broad avenues. Some of the Baroque masterpieces of the 1700s are still standing in Mexico City.

But by the 1700s, the Spanish Empire was declining, and the South declined with it. A new world was rising in the North. It had taken the North a long time to catch up. By the 1530s, when the French first sailed up the St. Lawrence River, the Spaniards were already well ensconced in Mexico, Peru, and Cuba. By the 1580s, when the English settled Newfoundland and tired to settle Virginia, which the named after Elizabeth, the Virgin Queen, Spanish universities in Lima and Mexico were already turning out more officials than Fadua or Paris.

There was no treasure in the north to attract colonists. There were furs, but you don't need a lot of people to trap animals and skin them, and the native Indians in the north were more warlike than those in the south. So really, the settlement of the North American continent didn't come until the seventeenth century. That's when the French founded Quebec and Montreal and the English refounded Virginia. That's when the Pilgrims took three months and five days to sail from Plymouth in England to New Plymouth in what eventually became Massachusetts. The seventeenth century is when the Dutch founded New Amsterdam in what is now New York, when the Swedes founded New Sweden in what is now Delaware, and when John Locke wrote a constitution for the new state of Carolina, which was named, of course, after King Charles I.

Tom Paine was going to call America the colony of all Europe. Indeed, by the eighteenth century America was attracting Welsh and Scots, Spaniards and Germans and Austrians to go along with the French and English and Dutch. And America was also a European colony in the sense that its new culture was European. Before the
Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, for example, they had signed a covenant, which was a true social contract. They constituted themselves a civil body politic, they said, and they promised obedience to the just and equal laws that shall be thought mean and convenient for the general good of the colony. And so, America was the colony of the European tradition of humanism and creativity born in the Renaissance and culminating in the eighteenth century Enlightenment spirit, a spirit that the American myth and American possibilities fit very, very well.

You can get an idea of this spirit when you go to Virginia and look at the extraordinary wilderness home that a young Virginia lawyer built himself in the 1760s. The lawyer’s name was Thomas Jefferson, and he called his house “Monticello”—the little mound. Jefferson made the plans for Monticello with the aid of a book on designs by the great Renaissance architect Palladio, whose sixteenth century creations you can still admire in northeast Italy. Palladio was coming back in vogue in the eighteenth century because his lines are the epitome of reason and harmony; symmetrical, proportional, never cold or dull or grandly stodgy. Some of the great buildings of eighteenth century England are Palladian, or Neo-Palladian, but you wouldn’t expect a Palladian mansion on the edge of Indian territory.

Yet, that is what you get at Monticello, designed and built by a man who was as much a universal man as Alberti was in the Renaissance—linguist, scientist, farmer, educator, town planner, and architect, horseman and musician. And since he was American, Jefferson was typically fond of technological improvements and gadgets. At Monticello, doors opened when you approached them, a clock tells the days of the week, and the master’s bed is placed so that he can get out of it in either of two rooms. The American landscape may still have been wild in the eighteenth century, but a society that could produce a Jefferson was highly sophisticated, which also meant that it wasn’t exactly poor any longer.

Both the British and French colonies and their trade were now worth fighting for. They may not have been as important as the West Indies, which produced sugar and coffee and tobacco, and which both the British and the French thought worth far more than Canada—Canada, which Voltaire described as a few acres of snow—and far more than the wilderness around the Ohio River; but they were still worth fighting for.

In fact, the great eighteenth century wars between France and England were really about who was going to rule the seas and therefore command the colonies; because by then, the crux of trade and wealth and power was seen as being overseas. So the British fought the French for world power, and in that fight the British colonials in America helped their fellow British against the French and against the Indians who fought on the side of the French. It was in these French and Indian Wars that men like George Washington got their military experience. By this time, the colonials had started to call themselves Americans, and they were glad when the Treaty of Paris in 1763 forced the French out of Canada, because that meant the French would no longer hamper their own movement westward. Nor would the French be there to arm and support the Indians to withstand the colonial advance into Indian territories. But when the French had been pushed out, the British, who had been seen as protectors, now began to appear as oppressors, or at least as a nuisance, because the British didn’t want trouble from their disobedient American children. They didn’t want the Americans pushing into Indian lands and starting conflicts that would cost money; and, even worse, the British—depicted here haughtily regarding a map of North America—the British wanted to tax Americans for services they, the British provided, services which Americans now felt they could provide by themselves.

The British wanted to harness the colonial economy to the interests of the home country, they wanted to control trade in the old mercantilistic way, when the Americans were free traders. So, almost as soon as the Treaty of Paris had been signed, British and Americans started to squabble, and within twelve years they started to fight. That was the American Revolution.

The American Revolution has sometimes been called ten years of wrangling and eight years of war, but actually the roots of the Revolution were planted with the first English settlements in America. There are books which emphasize the fact that nearly half the history of this country concerns a period of dependence on Great Britain. This is true, of course, but it also gives a false impression, because on the one hand American cultural dependence on Europe in general, and on England in particular, was not restricted to the colonial period but went on much longer than that; and on the other hand it would be quite possible to argue that the American colonies were pretty much politically independent from the very beginning.
For the most part, the colonial period is the story of self-governing colonies which were ignored by the mother country for decade after decade. Then, rather late in the day, and as it seemed to the colonists, rather suddenly, an attempt was made to tighten things up, to get some effective control over colonial affairs through administration and taxation. The attempt failed, very much as a parent would fail if he or she tried to control a grown child which had never known any discipline. Furthermore, seventeenth and eighteenth century England was politically divided. It was torn by civil wars in the 1600s, it was torn by rebellions in the early 1700s. But the English never were terribly interested in administering and controlling their colonies, and when they did try to control them, that aroused resentment, so the English drew back. By necessity or policy, colonial relations were oiled by salutary neglect by letting sleeping dogs lie. This left its mark on the colonies, it made it hard to order them around. You can drift into a policy, but habit becomes custom and establishes a sort of prescriptive right.

There is a story that illustrates this point. Sixty years after the Revolution, a man by the name of Levi Preston, who had been a Minute man in Massachusetts and who was by now a kind of historical curiosity. Preston was asked about the English oppressions, so called, which had started, presumably, all the trouble. "Oppressions?" he said, "What were they? I didn't feel it." Well, there was the Stamp Act. "Stamp Act? I never saw any stamps." How about the Tea Tax? "Well, I never drank a cup of the stuff. The boys threw it all overboard." Well, then, there were Sydney and Locke on the eternal principles of liberty. "Never heard of them. We read only the Bible, the Catechism, Watts' Hymns, and the Almanac." "Well, then," says the interviewer, "What did you do about that?" "Young man," said Preston, "What we meant was this: We always had governed ourselves, we always meant to govern ourselves. They didn't mean we should."

Now that conversation, I think, gives us a clear idea of one rather unexpected aspect of the American Revolution, that revolutions don't have to be caused by revolutionary ideas. The American Revolution was a conservative affair. It was fought by some people to resist further change; you might say, to resist change and progress in the shape of the growing efficiency and the growing power of the British State.

The beginning of the argument between the colonists and the London government was legalistic. The British imposed a tax, and the Colonies said you can't impose this kind of tax, it's unconstitutional. And so the British would withdraw the first tax and impose another sort of tax that was just as odious as the first, and when the tax agent kept coming Bostonians poured tea down his throat after tarring and feathering him. The point, of course, was that the colonists did not choose to pay taxes or to suffer restrictions for the sake of an empire that they no longer needed. It was not in their interest to pay taxes, and you couldn't suppose that they would be such very peculiar people as to sacrifice self-interest to sentiment.

They were breaking the law because they didn't like the law, and because they felt strong enough to break it, and they meant to go on breaking it; but what they wanted was a good excuse for doing so, a rationalization, a justification of their step. And so they started to talk a bit less about their rights as freeborn Englishmen and they started to talk a bit more about their natural rights as members of the human race.

Natural law was much safer ground. It was ambiguous, it was fashionable, and it was just what American patriots needed. Natural law was moral, since it was based on a faith in God and in the perfection of his creation. It denied authority to any government which didn't rest on the consent of the governed, and it was, so to speak, in the air. It didn't have to be argued, it didn't have to be justified. People usually accepted it whole as a self-evident truth. Even so, the Revolutionary argument did not rest wholly on natural rights alone. In fact, to start with, the Revolutionary leaders had some trouble in deciding which rights they were defending, whether they were British rights or human rights, so they tried a bit of everything.

The Revolutionary leaders couldn't decide, either, whether the oppressor was King George or the Parliament. There were appeals for relief from the oppression of the king, which they addressed to Parliament; there were appeals for relief from the oppression of Parliament, which they addressed to the king; there were appeals based on colonial charters, which they addressed to the courts. There were also appeals to the classic virtues dear to the eighteenth century; and one Rhode Island patriot urged fellow Rhode Islanders to awaken, as he put it, all that is Roman in Providence. Arguments, however, don't make revolutions or win wars. The Revolutionary War was possible because the colonists were too far away for the British to repress the rebellion with the means available at the time, and the war was won because the enemies of England had an interest in helping the colonists who rebelled against them. The French, especially, were delighted to pay the English back for the loss of Canada. They supplied the insurgents with tens of thousands of muskets; most of the gunpowder they used came from France; and finally, after the Americans had demonstrated that they weren't going to give in, the French came into the war and they provided the military and naval support that actually won it. And if you want to know what the Europeans thought
the war was about, you have only to look where the Peace was signed: not in Boston, not in London, but in Versailles, in 1783. That was the last victory of the French monarchy, and this painting was never finished, by the way, because the British refused to pose. So what Americans called the War of Independence was only won after a long struggle in which French aid and British incompetence were crucial, and in which the result was largely a matter of European power politics. Largely, but not entirely, for if in the end the colonists won, it was also because at the end of the eighteenth century the economic principles on which the old colonial system rested were being discarded--by Adam Smith and his followers in Britain, by a new generation of economists and philosophers in France.

Out of the Enlightenment a new philosophy of economic liberalism was rising over the West, a philosophy opposed to mercantilism and state regulation, a philosophy that taught that the wealth of nations was to be found in free trade, freedom of individual enterprise and competition, and the abolition of old restrictive laws of trade and navigation. And this movement of economic liberalism was part of the general eighteenth century movement of humanitarian and rationalistic reform in Europe, which meant that the economic reformers had made common cause with moralistic reformers who refused to sanction the coercion or oppression of subject peoples, including the colonists in America.

So here you have a coalition between English businessmen who felt confident enough not to want to close colonial markets, and an English public confident enough to sympathize with moral and philosophical appeals; which meant that the English were deeply divided on the colonial issue, and the ones who stood for a hard policy toward the American rebels belonged mostly to the Stupid Party, as we can see from their conduct of the war when, over and over again, it wasn't really the Americans who won, it was the English who lost. Next time, the influence of the American Revolution on Europe. Until then...

#138 The American Republic

One feared tyranny and sought a government that would not intrude upon the lives of people; the other feared the mob and wanted a government that would make people behave. As both men fought and struggled to build a nation, Europe dreamed of paradise across the Atlantic.

The American Republic this time on The Western Tradition.

And now UCLA Professor Eugen Weber's continuing journey through the history of Western Civilization.

Given the incompetence of English soldiers and politicians in the American War of Independence, given French aid, given factors like distance and a large measure of luck, we can furnish some explanation of how the colonists finally won. But then, when the fighting was over, we can also see the development of conflict in the American camp between moderates and radicals, between the conservative, the stabilizer, and the party of change and movement. It was, in essence, a classic revolutionary situation after the revolution was over.

One group was made up largely of the early revolutionary leaders who had been quite willing to go to war to get independence, men like Jefferson or Richard Henry Lee of Virginia. These people liked the Articles of Confederation that had been agreed upon during the war because they were pretty loose and ineffective and because they embodied the conviction that the greatest political gain of the revolution was the independence of the several states. The weaker the confederation was, the more independent the states were, the more independent the states were, the better they liked it. The men who opposed this group had, on the whole, come into the revolution more reluctantly, men like Alexander Hamilton or Robert Livingston of New York. Most of them believed that the new government should have a central government with power to coerce both the state government and the citizen. They were conservative in their politics, they were conservative in their social standing, men of principle and men of property, whose property sometimes provided a major principle.

These two tendencies, these two attitudes, are best represented by two personalities, Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton. And they are reflected in two documents: the Declaration of Independence, the idealistic proclamation that makes a revolution, and the Constitution, the legalistic document that is the product of compromise and of fear of further revolution. Obviously, the two attitudes were at opposite poles. There could be little compromise between those who felt that man needs only to be freed from his chains in order to move towards perfection, and those who felt that even the wisest and the strongest vows could not keep a man from making a damn fool of himself and making his neighbor miserable as well.
When they looked into the future, Jefferson and his followers feared the corruptions of power. They believed that if man was saved from tyranny he would do very well for himself. So they were for a government that would do as little as possible. When Hamilton and his followers looked into the future, they feared the corruptions of human nature. They believed that if man was saved from himself, there was a great future for American society. Naturally they were for an active, interfering government that would make things happen the way they should happen, that would make people behave the way they should behave. People who were of this mind argued that the attempt of a loose government based on the Articles of Confederation was a fake, and they eventually had their way at the cost of a few compromises at the Constitutional Convention in 1787. So while we can say symbolically that Jefferson--in a sense of the ideas he represented--that Jefferson made the Revolution, we can also say, with lots of reservations, that Hamilton made the Constitution; and that, to a certain extent, the interesting thing about the American experiment is that it has always preserved this combination of hardheaded practice on the lines of Hamilton and Hobbes, and very idealistic theory on the lines of Jefferson and Locke. So, while all men were created equal, this didn't include blacks, who could not marry whites; Indians, who were to be driven off their lands; illiterates and paupers, who weren't going to get a vote; and women, of course, who were not men. The Constitution replaced the old authority by a new one; the old manorial ruling class by a new republican ruling class, resting on property and social distinction and eventually on heredity too, as much as the old one had done.

The big difference was that Americans could not admit the hereditary and social distinctions on which their society, like every other society, was based. And this created a gap between theory and practice, between the theory of equality that united the nation and the practice of competition, competition with its unequal and selected results that kept the nation on the move and made it expand. The tension between theory and practice, between equality and competition, this tension would never be admitted, let alone resolved. The frauds and the illusions necessary to conceal it became part of American history and of history itself. And it's quite possible that without such great illusions and great deceptions, too, no great nation can exist, at least not as a nation.

If we look to see how this worked out in immediate practice, we glimpse first of all a belief in the great destiny of the new nation and a general conviction that Americans could do anything they wanted, untrammeled by the traditions and the repressions of the Old World. And nowhere was this feeling as strong as in the Old World itself, because America was a screen on which Europe could project its own ideal vision. Europe was divided and restless within itself. It was rent by the clash between the established ideas of inherited family status and privilege and the new ideas of personal merit. There was a growing demand for equality, there was growing social mobility, but not nearly enough, and that made for a more troubled class consciousness. At the same time, there was a growing elitism in Europe, both in the developing bureaucracies and in the aristocratic reaction of a class that felt threatened and reacted by asserting itself more strongly than before. And this conflicted with a vague but widespread desire among a lot of people who had been outside the political scene up to now: the desire to take part in affairs, to do good for society, to play the patriot, to act the citizen, the way people like themselves had shown was possible in the new United States. And it was to America that everybody referred, from Scotland to Poland; sometimes in the most unrealistic terms, the indifference to fact being a kind of mirror of the feelings of the order, of the patriot--a mirror, too, of the distance that turned the American continent into a mirage.

"They say," writes a Belgian in 1782, "they say that in Virginia the members chosen to establish the new government assembled in a peaceful wood removed from the sight of the people in an enclosure prepared by nature with banks of grass, and that in this sylvan spot they deliberated on who should preside over it." And here is something more heroic but equally silly from a Frenchman with strong echoes of Plutarch and the noble Romans. The day when Washington resigned his command in the Hall of Congress, a crown set with jewels had been placed on the book of the Constitution. Suddenly, Washington seized the crown, broke it, and threw the pieces before the assembled people. How petty does the ambitious Caesar seem before this heroic American.

Of course, this is a sort of fairy tale. Here we see a far more likely version of the event. But, under the literary artifice and the rhetoric you can find a kind of spiritual integration. You can sense the psychological discomfort of Europeans, the yearning to live in a better country where solid merit would be recognized. The moral rejection of existing European society, which would be the ultimate cause of revolution, then; in Europe we're told, talent could be a sad and futile gift. But in America, the most honest, the most truly respectful was also the greatest and most respected without reference to birth or rank. In America, there were none of the social injustices that were weighing more heavily in Europe, not because they were getting heavier but because people were more aware of them than ever before. In America, artificial distinctions had been brushed away. As a German professor put it in 1776, "The Americans are the most fortunate peoples on the whole earth, at least among the civilized nations. They do not even know the names of many burdens borne by subjects in Europe." The professor couldn't understand why half of Europe had not already emigrated across the Atlantic.
Of course, there were people, and Jefferson was one, who tried to combat the more absurd ideas about America that circulated in Europe. But the realists were opposed by those Europeans who preferred dreams to reality, and, indeed, who saw that if you wanted to affect reality only dreams could provide truly striking material. "You wish, Sir, to destroy this enchantment," says a Frenchman in 1786. "Cruel man, even if it were an illusion, would you still dissipate it? It would be dear to us. It would be useful in consoling the man of virtue." And he might have added, it would be useful too, in showing what you could do and what you could get if you tried your own revolution. What you had here was frustration translated into boundless hope. This feeling produced a kind of philosophy of history, the belief that the American Revolution marked an enormous turning point in the entire history of the human race.

One of the most revered of American public documents—the dollar bill—bears on its reverse the date 1776 and the inscription "Novus Ordo Seclorum," which means that in that fateful year, 1776, not only was a new nation born, but a new order of human society, free from the sins and the follies of the old Europe. The proof of that lay in the fact that George Washington did not become king when the war was over, but returned to his farm at Mount Vernon, which proved that Republicans really were virtuous men, like ancient Romans or enlightened philosophers. When Virginia wanted to honor its great republican hero, it hired the favorite sculptor of the Enlightenment, the Frenchman Houdin. His statue of Washington now stands in the Virginia State Capitol at Richmond, in a building designed by Thomas Jefferson. This is what Tom Paine had to say about the new republican spirit: "What we formerly called revolutions were little more than a change of persons or an alteration of local circumstances. They rose and fell like things, of course, and had nothing in their existence or their fate that could influence beyond the spot that produced them. But what we now see in the world from the revolutions of America and France are renovation of the natural order of things, a system of principles as universal as truth and the existence of man, and combining mortal with political happiness and national prosperity."

The extraordinary thing about this passage is that it was to a great extent true. And the main point on which Paine seems to be mistaken is not in getting excited about the significance of the American Revolution but in classing it together with the French Revolution. The American Revolution was different both from that of seventeenth century England and from that of eighteenth century France because it took place in a new country and a new world which were not set. This meant that for once the exalted hopes of the revolutionary idealists were matched by the vast resources of an unexploited continent, and by unlimited possibilities of social expansion and experience. The American leaders had the opportunity to build, not just to fight.

In eighteenth century France, Thomas Jefferson might have put together declarations and constitutions, but he would probably have gone to the guillotine like a lot of revolutionaries. In America, he was able not only to play the big part he did in the formulation of American political thought, but also an effective part as a practical politician in the government and the development of his country. When Jefferson died on July 4, 1826, which was also the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, when Jefferson died, he left precise instructions about what should be inscribed on his tomb. He wanted the inscription to say that he had fathered the Declaration of Independence, the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, and the University of Virginia. That's a very American, a very eighteenth century American, selection.

Coming from a man who had done a lot of other things in his life, including being President of the United States, which he had helped to found, Jefferson's inclusion of the Statute for Religious Freedom is particularly telling. I don't know of another revolutionary particularly interested in freedom of thought for others. And I also don't know another revolutionary who founded a university and designed it himself in 1816 as what he called an "academic village," with independent quarters for students and professors, with gardens, and with a courtyard surrounded by elegant neoclassical buildings, but open on one side to the mountains and the land. On the other hand, this is the man who thought that a little revolution was good now and then, and who wrote that "the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is the natural manure." He wrote that in 1787, just a few years before the French Revolution produced a bit too much blood manure. But still, it's remarkable that this man who would become President could be so forthright.

Now, have you ever asked yourself in the light of what you know about politics, how Jefferson managed to survive and prosper politically for so long? Was it only by occasionally eating his words? Or was it rather because here in America, and here alone, his conception of democracy as a free commonwealth of freeholders liberated from the economic and political servitude of the old world, free to exploit the resources of this new world—here alone all this was not just a Utopian dream? It was a practical policy which could appeal, which did appeal to the Virginia planters, to the Pennsylvania democrats, to the men on the frontier. And, in addition, it was a possible policy, be-
cause the new United States inherited in its turn the privileged position of the country it had defeated. America, too, and even more so, could be an island like England--inefficient, little governed, and remarkably free. It could do pretty much as it pleased without much interference from outside.

American democracy was rude, its structure was clumsy, its politics were wasteful, but it worked. Or so it seemed to foreign observers like the Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville, who came to see it in 1831, when the Union was half a century old, and who thought he found here the shape of things to come. And the American democracy didn't just work—it moved. After 1850, the United States had reached its present continental limits. After 1853, when the railroad reached Chicago and St. Louis, only Alaska and Hawaii would be missing from the present constellation of states. In this expanding land, where every tenth man or woman was an immigrant, a new nationalism was taking shape. "We've listened too long to the refined muses of Europe," wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson. "We shall walk on our own feet, we shall work with our own hands, we shall speak according to our own convictions." And these recurrent declarations of independence also were part of the American syndrome of what became an American tradition. So there it was: for nearly three centuries, the Western world had been in bondage to Europe. Now one portion of it was free. And within a few decades the vast dominions of Spain and Portugal would also be free from their European masters, if not free from themselves. In April 1789, Washington, the first President of the New Republic, took office, six days before the French Estates-General opened at Versailles—the prelude to quite a different revolution. By 1801, Jefferson was inaugurated the third President of the United States. It was he who directed the planning of the capital city, to be named after Washington, a capital which would be laid out on rational, enlightened lines by a French engineer called L'Enfant, whose design would imitate the Romans after whom the new Republicans modeled themselves—massive, dignified, virile and rather solemn. Washington architecture was supposed to reflect the power of the laws being forged there and the solidarity of the New Republic. And certainly there was something quite exceptional about what it stood for then, and it remains exceptional today, nearly two centuries later—Jefferson planned it well.

Although he was buried at Monticello, the Jefferson Memorial in Washington quotes the words of the Declaration he was so proud of—"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights. Among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, that to secure these rights governments are instituted among men."

In our next program, we shall see how these words echo throughout Europe with very different results from those they had in the United States. Until then...

#139 The Death Of The Old Regime

In every aspect of life new ideas and new values were taking over in France. Even Louis XVI supported the American Revolution. These were the people who lit the fuse—the educated, the better off, and these were the people who exploded.

The Death Of The Old Regime this time on the Western Tradition.

And now UCLA Professor Eugen Weber's continuing journey through the history of Western Civilization.

The American Revolution that I talked about last time deserves our attention not only for it's own sake but also because it was the first of a long series of revolutions that were to mark the years from 1776 onwards, a series that isn't over yet. And the revolution was doubly significant because the men and the women who made it, and those who got involved in it, managed to solve its central problem in a way that makes it rather different from the other revolutions that we have seen since then. Revolution, you see, is rather like a snowball on a slope. It's not easy to get it going, but once it's on its way, it is hard to stop it rolling and growing until it becomes an avalanche. And the problem in America was to stop the revolution for independence from snowballing into a popular and democratic revolution.

The Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation had marked the triumph of the democratic view which favored popular sovereignty and little government. The Federalist Papers and the Constitution, on the other hand, marked a sort of counter-revolution of those who distrusted the people and believed in strong government. To the federalists like Alexander Hamilton, democracy was nearly anarchy. And the way to prevent power...
from slipping into the hands of an illiterate mob was to have government by the best people in the land. People like Hamilton himself, who could be trusted to use power in a moderate and responsible fashion. So at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, a constitution was designed that was democratic enough to be adopted, but not democratic enough to threaten the power and the controlling position of the upper and propertied classes. And this is what is so special, so unusual about the American Revolution, that it very soon stopped being a revolution, that the snowball was stopped before it could become an avalanche. Even democratic leaders were able to indulge in the luxury of very revolutionary, very radical ideas while living and acting in a very conservative manner. It was possible to declare that life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were inalienable rights of all men and to provide legal protection for slavery. It was possible to declare that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, and to accept a constitution that did not provide for direct representation. So the American Revolution was ambivalent; both conservative and revolutionary. It could remain conservative because in relative terms the conservatism of colonial Americans was more radical by the general standards of Europeans of the time, and conveniently the deepest reactionaries in America, the loyalists who clung to king and empire and who might have forced a deeper radicalization by their intransigence, the loyalists left, or were forced to leave mostly for Canada, and those who remained could afford to remain relatively conservative simply because the colonies had never known oppression and because as human institutions go, America always had been free, excepting, of course, for slavery. On the other hand, the American Revolution was revolutionary because the colonists took the risks of rebellion and because they check-mated those Americans who wanted a society like the aristocratic society of England and the rest of Europe. But most of all, the revolution was revolutionary because it showed how certain abstract doctrines such as the rights of man and the sovereignty of the people could be, as John Adams put it, "Could be reduced to practice by assemblies of pretty level-headed gentlemen, exercising constituent power in the name of the people."

The effects of all this on Europe were very important. The revolution inspired the sense of a new era; it added new substance to the concept of progress; a whole new dimension to the ideas of liberty and equality that the Enlightenment had spread abroad; it got people into the habit of thinking more concretely about political questions; it made them more readily critical of their own governments and their own system; it dethroned England as the inspiration of enlightened thinkers and set up America as the model for a better world; it brought written constitutions, declarations of rights, constituent conventions, into the realm of the possible. Above all, perhaps, America made Europe seem unsatisfactory to a lot of people in the middle and the lower classes and to those members of the upper classes who sympathized with them, it made a lot of Europeans feel sorry for themselves. And it induced the kind of spiritual flight from the Old Regime and from the values that it represented. But all this was happening in Europe, not in America. What it comes down to is, that the American Revolution in its doctrinal aspect opened up the possibilities of political change, possibilities far wider than was necessary in practice in the America of 1776, but not in Europe. So while the formal example of revolution may have been given in Philadelphia the effective example was going to be given in Paris.

It was 1789 and the storming of the Basille, not 1776, that set Europe on fire. And it is the French Revolution, not the American, which puts the question of the price of revolution, which gives us the certainty that there will always be a very high price to pay, and it leaves us wondering when everything is said and done whether even that high price will actually pay for the goods ordered, for the changes and advantages we might expect from revolution. In considering the French Revolution, the first thing we have to remember is how popular the very idea of revolution had become in Europe in this last quarter of the eighteenth century. You find village priests who keep the Encyclopaedia, and the works of the philosophers on their bookshelves, you find laborers and peasants reading pamphlets about the new ideas, or being read to if they can't read themselves. You have the tremendous popularity of a man like Lafayette who returned from the American war to become a hero at home. And Benjamin Franklin who becomes a kind of saint of the Enlightenment. And, of course, you have the philosophes. None of the philosophes actually advocated violent revolution, but their writings spread revolutionary ideas and along with books and pamphlets that were remaking the European mind, especially the French mind, there was propaganda for radical change heard in the fashionable salons of Paris, in cafes, and in societies of every kind which were founded in great numbers at this time; agricultural societies, philanthropical associations, provincial academies, correspondent societies, and reading rooms where people could not only read but talk. The Masonic lodges especially were favorable to philosophical infiltration because they had the same ideals as the philosophes; civil equality, religious toleration, the liberation of the human personality from all institutions that kept it immature, and the lodges didn't include just bourgeois, but priests, and nobles, and even the brothers of Louis XVI. Then there was the theater. A playwright like Beaumarchais whose patron was Queen Marie Antoinette, a man like Beaumarchais was busy writing subversive comedies like Marriage of Figaro, which raised doubts about the value of noble birth. Marie Antoinette even acted in his plays for fun, while the King used Beaumarchais to supply arms to the American rebels and in the hands of another Mason, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Figaro became the hero of an immensely popular opera and Masonic ideas provided the core of an even greater opera, The Magic Flute.
The virtues of humanity were also affirmed by a new interest in the necessary virtues of the citizen. And this went along with a revival of the classical models of good citizenship in Greece and especially Rome. You remember the Rhode Island patriot who wanted to awaken all that was Roman in Providence. Well, a lot of the rhetoric of the eighteenth century revolution referred to the resolute and ruthless heroes of the Roman republic who sacrificed themselves, and everybody else, in the interests of state and society.

Some of the most effective propaganda in this line was produced by painters. And the most representative of these was probably Jacques-Louis David, the harbinger of revolution in art. In 1784, the year after the Peace of Paris ended the American Revolution, David painted a scene called "The Oath Of The Horatii" that had been originally inspired by a tragedy of Corneille, the story of the three Horace brothers who go off to fight for Rome swearing before their father that they are going to win or die. David's historical scenes were invariably manifestos, for Stoicism, courage, civic spirit. They were seen as an indictment of effete aristocratic ways and an advertisement for a return to the stern, patriotic morals of republican Rome. So David became a culture hero and in 1789 he painted another classical scene; of Brutus, the Roman consul, receiving the corpses of his own sons whom he had condemned to death for treachery. It wasn't just the moral uplift, it wasn't just the political implication, it was also the setting and the costumes that made a strong statement for the simple virtues, for a sober architecture without curves or curly-cues, for dress and furniture that were sparse and simple and, by implication, virtuous. This had a tremendous impact on fashion. Virtue doesn't come easily, but dressing in a virtuous style does. So, men cut their hair short in the Roman style, a-la-Brutus, and women adopted the dresses and the hairdos of Brutus's daughters, and eventually the really up-to-date adopted the very flimsy dresses that the Sabine women were supposed to have worn when Romans stole them away, with straight lines and practically no underwear and the breasts exposed, and nowhere to keep a Hanky or a key which, in turn, introduced another novelty; the "ridicule," or "reticule," which was the ancestor of our handbags.

So in every aspect of life new values were taking over, indeed by the 1780s these new values and ideas had been around so long that they didn't seem very new, or very revolutionary. People were beginning to take them for granted. And even the people against whom they were directed, the aristocrats, were beginning to take them for granted. But they were playing with fire.

Louis XVI, for instance, had supported the American rebels and helped them win their revolution. French noblemen like the Marquis de Lafayette had fought in the American army and had become heroes in France because they fought for a cause that the whole machinery of the French state was geared to crush at home. At the same time the monarchy was growing weaker because its finances had been undermined by the cost of war across the Atlantic. The American Revolution had cost France the equivalent of four year's revenues, most of this had been raised by borrowing. More than half of every year's budget had to go just to paying the interest on the debt. And all sorts of other things were going wrong; the weather was bad; the crops were bad; the price of bread was getting higher and higher; wages stood still; prices went up, and so did the taxes that a desperate government, trying to make ends meet, was trying to squeeze out of the taxpayer. And since a lot of the French were not taxpayers, because nobles and clergy and officers of the crown didn't have to pay anything, the burden fell on the people least able to pay them.

This last factor was very important because the mass of people would not have been stirred by theories if they hadn't been suffering in practice. And they were suffering terribly even though the economic problems of France were not insuperable. These problems could have been solved, at least in part, by a government that knew its morals. The deficit could have been made up, the national debt could have been handled, but to do this you had to break the privileges of the privileged, you had to break the privileges especially of the clergy and the nobility, you had to make them pay taxes. You had to cut the pensions that were sucking the treasury dry. Just one family of royal favorites, the Polymarchs, were getting pensions equivalent the one and a half percent of the annual revenues of the crown for doing nothing, but for doing it very gracefully. If you could do away with pensions and tax exemptions, you could probably set the country's finances on an even keel. But, of course, none of this was done.

So here was a repetition in many ways of the situation in the American colonies. The French government liked the British tried to tighten things up for the sake of efficiency and for greater revenues, and it was opposed at first by certain privileged groups; nobles, clergy, gentlemen, lawyers, and intellectuals. Although there was a background of discontent it didn't have to explode unless the fuses were lit and the people who lit them were, as in America, the better off people, the educated, who brandished slogans like "Liberty" and "Natural Law" and "Representation" in order to defend their privileges. The same thing was going on in other parts of Europe. In 1786, there was a revolution in Holland which had to be put down by Prussian troops, in 1788 there was a revolution in Belgium, and there was unrest throughout the Hapsburg Empire and all were directed against governments that tried to disturb old traditions, old institutions, to attack privileges, to introduce more rational reforms, more efficient adminis-
tration, and that's just what happened in France. The French government under a fairly able minister of finance, Charles de Calonne, tried to rationalize the management of the country, tried to move into the modern age by abolishing the anachronistic survivals of the feudal system. But, paradoxically, the government tried to do this by reviving an old feudal institution; the Estates General, a representative assembly that had met just once since 1500 and not at all since 1614. The government wanted to play the Third Estate, the commoners, against the privileged orders. But the ploy failed and the Third Estate took over, claiming quite rightly that it really represented the nation. It declared itself the National Assembly and after a lot of talk, much of it foolish, the representatives of the nobility and the clergy joined them and that, in June, 1789, was the beginning of the constitutional revolution.

Then, on the fourth of August, in a great burst of enthusiasm, the Assembly abolished the feudal order. The sitting opened with a Viscount proposing the abolition of all economic privileges, no more forced labor, no more personal servitude, no more tax exemptions. A Duke supported him strongly, and the proposals were voted with enthusiasm, and after this, all particular privileges were sacrificed on the altar of the fathers. Hunting rights went the way of all flesh, guilds and corporations were suppressed, the clergy gave up their tithes, the magistrates who bought their offices gave them up too, and this went on until two o'clock in the morning.

It's interesting to compare David's view of the crucial moment when the Third Estate's swore never to separate until France got a written constitution like the Americans had, to compare this with a painting of the Oath of the Horatii because the gestures are exactly the same. Which demonstrates either that life imitates art, or that artists imitate themselves. At any rate when the sitting was over, the administrative and political unity of France had been achieved, something that absolute monarchy had always tried and never managed to do. And the Old Regime was dead. On its grave, three weeks later the assembly proclaimed the Declaration of the Rights of Man full of echoes from America and more distant echoes of Locke and Rousseau. It might seem that by the end of August 1789, the French Revolution had been made, and that in so far as the public in London and Paris and Philadelphia was concerned, all was over but the cheering. Unfortunately, as you know, it wasn't over because just as the King had played the Third Estate against the nobles, and the third estate had got the better of it, so the Third Estate in order to get its way, raised up its own monster and that was the people, the mob of Paris.

Back on July the fourteenth, the Paris mob had stormed the Bastille, had torn it down, had set free the prisoners and massacred the soldiers and the officers inside. It didn't matter that the old prison was practically empty, because its fall kept the reformers in power in the National Assembly. And then, while mobs rioted in urban France, peasant mobs had gone on the rampage in rural France as well against the oppressive remains of the feudal order. This is the background of the Declaration of the Rights of Man. And then in October, 1789, the Paris mob, led and controlled by Paris market women, marched on Versailles. They massacred the King's guard, they brought the royal family back to Paris; the baker, the baker's wife, and the baker's boy is what they called them. They brought the royal family out of their safe, splendid refuge into the capital of democracy. So, the revolution had got out of hand, the National Assembly itself could not control, and the snowball was about to become an avalanche, as we shall see next time.

#140 The French Revolution

It started out with ringing words and heads held high— it ended up with grandiose slogans and heads cut off. It was meant to bring equality and liberty; instead it brought dictatorship and the new hierarchy of a great powerful empire.

The French Revolution this time on The Western Tradition.

And now UCLA Professor Eugen Weber's continuing journey through the history of Western Civilization.

As we saw in our last program, the first years of the French Revolution were a fascinating time because everything seemed possible. An English poet just twenty-one years old, William Wordsworth goes to France in 1791, he falls in love with a young woman, he falls in love with love, with France, with the Revolution; and this is what he had to say about it: "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, but to be young was very heaven. Oh, times in which the meager state forbidden ways of custom, law, and statute took at once the attraction of a country in romance." It was a fairy-tale, a land of romance; but there was more than romance, there were Enlightenment in action, there was history on the march. The Revolution perfected what generations of kings and royal ministers had worked so hard to achieve and never managed to achieve. The Revolution centralized France, it abolished
particular laws, particular privileges, particular servitude, no more different institutions and different provinces, no more internal customs barriers between provinces that hamper the circulation of people and goods. The Revolution establishes one law, one court system, one administration, one bureaucracy, one set of rights and duties for all the French—which really means for all Frenchmen, because Roman precedent didn’t give woman much status. So at last, with some mitigation, reason was in power, or so it seemed.

Reason gave France a constitution; it introduced, representative government, and universal suffrage; that is, universal male suffrage. It abolished the old provinces and divided the country into new areas called departments. Of reasonable size with reasonable names like Loiret and Basques taken from a local river or mountain range. The Revolution abolished the old system of weights and measures, which wasn’t a system at all, but a jungle of different local measures. It introduced the metric system from the Greek word for measure. It created a new calendar with new months with wonderful names like Floreal, and Thermidor, and Fructidor evocative of nature and of productive activities, and it replaced the seven day week with ten day periods, decades, so workers would only waste three days of rest a month instead of four. It abolished the local languages and dialects like Flemish, Breton, and Basque, and replaced them with one national language, French, which would be taught in schools to all children, not just to a privileged few. And it decreed that careers from now on would depend not on birth, but on talent, on a person’s capacity, and performance and merit.

Unfortunately, most of these wonderful reforms remained on paper. Universal suffrage, public education, the generalization of the French language, and of the metric system were all going to wait another hundred years. The reforms that did work, however, caused a great deal of trouble. Careers, at least for a while and up to a point, did open to talent; and that, of course, caused a good deal of friction. Even more troublesome was the problem of religious reform. Although the Revolution didn’t move against religion as such, you noticed that Sunday disappeared from the new calendar and people were also encouraged to abandon reactionary names of the saints, of kings, to replace them with progressive names of heroes or of useful things. Names like Brutus, Crassus, Hector; or else Cabbage, Dandelion, Carrots; and one of my colleagues has remarked that “revolutionary names read rather like a seed catalog.”

Moreover, the revolution represented religious tolerance. It removed restrictions against outcasts like actors or public executioners; more important it emancipated Protestants, it emancipated Jews. Everybody was free to practice what religion they pleased, provided it didn’t threaten the state, and that was hardly acceptable to good Catholics. What was much worse from the Catholic point of view was that the new state wanted to control the clergy even more than the old state had done. It confiscated church property, and it put the clergy on salary. So, priests become public employees, they had to swear a loyalty oath, they had to serve the state and not the pope; and that was going to cause big trouble. The pope forbade the clergy to swear allegiance to the state and the constitution, those who did swear were excommunicated and that divided the French church into a minority who took the oath to the state, and a majority who refused and were imprisoned or exiled, or forced into hiding. And it divided French citizens into those who obeyed the government, and to those who obeyed the pope.

Among these latter’s was Louis XVI, who had accommodated himself to all the other changes of the previous years. But the religious crisis prevented him for carrying out in practice the constitution he had sworn to uphold in theory, and in due course, he was going to lose his head. And so was the Queen, both executed in the great square which Louis’s grandfather helped design, in which is now called with a certain black humor Place de la Concorde. At this point the evolutionary change which revolution has simply accelerated was derailed, and France was torn wide open by a real violent revolution. The monarchy was done away with, the liberal constitution was jettisoned, dictatorship and terror took over. Where the first stage of the revolution had been liberal and not very violent, the second stage which began around 1792 was illiberal, attempting to impose things on France that France wasn’t prepared for. So it had to use force and it had to use terror. Political freedom had to be protected by dictatorship.

The revolution said that it stood for liberty and equality, but liberty and equality are very hard to reconcile, because the exercise of liberty aggravates natural inequality. Reason and tolerance are also hard to reconcile, because reason can lead to equality, as it did when dogmatic rationalists went to war against priests in the name of reason, and dogmatic egalitarian went to war against rank, wealth or any kind of distinction, even ability. So liberty and equality became victims of a revolution that was carried out in their name. The guillotine was an apt symbol for the situation in which well meaning enthusiasts set out as one of them said, “To force people to be free.” Remember, however, that no one set out deliberately to make life hell; the terror as it was called, was the use of force, or legal violence in order to make the world a better place. So it killed a few thousand of people by execution; then it killed a few hundred thousand in the civil wars it set off. And it also laid down such basic traditions for the future as fixed prices which drive goods and especially food out of the market; a paper currency that quickly lost
its value and gave paper money a bad name in France for the next hundred years; a police state to enforce its decrees and stifle criticism, a police state much tighter than the Inquisition ever managed to oppose; and finally recourse to foreign war in order to solve insoluble problems at home. France had to face what looked like the threat of reactionary foreign powers.

In 1792, France mobilized an army of volunteers to fight Prussia and Austria. In 1793, the revolutionary government declared war on England, Holland, and Spain, all in one month. On the other hand, the Revolution had turned the country into a nation. It had declared that the French who had been merely subjects of their kings were now citizens of a sovereign state, equal shareholders in the nation. That was a good thing and it is going to pay dividends in the future. It meant that the sovereignty of the people was much more powerful and much more encroaching than the sovereignty of the king had ever been. It meant that the government which represented that sovereignty could raise more taxes than any king had ever done, and it meant that the state could mobilize not just the money of its citizens, but their bodies too. This is a French army recruitment poster. Now, conscription wasn’t new in Europe, the Swedes had used a sort of draft in the Thirty Year War, and Louis XIV’s great war minister Louvois had tried to introduce it to France, although he had to drop the idea because of to much opposition. Then Prussia perfected its system of regular military service for all healthy males, along with a reserve, and with plans for general mobilization, which is how Prussia survived and prospered through the eighteenth century. By 1789, it kept nearly two hundred thousand men under arms, where the king of France could only manage a hundred and eighty thousand, even though France was so much larger. And Prussia’s two hundred thousand soldiers cost her just one-third of what France’s smaller army cost. But by 1792, three years into the Revolution, the French had gone to war with most of Europe and they had requisitioned their own population en masse.

By 1794, the French army was nearly one million strong, five times more than it had been three years before, and a new era had opened in military history which we can fairly call the Gunpowder Era.

The basic military formation of the Old Regime was the thin file of highly trained soldiers; one, two, three ranks. The basic military formation of the new regime would be the column; a massive thing well adapted to a lot of ill-trained conscripts that have to be kept together under fire. It was all very understandable, but the fact remains that no general of the Old Regime would have dreamed to throw his man in heavy columns like this under the enemy fire. The thin file did not produce decisive results but it spared the men, and the men were hard to get, and they were expensive: expensive to recruit, expensive to train. But the generals of the Revolution, and later of the empire, spent their men without counting the losses, they knew that the state could always get more for them because it saw the whole French nation as a reservoir. And the reservoir was free.

It’s possible that the large scale massacres which followed were connected with the revival of the idea of total war, an idea the eighteenth century had forgotten. The difficulties of 1793, brought about not only the mobilization of men, but also, as you’ve heard, the mobilization of civilians of all ages and sexes and the attempt to control natural resources in a way that had never been seen before. The difference between the total war which the French invented rather casually in the 1790s, and the total war which we dread today in the 1980s, though its very great, its only a matter of degree. And once again, we’re faced with this curious paradox that something which started so hopefully and with such excellent intentions as the French Revolution did should produce such extraordinary and terrifying results.

The victories of the Revolutionary generals, for example, were facilitated by the fact that they abandoned all the accepted rules and inhibitions, and conventions of warfare, as warfare had been conceived in the eighteenth century, and that made warfare much, much worse. The destructive wars of the seventeenth century had led to the devising of a system of limited warfare in the eighteenth century, formalizing the conduct of war, limiting its destructiveness both for soldiers and for civilians, but the French generals now abandoned it. First because of necessity, they were fighting everybody at once and they didn’t have time for niceties, second because they didn’t care about the established order, about the established code. They violated borders, they fermented revolutions, they lived off the country and they moved much faster. They ignored all the nice comfortable conventions, and so they reintroduced the old ruthless practices into current use, and eventually there enemies would adopt them to.

The French saw themselves engaged in the great world struggle for the liberation of peoples from the yoke of dynastic tyranny. They pledged war to the castles, peace to the cottages. War against the oppressors for the oppressed. They declared they would assist every people that wanted to be free. Depending on how you look at it, this was a blank check for rebellion or a imperialistic provocation against the other powers of Europe. But it turned out that some populations didn’t want to be liberated or didn’t want to adopt the institutions the French thought they should adopt. Such people had to be freed of their inhibitions, they needed French guides and
commissaries, and occupiers to teach them to be free, just as the French themselves had had to be taught. And so, here you had the ideology and the practice of national revolution in which revolutionary disorder became revolutionary dictatorship, and wars of national liberation became wars of national imperialism, another instance of how the Revolution perfected what generations of French kings had worked for but had never accomplished.

All this culminated under the leadership of a dictator of genius, a great general and a great administrator, Napoleon Bonaparte. Napoleon began his career as an artillery officer just on the eve of the Revolution. And just in time to take advantage of the opportunities that the Revolution and its wars held out. His rise was meteoric. At twenty-four, in 1793, he's already a general. In 1795 and 96, he crushes the Austrian and Sardinian armies, and before long all of Italy and Switzerland had fallen under French domination as well. In 1799, at thirty years old, he's the most powerful man in France. He issues a new constitution, essentially he imposes one man rule, and by 1804, he has crowned himself emperor. Napoleon tried to immolate Alexander the Great, and he almost succeeded. Under his rule the French conquered or dominated Europe from the Baltic to the Adriatic. For a few years there were French kings or princes in Madrid and Naples, and Dubrovnik and Stockholm, and Munster and Florence. France ruled the continent while England ruled the waves. And this empire only fell to pieces when the French over-extended themselves and invaded Russia, after which Napoleon was defeated more by the Russian winter than by his enemies. But Napoleon was also the last and greatest of the Enlightened Despots. Great general that he was, his greatest work was the Civil Code which we now know as the Napoleonic Code, a set of laws that gave permanent form to the gains of the Revolution: individual liberty, freedom to work, freedom of conscience, equality before the law. The Civil Code was in the tradition of liberal humanism that we've seen operating since the Renaissance with its interest in the individual and its lack of interest in women, regarded as mere machines for making children and second class citizens at best. The victories of Napoleon's armies prepared the way for the victories of the Napoleonic Code and also prepared the way for the evolution of the people occupied by the French toward individual freedom. Napoleon's armies acted as a catalyst. Wherever they passed they destroyed what was left of feudal institutions, they abolished serfdom, the emancipated Jews, they brought in freedom of enterprise. Before Napoleon individual freedom found its limits on the Rhine, by 1812 these limits had advanced roughly to a line from Denmark to Bavaria and then south to the Adriatic, which happens also to be the line dividing free western Europe from the Communist world today. But having freed this people from their Old Regime, having feed them on liberal ideas, having taught them to think in these new French ways, Napoleon produced a result he had not intended. He gave them the idea of national sovereignty, and national self-determination. The idea that if they were free as individuals under the law, they should also be politically free under a state which they choose themselves, not one imposed by the French. In spite of himself the conqueror became the instrument of a political liberation and a political liberalism he had not attended to bring.

The wars to bring fraternal aid brought occupation. But it's obvious that neither the Revolution nor its wars with the tons of human flesh they waste, that none of these were quite in vain. They propagated modern ideas of national suffrage. They proclaimed that all men have rights. Women, unfortunately, took a bit longer, and in France, the home of the Napoleonic Code very much longer indeed; they prepare the way for lower classes to enter political life; they suggested totalitarian methods and ideas that the twentieth century was going to copy with enthusiasm, and they set out an agenda that we are still working out today. In our next program we should look at another, very different, kind of revolution that also changed the world—the Industrial Revolution, until then...

#141 The Industrial Revolution

It was a time of marvels: powerful railroads, mighty bridges, giant factories, telegraphs, telephones, and newspapers for a penny that linked and shrank the world. And towering above them were the cities, symbols of an age.

The Industrial Revolution this time on the The Western Tradition.

And now UCLA Professor Eugen Weber's continuing journey through the history of Western Civilization.

In 1848, a young Prussian exile living in Brussels wrote this hymn to the bourgeoisie. "It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals. It has created more massive and colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together: subjection of nature's forces to man; machinery; application of chemistry to industry and agriculture; steam navigation; railways, electric telegraph; clearing whole continents for cultivation; making rivers navigable; whole populations conjured out of the
ground. What earlier century could have told that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labor? The passage is from the Communist Manifesto and its writer, of course was Karl Marx, who was very impressed by material things; and when Marx wrote this, he wrote it together with his friend Friedrich Engels, who was quieter and less dramatic, hence more liable to be forgotten than Marx. So when Marx and Engels wrote this, the nineteenth century was just beginning to reveal its prodigy; prodigy that we usually lump together as the Industrial Revolution.

The Industrial Revolution is usually related to advances in textile production after it became mechanized in eighteenth century England, but the machinery still turned with water power. In 1848, when the Communist Manifesto came out, most of the textile works on the continent were still dependent on the streams that made them run. Even in England, which was the great pioneer of Industrial Revolution, one mill in five had no steam engine. But the effect on people’s lives and on society as a whole was already dramatic. In a later show I shall be talking about the dark side of the Industrial Revolution, the misery and suffering it brought to millions. Just after 1800, for example, William Blake, the visionary English poet who was the son of a London hosier, attacked the “dark satanic mills that defiled England’s green and pleasant land.” But within a generation of Blake’s poem these dark satanic workshops were also turning out ginghams, and calicos, and other stuff that even working women could afford to buy. So now poor girls who had turned out for centuries dressed in drab homespun began to look as a Frenchmen was going to put it in the late forties “like a garden full of flowers.” And it wasn’t just the girls. For thousands of years poor people had worn second-hand clothes, hand-me-downs, and durable stuff of which they would have one suit or one dress in a lifetime, at most two. In the nineteenth century however, they were going to be offered ready-mades at accessible prices. Garments sewn on the new mechanical sewing machines that the New Yorker, Isaac Singer, patented in 1851. And by the end of the century they might be able to buy their own sewing machine and make their own garments and those of their family no longer by needle and thread, but by stitching them mechanically in a fraction of the time.

So Marx wasn’t alone in feeling the revolutionary character and the results and the potential of the Industrial Revolution, industrialism itself being a word coined in the 1820s. And he wasn’t the only one to take present achievements as indications of future growth. He was right to be impressed, and he was right to expect more of the future.

There were only about sixteen thousand miles of railroad track in Europe when Marx published his Communist Manifesto, but if you put them together with the tunnels, the railway bridges, the stations and workshops, and sheds that were part of the system, they already represented more stone and metal than all the monuments of antiquity including the pyramids. By the First World War there would be over two hundred and twenty thousand miles of rail running across Europe and if you count the subways, and the drains, and the sewers that made the cities work. The aqueduct, as great as anything the Romans built, the hundreds of miles of roads, and canals, and tunnels; and bridges grandeur and more imaginative than any ever built before, and the tens of thousands of miles of telegraph lines, not to mention the poles that lined the landscape in a completely new way. If you count all this you have a mass of public works vaster than anything humanity ever produced. One English historian reckons that the nineteenth century also produced more stone work in the Gothic style than the Middle Ages. It certainly produced more Classical buildings than the Classical Age ever did. But the greatest advances of the Industrial Revolution were in the realm of transport and communications. When the nineteenth century opened, Napoleon’s armies didn’t move much faster than those of Julius Caesar. When the century closed, you could cross all of Europe in three or four days by rail and everybody knew that you could go around the world in eighty days as Phineas Fogg had done in Jules Verne’s novel of 1873. And you could do all this in the new comfort of railway cars, dining cars, even sleeping cars.

There were other extraordinary changes as well. For the first time news was consistently moving faster than people. In ancient times you could send a message by carrier pigeon and you could hope that the pigeon didn’t get diverted along the way or eaten. In the time of the three musketeers you could send a message by courier who might cover as much as sixty miles a day as long as he wasn’t held up by bad weather or by robbers. By the time of the French Revolution you could send a message by semaphore telegraph provided the message was simple and the weather was clear. But by the 1870s, a telegram could reach around the world in a few hours and by 1900, radio messages could move over the oceans in a flash.

The telephone, which people took for a trick in the 1870s, had two and a half million European subscribers by 1900. And rotary presses were turning out daily and weekly papers in increasing numbers making news increasingly available. Even news itself was a nineteenth century notion, suggesting a world attuned to novelty rather than routine. Daily newspapers existed in the eighteenth century but they cost a lot of money and, practically speaking,
they were reserved for the well-off. It wasn’t until the introduction of the rotary press in the mid-nineteenth century that all this changed. The London Times, for example, printed five thousand copies a day in 1815 and sold them for seven pence. Forty years later, it sold fifty thousand copies a day at five pence. In 1815, it took four days before the Battle of Waterloo was reported in London. But after 1851, when an under-water cable linked Dover to Calais, and after 1866, when it linked England to America, news took only a matter of hours. And there were also newspapers selling for a penny only, which made news available to all, and raised circulation first into the hundreds of thousands and eventually by the 90s, the 1890s, into the millions. The influence and the power of the press was a completely unexpected phenomenon. It was in 1828, that an article in a Scottish magazine declared that the gallery where reporters sat listening to parliamentary debates had become a Fourth Estate of the realm. So now what today we call the media were added to the Old Regime vocabulary of clergy, nobles, and Third Estate. Now here was a completely new way of addressing the people, of affecting the masses, and it proved so effective that a number of revolutions, like the Revolution of 1830, and a number of major political crises like the Dreyfus affair in France in the 1890s could be directly attributed to the press which first whipped-up public concern and inflamed it, then claimed to reflect what it had in fact, created. Mass circulation papers, where the real profits are, were sold by sensationalism and muckraking. So that’s what a lot of papers looked for and their revelations could shape governments as well as individuals. They could bankrupt a bank, they could topple a government, they could help to start a war, which happened when the French press whipped-up popular feeling against the Prussians in 1870 or the Hearst press helped to start the Spanish-American War in 1898.

But far from these spectacular effects, the simple fact that newspapers brought a mass of world news to the door each morning, news selected chiefly for its lurid appeal, this made the world seem a busy, crowded place full mostly of crises and crime. Of course there is crime in every society, there is violence in every age, and our age is no more criminal, no more violent or corrupt than others, though you might not believe it. If anything, our age is less so. But we know more about exceptional activities because ordinary activities are not news. There is no story in a wife loving her husband or a father loving his children. It’s only when they beat each other that it becomes interesting and this is what is news; so we know more about these activities, we read and hear all the time about things that traditional societies knew about only if they happened next door or if they were sufficiently spectacular. So what was ignored until the 1800s, and what remained vague or diffuse until then, became increasingly real and personalized thereafter.

It became even more real when you could see a picture of it. In the nineteenth century it wasn’t just newsprint that became affordable and accessible; pictures did too. The lithographic process developed after 1798, photography developed after 1839, and then photo-lithography started a tide of prints and etchings that produced graphic, visible witness of wonders and horrors. Horrors like Goya’s Horrors of War series that came home more forcefully when you could see them. They also allowed people of modest means to put pictures on the wall or on the mantelpiece, portraits, caricatures, reproductions of art, and this filled humble homes with color. It gave shape and concreteness to news events, it put a face on public figures that most people had never seen before. And it also allowed lovers or relatives to send each other their likeness, or a picture postcard from faraway places. And what all this did was to accentuate the chief characteristic of the age, which was novelty and constant change. All ages see change; all ages are kinds of transitions. Eve probably told Adam that they lived in a time of transition. But the nineteenth century brought this home more forcefully than any age had before, and the news industry documented, illustrated the process so you couldn’t escape from it.

All these achievements were spectacular, but they also affected peoples lives in unspectacular ways. The communications revolution was as perceptible as the textile revolution. Ordinary people could send telegrams now. They could walk into a post office and send a money order safely. They could afford to buy a stamp and send a letter or a postal package. And ordinary people could take a train, where half a century before they would have walked, or else stayed home. In 1830 less than twenty thousand people a year crossed the Atlantic to America. By the 1850s there were faster clipper ships that could reach Boston from Liverpool in only twelve days; and then came steamships which were a lot more reliable, until by the end of the century one million people crossed the Atlantic every year. The Agricultural Revolution was less spectacular but then you could not have had an Industrial Revolution without it. In the age of industrialization, the greatest industry was still agriculture. And agriculture was revolutionized so that eventually fewer men and women were able to feed a lot more people. In 1800, three quarters of the population of Europe were engaged in growing food. More than three quarters of the food of ordinary people consisted of potatoes and bread. By 1900, only half the population of Europe was growing food and Europeans were eating more vegetables, more meat, more fruit than ever before. But it was a long haul.
Through all of recorded history until just the other day, Europe had lived on the verge of famine, or at least on the verge of hunger, as many people still do in non-industrialized nations. You can’t control the weather; you can’t control the harvest, until the nineteenth century. Until that time food shortages were par for the course. Famine was part of the experience of every generation in Europe. And famine didn’t mean missing a meal, it meant people eating grass, or earth, or tree bark, or sometimes their own hands, or falling dead in the streets or in country villages.

Although scenes like this one had become rare in Europe by 1800, there were several serious famines in the years just after the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, in the early 30s, and most dramatically in the late 1840s, when famine cut Ireland’s population by twenty percent. After the mid-nineteenth century western Europe would never know such peacetime catastrophes again. This was partly because ships and rail could now move grain faster and more efficiently to where it was needed, and partly because farmers had learned how to produce larger surpluses. And Europe needed ever larger surpluses because more people lived in cities and fewer people worked the land. In 1800, about ten percent of Europeans lived in cities. By 1900, about forty percent of them lived there and someone had to feed them. Some of the surplus food came from outside Europe; from North America, from South America, from Australia, which remember were still, in terms of economics and population, extensions of Europe. By the end of the nineteenth century about one-tenth of international trade was in cereals. King Corn was overtaking King Cotton. But most of the extra food was produced in Europe itself, a lot of it in the most advanced industrial countries. In fact it was Britain’s Agricultural Revolution of the eighteenth century that led to the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth. Industrialized Britain produced more food and fed its exploited masses better than Russia, which was totally agricultural. This was achieved by putting more land under the plow, by rationalizing production, by using better crop rotation, by using more fertilizer, and by using better tools, first the sieve instead of the sickle; in due course machinery like harvesters and threshers. By 1914, two and a half times as many people lived in Europe as century before, and they were better fed by a vastly smaller proportion of the population. Of course, more land under the plow also meant that agriculture probably ruined more of the environment than industry did, cutting down forests, affecting the water tables all over Europe. If you set this aside, the Agricultural Revolution brought a new prosperity to all the land. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were fewer peasants, there were more farmers, there were fewer people living on the land but those who made their living from the land farmed better and lived better. They had better homes, they had more and better furniture, they could afford to show off their regional costumes which were less historical revivals than modern status symbols. And they could go to the market or to the fair on better roads.

But the most dramatic changes took place not in the country but in town. There the novelty laid in the appearance of the industrial city and especially the big city. In 1800, there were seventeen cities in Europe with a population over a hundred thousand people. By 1900, there were one hundred such cities. Thirty-one million people lived in them and a lot more passed through, sometimes just to see them. In 1830, tourists went to Manchester or Liverpool the way we today go to see Disneyland today, or Hiroshima; because they were extraordinary, fascinating, or terrifying examples of the possibilities of the age, of our dreams, of our nightmares. Cities, of course, are the home of civilization; from the ancient world they have been so. And even the word "civilization" proves it: "civics," "civil," "civility," "civilization," they all refer to what a citizen is or should be, the member of an urban community. And an urbanite is described as "urbane," "courteous," "elegant," "refined." Few were so really, few are so now, but the urbanites are by definition superior to the rustic countrymen who get all the negative descriptions: "poor," "yokel," "bumpkin," "clodhopper," and so on. As I said this was always so, but in the modern world in the world made and remade by the Industrial Revolution, it was more so with profound implications for all of us as we shall see in our next program.

#142 The Industrial World

For the first time, there was light—new shops, new goods, new pleasures, wide thoroughfares. But there were also chimneys belching smoke, factories fouling air and water, and gunboat diplomacy making the world safe for Europe.

The Industrial World this time on The Western Tradition.

And now UCLA Professor Eugen Weber’s continuing journey through the history of Western Civilization.
Last time, we ended with the rise of the big city during the Industrial Revolution. Cities have always been the centers of civilization, of course, but in the nineteenth century, this was more so. They became the "shop windows" of the modern world and even the term "shop window" was something that you couldn't have used before the late eighteenth century, and that you wouldn't be very likely to use before the nineteenth century, because there were no shop windows. A French girl who visited London on the eve of the French Revolution was fascinated to find that there were windows in front of shops through which she could see the goods on sale, and she spoke of this as a cunning device. And then, a few years later in 1807, a Londoner refers to window displays as a very recent refinement, and he adds that glass windows were seldom used in shops before the present age. Now, think of this next time you go window shopping, another nineteenth century innovation.

Most shops, however, remained what they had always been, and what they still are in some third world countries today: holes in the wall with the goods in front, the workshop at the back, the kitchen and family quarters either in the back or on the floor above, no windows but wooden shutters that the owner takes down in the morning and puts up at night. In all but the major cities, goods were bought either from stalls in the open market or from itinerant peddlers with a pack or a cart or from some traveling salesman. In England, the salesman was known as the tallyman because he was illiterate and kept his customers' accounts by a tally of notches on a stick.

Around 1800, Jane Austin, the novelist whose father was a country clergyman, was buying material for her dresses and her stockings from just such an itinerant draper—and note that most people had to make their dresses at home, and their stockings too, until the power knitting frame for stockings was introduced in the 1840s and the sewing machine in the 1850s. While such innovations would make sweatshops like this one possible, they also produced cheap ready-mades that ordinary people could buy from shops to wear. But in the late eighteenth century, shops as we know them were exceptional, nor were the few that existed in cities very attractive. For one thing, they were dark. There were few windows because glass was rare and expensive and plate glass for large windows was almost nonexistent. The middle classes only got clear window glass in any quantity as the eighteenth century ended, but with this came the beginning of a revolution in indoor lighting which would continue in the nineteenth century with the introduction of gas light.

Although we take a lighted interior for granted, it was never so until the day before yesterday. It took artificial light to change the age-old pattern of the day that had made thousands of generations stop work and go to bed when it got dark. Our control of natural phenomena like light and dark is very recent indeed. It's less than two hundred years old for a few privileged people. It's less than a hundred years old for most.

It was still rare through most of the nineteenth century, but it was tremendously exciting. For the first time, you could sit and read or knit under a lamp after dark. And you could also go out at night into streets which were just beginning to be lit so you didn't need a torch or a lantern to see your way about, and you didn't have to depend on the moon. On the other hand, the streets even in big cities like London or Paris were mostly ill-paved, full of potholes, mud and dust; so you might have stayed indoors after all. Until the latter part of the nineteenth century there were hardly any sidewalks. Pedestrians risked being run over by traffic or getting absolutely filthy when they took a walk, so there was little strolling for pleasure. The wealthy carriage trade went in carriages not just because they could afford it, but because any other course was dangerous for skirts or trousers or even life and limb. Consequently, shopkeepers in the bigger cities developed enclosed galleries and arcades where you could stroll and window-shop safe from traffic and weather. And then they developed bazaars where different traders could concentrate their stores under one roof until finally, about mid-century, the first department stores appeared, the biggest of which were going to become monumental showplaces and symbols of the new consumer economy.

It's fashionable nowadays to disparage the consumer economy, and it's true that it has gone to exaggerated and wasteful lengths, but I would rather have too much than too little. And I would rather have a majority of the population with access to consumption than just a tiny minority, as had been the case throughout history. Until, that is, until the nineteenth century's mass production, bulk buying, economies of scale encouraged mass consumption and created the low prices, the discounts, the sales that gave a lot of people access to goods and comforts and the courteous treatment, incidentally, that only very few enjoyed until that time. Of course, there were still millions who couldn't afford these goods. There are still millions today. But for the first time, there were millions now who could afford them, not just a few thousand as before, and that was a dramatic change.

All of this started in England, which Napoleon had once denounced as a nation of shopkeepers. The English interest in commerce and exchange led to better streets for goods and customers to move on, like Regent Street in London, which was praised in the 1830s and 1840s for its spaciousness and grandeur. After mid-century, wide new thoroughfares could be found in Paris and in other cities as well, not only because they made traffic and shopping
easier, but also because they allowed more air, more breathing room in general. They were lined with trees, with benches, with lamps, and increasingly with that novel invention, public lavatories. There were also new parks built all over Europe in imitation of London’s famous Hyde Park, which was a royal garden newly open to the public, and of the gardens of the Royal Palace of Versailles in Paris, also open to the public, another symbol of what was happening everywhere. Facilities and pleasures hitherto open only to the very few were being made available to the many, and the many were eager to join in.

The modern city was a great display, a continuous fair—exciting, impressive, entertaining in itself. The city was also becoming safer and more comfortable. Regular police forces appeared in the 1830s, and there were public baths, drinking fountains and stand pipes for water. And there were public wash houses where the poor could wash the linen of the rich, and sometimes even their own. The poor, like the rich, could also visit museums now, and exhibitions which the nineteenth century made public and free to all. In one of Zola’s novels, The Dram Shop, a working class couple in the 1860s celebrate their wedding by going to the Louvre Museum with a whole wedding party. Very soon, in fact, art was going to spill over into the street. Lithography was used by businesses to sell sardines, or dresses, or cigarettes, or advertise entertainments; and city streets blossomed with posters which represented some of the most exciting art work of the time. They exposed ordinary people to the avant garde art of the day. They got them acclimated to a new pictorial shorthand that was just beginning to take over. And the nineteenth century was also the age of public transport. As streets were broadened and straightened tramways appeared, streetcars that were pulled by horses along rails until they were electrified in the latter part of the century. There were omnibuses, too, pulled by horses until the appearance of the internal combustion engine at the turn of the century. Not to mention trains that made the suburbs and the countryside a short ride away, and sometimes even the seaside, making it accessible to city folk of pretty modest means. Indeed the second half of the nineteenth century was, for many, the age of Sundays in the country, of family picnics by a river or in a field, taking your girl out rowing; of a new kind of relaxation that the Impressionists began to paint in the 1860s. A whole new population of artisans, clerks, shop assistants, were able to enjoy nature and fresh air as never before.

So what you had was a democratization of goods and services and facilities, including leisure and nature and fresh air. And people needed more leisure and more fresh air because the modern city, which offered them a lot of new things, also took away some of the old things.

Just as you could see a medieval city from far away because of its church spires, you could see the nineteenth century industrial town because of its chimneys belching smoke and the smog that hung over it. Dickens produced a graphically disgusting picture of this in Hard Times, where Manchester becomes Coketown, which he describes as “a blur of soot and smoke, a dark, formless, stifling jumble,” under what another Englishman, John Ruskin calls “the storm cloud of the nineteenth century.”

And you could smell it, too. Not just the smell of coal and machine oil, but the refuse. At the mid-nineteenth century, Parliament had to suspend its sittings because the Thames stank so badly. And so did a lot of industry: gin works, dye works, gas works, chemical works and so on. But the most characteristic smell was coal dust and smoke. The Industrial Revolution ran on coal, the nineteenth century was fueled by it. Even at the end of the century when people were already beginning to use electricity and gasoline driven engines, ninety-five percent of commercial energy was generated by coke and coal, and most fireplaces were heated by it, however badly and inefficiently.

England was the most coal-driven country, because England had coal fields that were within easy reach of water transport on the Clyde, on the Thames, and in Wales. Newcastle on the Thames was so identified with coal that “carrying coals to Newcastle” became a proverbial metaphor, like shipping beer to Milwaukee. Even the railways and tramways that marked the century really began as rails laid down to carry carts of coal pushed by workers or pulled by horses from the pit head to the docks. It was a Thames-side man, George Stevenson, who first put wheels on a steam boiler around 1815 to haul the coal wagons along the rails, and it was Stevenson who adapted this thing he called a locomotive to pull the first passenger railway train in 1825 at the terrifying speed of fifteen miles an hour.

The more industry expanded, of course, the more the coal fields grew and the more industry clustered around them. In northwest England, in Belgium, in Lorraine, in the Ruhr, in South Wales; here was Europe’s industrial frontier. And you can compare its attraction for immigrants to what was going on in America. In the thirty years before 1914, the rate of immigration into South Wales was not very different from that into the United States. And there were more Poles who moved into the Ruhr Valley in Germany than there were Poles going to Chicago. Where there was coal, there was industry; and jobs, however grimy and however low-paying.
Coal output soared in the nineteenth century, doubling every twenty years. By 1913, there was thirty times as much coal going up in smoke as there had been in 1820, which made industrial Europe and America smoky and smelly and dark. It produced the London fog that you read about in Dickens, or see in films about Sherlock Holmes or Jack the Ripper, and it produced a lot of bad throats, burning eyes, and bronchitis. Most of the coal went to produce the iron and steel, which were the raw material of nineteenth century machines, tools, bridges and armaments. Then it went to produce the steam that turned the engines and ran the steamships. By the end of the nineteenth century, three quarters of the steam engines in the world were in Britain. But it wasn't just industrialists who were excited by all this; artists were equally excited about what was going on. Turner painted rain, steam and speed. The Impressionists painted the trains with their plumes of smoke, the clouds of steam rising out of railway yards. And less well-known painters, painted forges and factories, and tunnels and bridges.

But it was the railway station above all that was the symbol of triumphant technology in the nineteenth century. In a monumental age fond of showing off, the railway station was the very emblem of power—more grand, more monumental even than the bank. In the 1860s, Walt Whitman sang the shapes of the new age: shapes of factories, arsenals, foundries, markets. Shapes of the two-threaded track of railroads; shapes of the sleepers of bridges, vast frameworks, girders, arches. Whitman's lines also bring to mind grand structures like the Crystal Palace engineered in 1851 to house all the London exhibition of that year in one building of glass and iron, on the great shed of the St. Lazare railway station in Paris that Monet liked to paint, the Eiffel Tower, built in 1889 to mark the first century of the French Revolution. But Whitman himself was probably thinking of the Brooklyn Bridge, designed in 1867. For a long time the towers of the Brooklyn Bridge were the tallest structures in New York, and according to the art historian Kenneth Clark, all of modern heroic New York started with the Brooklyn Bridge. And some of the most beautiful and massive shapes that Whitman didn't mention were to be found on water. Tonnage and speed kept increasing because larger, longer ships were faster and more comfortable to sail on. This is the Great Eastern under construction in England in 1857, the largest ship of its day. Naval vessels were also being perfected. The steel plated dreadnoughts were bigger and heavier; new destroyers were faster; the submarines developed by the South in the American Civil War were invisible, at least when they submerged. By the end of the century the new warships burned not coal but oil, which was lighter, more efficient, and had the special advantage of being less visible from far away, which made naval warfare even deadlier.

It was the oil needs of Western war fleets that would eventually usher in the age of oil diplomacy, but it was the fleets themselves, whether they ran on coal or oil, that made possible the age of gunboat diplomacy, which simply means if you don't like what some small country does, you send a warship around to intimidate it, as countries including the United States have done ever since. The warship of the late nineteenth century was as much the symbol of the Industrial Revolution as the textile mill or the coal mine. It was a masterpiece of modern engineering. It burned the coal, later the oil, that fueled the industry. It was plated first with iron, then with steel, which was yet another innovation of the nineteenth century, without which we wouldn't have either dreadnoughts or skyscrapers. The warship's guns could locate and hit targets many miles away while racing through the sea. It protected and advanced European trade. It made sure that goods went out from the producers to the consumers and that the raw materials came in from every part of the world. And it impressed the lesser breeds without the law and kept them in their place, which of course was now firmly under the sway of Europe.

It was shipping that linked the economic core of the nineteenth century with a periphery, and it was shipping that provided a link between Europe and its dependents. But it was the gunboat that symbolized the fact that Europe ruled the world economically, politically, militarily. Nonetheless, as we have seen again and again, no power goes unchallenged. In our next program, we'll leave behind the achievements of the nineteenth century and we shall look at some of its conflicts. Until then...

#143 The Revolution and the Romantics

It was a time of revolution when writers and artists also fought for freedom. They exalted the outlaw, decried injustice, stirred the imagination. They reached millions with their art, and in doing so they colored the politics of a century.

Revolution and the Romantics this time on The Western Tradition.

And now UCLA Professor Eugen Weber's continuing journey through the history of Western Civilization.
I've been talking about the achievements of the nineteenth century and they were impressive. Now I want to talk about its conflicts. These were generational conflicts, social conflicts which were the dark side of the centuries material triumphs, national conflicts and international ones, including bitter colonial friction. It's a story no less exciting than that of the Industrial Revolution, because it too is the story of upheaval, social revolution, national revolution and their international counterparts; the eighteenth century's legacy to the nineteenth. Every age lives in the shadow of the past even if it doesn't know it. The nineteenth century lived in the shadow of the eighteenth and it was very strongly aware of this. The politics of the nineteenth century, the ideas that moved or repelled it were the fallout of revolution, and revolution was its constant point of reference; very often its constant experience.

The wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon began in 1792, and ended in 1815, at Waterloo where Napoleon was finally defeated by the British with Prussian help. The great powers were determined to avoid another ordeal on this scale and the congress system they set up kept war from spreading beyond localized conflicts for a long, long time but political disorder had come to stay. For the next forty years or so, there wasn't a single year in the Western world from Poland to Peru without revolutions, rebellions, insurrections, some of them very bloody indeed. Waterloo or no Waterloo, not all the kings horses nor all the kings men could put the Old Regime together again.

The revolutionary agenda rose like the tablets of the law before the peoples of Europe and the Americas, and the revolutionary agenda seemed unending. The American Revolution, then the French had proclaimed two astonishing notions, both of them new in the experience of the Europeans. The first was that they could make war against their rulers. The American colonists, after all, had used violence to get rid of their British king and the French had use violence to get rid of their monarchy and then they had gone on to overthrow or humiliate the ruling dynasties of all of Europe. This kind of thing, on this kind of scale, had never happened before in European history. The notion that subjects could make successful war against their hereditary rulers opened up similar political possibilities in the nineteenth century that nuclear weapons opened up in the twentieth century and they were just as unsettling.

Within a lifetime of Waterloo, Latin America had fought itself free of Portugal and Spain; Greece had fought itself free of the Turks; the Belgians had set up their own independent kingdom; Italians, Poles, Canadians, Swiss, Danes, Germans, Spaniards, Portuguese had produced insurrections; not to mention the French who changed rulers several times, and the English who tried hard to do so but failed.

The second notion that came out of this era of revolution reinforced the first, the political philosophy that justified the war of subjects against rulers. The revolutions in France and in America had not just succeeded. You could also justify them on moral grounds. It was this claim that they were just and righteous acts that made revolutions respectable. Before this, rebellion had been a crime generally looked on as the ultimate civil and moral crime. But Americans and French claimed that they were not criminals at all, they were standard-bearers of a new philosophy of man. They seemed to suggest that all attempts to overthrow a king by violence were good, because practically all kings were evil; but above all, because the institution of kingship was evil. And this view affected increasing numbers of ordinary, respectable people who would have kept well away of revolutionaries in earlier times.

The basis of the new position was to be found in three major ideas that we have already encountered: the perfectibility of man, the sovereignty of the people, and the equality of man; and if I use "man" rather than "people" or "humanity," it's because this is the language that was used. The most fundamental of these ideas was that humans are perfectible. That they can be made perfect, that their lives can be made perfect and so can the societies in which they lived. This was a very new idea and at the secular level it was very anti-Christian because according to Christianity, we cannot hope to be perfect in this fallen, temporal world. But this new idea said that man could be perfect if only he were not prevented by the superstitions of the Church and the tyranny of kings. Churches and kings condemn us all to spiritual and temporal slavery, or as Rousseau said, "Man is born free, yet everywhere he is in chains." Those who agreed with this view, felt that all you had to do was to break the chains. If you did that, you would achieve not just freedom but perfection.

So at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a generation of Europeans grew up who were told that they were free men condemned to slavery, but that their liberation was at hand and really that it was in their own hands. They remembered Voltaire's advice to crush the infamous cleric, the agent of backwardness and superstition, and they agreed with the poet Shelley that the world would be a better place when the last king had been strangled with the guts of the last priest. They never went that far in practice, but they rather did talk that way. Equally new was the
doctrine of the sovereignty of the people. Nobody could actually say exactly just what this meant, but it was clear it did not mean the sovereignty of kings. Kings, and especially absolute kings, were tyrants, usurpers of the true sovereignty which rests in the people and so kings should be done away with.

Finally, all men were equal and all men were brothers. Again, no one could define exactly what this should mean in practice, though it implied that no man should enslave, oppress, maltreat another. More importantly, it denied that any group of men could claim rights over other folk just by referring to privilege, tradition, property, ancient conquest, or blood, or birth. Rights based on such traditional claims are no rights at all. The only rights that matter are the inalienable rights of man, rights that are yours just because you are a man. In due course, this notion would be claimed for the disinherited as well; and the rights of man meant the emancipation of slaves in Europe by 1848 and in America twenty years later, although the emancipation of women took a great deal longer. But the first use of the slogan was simply to deny the rights of kings and priests and hereditary aristocrats to rule over others or tell them what to do. This composition for example, is called The Nightmare of the Aristocracy.

The legacy of 1776, the legacy of 1789, was the belief that social and political wrongs were there to be righted. That it was our duty to right them, and that if governments and societies didn't do their duty, then a revolution should do it for them-- an attitude which brings us to an important strain of nineteenth century thought that we call Romanticism. Look at this picture of Napoleon as emperor; solemn and grand, the last of the Enlightened Despots. Now look at this one where his beauty, his conquering aspect are stressed and the surroundings are wild not solemn, not ordered. Napoleon could be a bandit, a highwayman, a rebel, a sort of figure that was supposed to excite young men and make young ladies swoon, which we call Romantic. In fact, Napoleon embodies both these characteristics. He's the authoritarian father figure identified with law and order and repression and police and the code that protects property and contracts and the family. But he is also the Romantic hero, a sort of Robin Hood, who triumphs over tremendous odds, who represents adventure, excitement, energy, and youth against age, and the "outs" against the "ins." After Waterloo, it was the second image of Napoleon that survived and that turned the master of a very efficient police state into a patron saint of revolution.

But the real patron saint of the new era was another figure from the previous century, Jean Jacques Rousseau. I mentioned before that Rousseau provided many slogans of the revolution, but his real influence in the nineteenth century came from his Confessions, which were only published in the 1780s when he was safely dead. The Confessions are the first modern autobiography in which the writer is so fascinated with himself that he tells everything he can about himself-- his weaknesses, his bad actions, his love affairs, his sexual hangups.

According to Rousseau, behaving badly doesn't matter because man is naturally good; it's society that perverts it. Man is naturally happy; it's society that makes him unhappy. And Rousseau's conclusions: fight oppression, fight repression, be yourself, resist social convention, scorn money and status, drop out, choose rejection and failure if that is what it takes to be true to nature, your nature. Rousseau chose rejection and failure, which made him a very suitable figurehead for the party of the rejected and the oppressed. Although in his case I must say, nothing succeeds like failure. In France alone, half a million copies of his works were printed in the seven years between 1817 and 1824. Rousseau was in the right place at the right time. Before Romanticism, he was the incarnation of Romanticism; because Romanticism, above all, was a reaction against the rationalism of the earlier Enlightenment, a reaction against the enlightened dream of a world where everything could be calculated and worked out in rational terms.

Remember that the spirit of seventeenth and eighteenth century Enlightened thought had been to investigate what you could see with the help of new scientific instruments and to calculate what you could calculate. But the Romantics wanted to get the invisible and the incalculable. They were interested in the forces that move us or reveal us to ourselves: dreams, fantasies, madness. Romantic painters painted nightmares. They painted madmen. They painted people under stress who didn't act reasonably. They painted terrible accidents where nature masters man.

The Romantics were also interested in the great silent currents of society and history. The two great results of this would be the systems of thought elaborated by Karl Marx and by Sigmund Freud, both of whom wanted to reveal the underlying forces that move and affect human beings behind or below the apparent activities of society and individuals. More immediately, Romantic literature and art were about opposition and conflict. They were against conformity, ill-manners, beliefs, taboos, even to the extent of condemning incest. They were against oppression; national, political, and social oppression. They wanted to abolish suffering. They opposed slavery. They opposed the death penalty and they were against the law which was an agent of oppression. Against the law they exalted the bandit, the outlaw in their paintings, in their plays, in their novels, their operas, even the fashions. They were for rebels against established authority; for youth against old age; and in part it was a generational revolt against conser-
Romantics were rebels or they were sympathizers with the rebellions like Wordsworth, who you remember went to France in 1791, and found "that bliss was it in that dawn to be alive." But Wordsworth changed his mind when liberation became war and terror, and others reacted just like him. The German poet Goethe admired Bonaparte as the carrier of revolution, admired him as the great liberator until that is, Napoleon became the great oppressor. Beethoven dedicated his Third Symphony, the Eroica to General Bonaparte. But when on the eve of its first performance, he heard that the General had made himself emperor, he tore off the dedication page and almost destroyed the score. Some took longer before they lost their illusions.

The poet Byron supported the Italian patriots in 1820 and the Greek patriots a few years later. He went to Greece to fight for Greek freedom. He set up and subsidized a Byron Brigade and then he died of a fever at Missolongi. And Shelley supported radicals in England as well as freedom fighters in Greece. And Shelley's widow Mary wrote the story of Frankenstein which is not only the first science fiction novel but a very Rousseau-esque story of a kind of noble savage, naturally good, corrupted and driven to murder by ill treatment.

Romanticism also exalted history—the past against the present, the past used to justify and inspire present conflict, present action; the great deeds of Germans or Scots or Greeks or what have you, who deserved to be great again; the rebellions of William Tell or of Robin Hood or of the people of Paris against foreign oppressors or against local oppressors.

Probably the most influential Romantic of all, Sir Walter Scott invented the historical novel, a genre that brought the past to life in a colorful, moving way in stories of adventure, romance, derring-do in picturesque settings. Novels like Ivanhoe, which was published in 1819, didn't just stir the imagination. They inspired pride in being British and by extension, in whatever nationality you might be. They also inspired the desire to fight against injustice, against intolerance, the heroine of Ivanhoe was Jewish, against the oppression of the weak by the strong and the young by the old. French Romantics like Victor Hugo, labored the same theme. Justice for the people, for the poor, the weak, the oppressed; and one of Hugo's heroes is a bumpback, another is a convict. His greatest success, Les Miserables, is a political and social novel about the virtues of those whom society casts out or crushes.

Finally, in Shelley's most famous political poem, which is about England in 1819, we find this which he wrote after British Cavalry had ridden down a crowd of unarmed men and women in Saint Peters Fields at Manchester, killing eleven and injuring several hundred, a massacre which ironic popular analogy with Waterloo turned into Peterloo, The Massacre of Peterloo.

An old, mad, blind, despised and dying King.
Princes the dregs of their dull race
Who flow through public scorn
Mud from a muddied spring
Rulers who neither see nor feel nor know
But leech-like to their fainting country cling
Till they drop blind in blood without a blow
A people starved and stabled in the untilled field
An army which liberticide and prey
Makes as a two-edged sword to all who wield
Golden and sanguine laws which tempt and slay
Religion: Christless, Godless, a Book sealed
A senate times worst statutes unrepealed
Are graves from which a glorious phantom
May burst to illumine in our tempestuous faith

I've talked so long about the Romantics because their spirit infused the politics of the century and inspired its major conflicts, both national and social. As a matter of fact, when at the end of the nineteenth century a French labor leader was asked about his inspiration; did he read Marx, did he read Jacques Sorel. He answered, "Lord no, I don't read this sort of chap. I read Alexander Dumas. I read the Three Musketeers." Now perhaps Germans were more serious than the French, but I'm sure that British labor leaders read more of Walter Scott and read more Dickens, both of whom were Romantic novelists, than they ever read Marx. It was the Romantic spirit.
that inspired political and social revolt in England in the 1820s and 40s, in France in 1830s and 40s, and 70s, not so much revolt by the oppressed as by those members of the upper and middle classes who couldn't stand the oppression, couldn't stand the injustice and the suffering that they saw around them. And indeed there were many terrible things to see, as we shall discover next time.

#144 The Age of Nation-States

A powerful current flowed through Europe; the current of nationalism and national pride. And as European powers expanded their empire, their rivalries extended all over the world until war seemed inevitable.

The Age of Nation-States this time on The Western Tradition.

And now UCLA Professor Eugen Weber's continuing journey through the history of Western Civilization.

Last time we saw how the Romantics looked at its society with new eyes. They saw things that had been there before of course, but now that they have taken a good long look, they were shocked, they were shaken, and they wanted to do something about it. The Industrial Revolution, the urban explosion, the improvement of communication and information had concentrated the reality and the image of suffering and horror and injustice to an unprecedented degree just as the fallout of Enlightenment, Revolution, Romanticism made people more sensitive, more ready to be impressed, or depressed, by human suffering.

The wonders of modern industry were matched by the horrors of human industry, or perhaps inhuman industry: little children working sixteen hours a day and getting so tired that they fell into the machinery and were killed or maimed; men, women, and children dressed in rags, living in pits like bears; several families to one room, with a beaten earth floor covered with mud and manure. The problem was mitigated by reforms which gradually improved the lot of the outcast poor, by the workers organizing to help themselves, by revolution which accelerated the process of reform, and by the increased production and resources that brought more surplus, and more to go around. By the second half of the century, the grinding hunger and misery that so depressed earlier observers had been alleviated. They hadn’t disappeared by any means, but they had become less intense. Hours of labor were being restricted. Conditions of work were being improved. There were medical services, old age pensions, schools, subsidies for housing, for garden allotments or unemployment.

All this came in dribs and drabs, however; often too little and too late. In most countries, social legislation of real importance was only passed at the end of the nineteenth century, or in the twentieth century, but it had never existed before, and if you compare the last a hundred and fifty years with the rest of history, this alone makes it an exceptional period. Moreover, social reform came in part because the upper and the middle classes felt sorry for the lower classes, and that was new too. You might describe it a social romanticism; it sees the people as the last noble savages from whom social regeneration will come. And this point of view, which combines empathy, charity, and guilt, this point of view is still with us today.

Reforms also came because more people got the vote. By 1914, every male had a vote; even in countries like Austria and Italy which had lagged behind the rest. Universal male suffrage meant that politicians who wanted to be elected had to mind interests of broader and broader sections of the electorate. On the other hand, one shouldn’t exaggerate electoral pressure, because social reforms came before voting rights in places like Germany, and they were slow to come in places like France, which had universal suffrage quite early. Still the vote was a factor in reform, just as it was a negative factor in the case of women, who having no votes, found it hard to put pressure on politicians whom they needed to grant them the vote.

By 1914, women went to the polls only in Finland and Norway, although this was about to change as well, and it was close to change in England whose women were about to get the vote just before the war and did get it just after. The fact that reforms came because there were more resources to go around inspired or confirmed ideas that you might call social utilitarian; organize the economy properly and you solve the social problem, organize production and distribution and you eliminate poverty. The great figures of this school were the Count de Saint Simon in France and his secretary Auguste Comte who was a mathematician.
The doctrines associated with Saint Simon and Comte are known as Saint Simonism and Positivism. Positivism, because it was supposed to be based on scientific analysis of positive data like mathematics or statistics. But what these doctrines are really, is religions of progress inspired by the real progress taking place, and arguing that gigantic further progress could be accomplished by technocratic managers, engineers, financiers, specialists of all kinds because it was closely related to concrete achievements positivism inspired a lot of people, including the men who won Brazil’s independence, who put the positivists slogan on the country’s flag, order, and progress.

Positivism also produced some very real successes. Positivists and Saint Simonians built some of Europe’s great railway lines. They planned and built the Suez Canal and the Eiffel Tower. They published the first mass magazines. They started the first ad agencies. But if these contributed to the general prosperity, they addressed the workers’ problems only incidentally and indirectly. If the workers wanted to be effective in labor politics and national politics, they themselves had to organize or to be organized to help themselves. And here we get the tradition of social revolt, which begins by trying to integrate the workers into the bourgeois state and which ends by denying that integration is possible by arguing that the classes cannot be reconciled, the two nations, the poor and the rich, cannot be integrated. In this view the workers, the working class have to conquer power. They have to take over the state and use it in their interest just as the bourgeoisie wrested power from the aristocracy in the revolution to use the state in their own interests. As Karl Marx declares, “Only when the working class has conquered, only then will liberty and equality reign, because then there will be no class left to oppress or be oppressed, society can be organized in a rational manner with labor and justice for all, resources will flow from everyone according to their capacities to everyone according to their needs.”

Marxism, however, was not going to be very influential until the end of the century. But the several doctrines that tried to integrate the underprivileged by reform or by revolt prodded the social revolution along, made everyone more aware that this was an issue, and colored the politics and the atmosphere of the time. But there was an even more powerful current flowing through Europe and out from Europe, and that was the current of Nationalism; of national sense, national pride fed by the example of eighteenth century revolutions and by the ideology of Romanticism. Greeks, Poles, Romanians, Checks, and South Slavs were ruled by foreign powers, and Germans and Italians were divided into a lot of separate states. But, as everyone knew, men could only be free as citizens of their own nation, not as subjects of some foreign ruler. This attitude is what inspired the Latin Americans to rise against their Spanish and Portuguese monarchs; it inspired the Greeks to rise against the Turks; it inspired the Belgians to seek independence from Holland.

In fact, the international history of the century is the story of people struggling to be free as nations, achieving this as the Italians did, and the Germans, Romanians, Bulgarians, and Serbs in the 1860s and 1870s, or failing like the Poles. Those who failed kept trying and their plotting and their insurrections introduced an undercurrent of instability. There was no enduring international stability in nineteenth century Europe because the subject nations; Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Romanians, South Slavs were continually conspiring and rebelling to get what they claimed were their national rights. The two great revolutionary explosions of 1830 and 1848, especially, were times of national revolution when peoples either revolted for independence or for the right to unite in one common nation-state. The nineteenth century was not a terribly war-like age in Europe, but the wars that were fought were almost all over national issues; the unification of Italy, then of Germany, then of Balkan countries, until general war broke out in 1914 precisely because the South Slavs wanted a united nation of their own. And when the First World War ended, the national aspirations of the nineteenth century were finally answered. Europe, from Russia to the Atlantic, was a Europe of nation-states. But in the twentieth century, economically the affairs of Europe and the rest of the world were run by the advanced countries and to an important extent from places like the Bank of England here. Politically, international affairs were in the hands of the “Great Powers,” a term invented at the time of the peace conference after the Napoleonic Wars, the Congress of Vienna with Britain, France, Russia, Austria and her Hapsburg Empire and Prussia, which in 1871 became the German Empire. Then, in the 1870s, a unified Italy joined the group. These were the Great Powers, and you will notice that the United States was not one of them, partly because it was busy in its corner of the world; partly because nobody could imagine a non-European country being a power at all.

The Great Powers squabbled, but for the most part they ran the world as an informal club. The first half of the century, the two major powers were Britain and France who combined industrial development and large population. In the second half of the century, the two major powers were Britain and Germany for the same reasons. The original object of the Great Powers Club was to prevent anything like the French Revolution from ever happening again. The French Revolution haunted the nineteenth century as the Russian Revolution was going to haunt the twentieth century. And there is no understanding international politics in this period if you don’t bear
that in mind. Revolution kept breaking out in the early 1820s and early 1830s, and especially in 1848 and 1849. But whenever revolutions got out of hand, the other powers intervened to help each other put down an uprising, and even more important, the motives for revolution were being whittled down.

One big revolutionary demand in Germany, as in Italy, had been national unification. But that was achieved by 1870, not by revolution but by conservative power politics handled by intelligent statesmen like Bismarck. Men like him and like Napoleon III in France, realized that the radicals could be defused by carrying out the less radical part of their programs: higher productivity, economic improvements, and moderate reforms made this possible. The Great Power’s, like Queen Victoria’s England, were also determined to avoid anything that would weaken them, anything that would let revolution through; and the first thing they wanted to avoid was any large general war because they thought, and rightly, that war would advance revolution. So the European wars of the nineteenth century tended to be marginal, as in the Crimean seen here, or in the Balkans; or else they were bilateral, France against Austria, Austria against Prussia, Prussia against France. On the whole, however, the century from 1815 to 1914 was the longest period without general warfare in the history of Europe since Roman days. And the reason for this, or part of the reason, is that the European powers managed to export their competitions and their circuit of energy to other parts of the world, which is what we call Imperialism.

Overseas politics had always been part of the Great Powers politics, but in the nineteenth century they became more so because European politics were world politics. Europe had gobbled up the world. It did so by conquest; it did so through trade and investment; it did so by settlement, sending something between thirty to fifty million Europeans into countries that were already extensions of Europe, as in the Americas, or were going to become extensions of Europe: Australia, New Zealand, North Africa, South Africa, and Siberia. European colonies, like England’s Australia, were in effect autonomous in their politics; better off economically than the home countries in Europe, and more open as well. On the whole, they offered more opportunities, more equality, more democracy than the old country, at least for the whites. This was not the case, however, in colonies where settlers were in a minority, where a few soldiers, planters, administrators ruled over natives with different colored skins. It isn’t very clear why they even bothered to do so because it isn’t necessary to occupy an area in order to dominate its economy. The British controlled the economy of Egypt probably more effectively than they did Australia, and they made more money. Economic control was more economical than colonial conquest and occupation.

If the world was nevertheless divided up in this unpractical colonial way, it was in part because Great Powers and small are not always moved solely by rational interests. There was a sense of adventure about the colony, the sort of thing you get in Tarzan stories. There was a sense of mission, bringing Christianity, or hygiene, or decent government to what the turn of the century described, with no embarrassment, as the lesser breed without the law. We can laugh now about the “White Man’s Burden,” and there was a lot of hypocrisy about it, and brutality and stupidity. But then again the slave trade in Africa, which was carried out by Africans and Arabs, but only put down by white officers and missionaries, recent converts to anti-slavery; and a lot of diseases were treated, and a lot of overpopulation problems were inadvertently caused by the intervention of white doctors. But the main reason why the Great Powers got themselves into colonial possessions was because the rivalry of European powers competing for supremacy in Europe were spilling over into the rest of the world.

A Great Power, by definition, had overseas possessions, and it had a fleet. The British had both. The French had both. So when the Germans became a Great Power after 1870, they had to have colonies too, and a fleet, despite the trouble and expense these cause. Even the Italians, once they were completely united in 1870, started to think that they would like to look like a Great Power, and so they started to think about colonies. In any case, European rivalry, economic and political, extended all over the world and filled the thirty years before 1914 with international crises arising out of colonial conflicts. This is an American cartoon of Russia’s imperial ambition. None of these crises actually produced world war, but their accumulation produced the expectation of a major conflict and made it seem unavoidable sooner or later. And it’s not surprising that when world war finally came in 1914, it began in what you might describe as the last colonial or the last decolonized area of Europe; the Balkans. Just as nineteenth century statesmen bad expected, war and revolution came together. Russian colonial expansion on the Pacific rim had brought the Tsarist empire to war with Japan, a war which Russia lost badly. Its humiliating defeat destabilized the Russian empire and brought revolution there in 1905. This revolution was put down, but not before it sparked sympathetic revolutions in Russia’s even more backward neighbors, Persia, China, and most important Turkey and its decrepit Ottoman Empire. With Turkey in chaos, her Balkan subjects and ex-subjects started to fight the Turks and each other. This upheaval in the Balkans threatened in turn another archaic empire, that of Austria-Hungary, the Hapsburg Empire which ruled over a great many Southern Slavs in what is today Yugoslavia.
So the First World War was going to break out in the darkest Balkans because the interests and the fears of three archaic empires met there and clashed with each other, and clashed with the revolutionary national ambitions of Serbs, Croats, Bulgarians, and Greeks; not to mention Italians, Montenegrans, and Albanians. The crisis that began the war arose when the heir to the Austrian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was murdered by this Slav student terrorist in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia, which was then part of Austria's Empire. It was commonly believed, and rightly, that Serbia; an independent Slavic nation had a hand in the assassination, and so Austria, backed by her ally Germany, confronted Serbia, which was backed by Russia, which was ally to France and aligned with Britain. None of these powers really wanted war, but everyone was prepared for war, and the more prepared as a result of the long series of colonial crises. So the Great Powers network, designed to avoid hostilities by mutual deterrents, helped to bring it about. Within weeks of Franz Ferdinand's murder, most of Europe was at war.

So a century that started with a war that was finally decided at Waterloo in 1815, really ended in a another war that was finally decided on Flanders Field, not far from Waterloo in 1918. And the century which opened with an era of revolutions in western Europe ended with an era of revolutions in eastern Europe. But that is another story for another program. Next time, we'll go back a step to the end of the nineteenth century when many of our present attitudes were really shaped. Until then...

#145 A New Public

By the end of the nineteenth century, schools were laying down the values and standards of patriotism for the very first time. There was less underemployment, there was more free time, more entertainment, and a new breed called consumers.

A New Public this time on The Western Tradition.

And now UCLA Professor Eugen Weber's continuing journey through the history of Western Civilization.

Last time, I carried the nineteenth century to 1914—and let me tell you it was a heavy burden to bear—to 1914 when it exploded. But I want to go back once more to the thirty years or so before 1914, because, as one Frenchman put it who was going to die in the first weeks of the war, the world had changed more since he went to school than it had since the Romans. It was in those years, roughly from the 1880s to the outbreak of the first world war, that a radical change began which turned out to be the most profound revolution that the West had ever known. It was then that the great mass of people came to live and even to think like everybody else about whom history has ever been written. For several thousand years, remember, written history was a history of the upper classes, by the upper classes, for the upper classes. The definition of upper classes may have varied a bit but until the nineteenth century, literacy was always the perquisite of the ruling groups and their immediate servants—clergy, clerks. The human record kept to the interests and the activities of those who made the record or who were expected to read it.

Granted, that record was impressive, but it remained narrow with the lower classes, that is, the immense majority, making only sporadic appearances on the stage of history. That's when one talked about the starving masses, or the suffering masses, or the rebellious masses. The rest of the time, the masses were either out of sight, or else they served as extras for crowd scenes in which only a few characters from the upper classes could be distinguished.

The populace provided the local color, and even the wonders of the Industrial Revolution were seldom for the common people, hardly ever for the common people outside the towns. But after mid-nineteenth century, average people began to eat better, to dress a bit less badly, to work a bit more regularly. And they could also admire the material progress around them—the gaslights, the electric lights, and so on. The two nations were still a social reality, but they were evolving into something else, an evolution that was gathering speed. By mid-century the upper classes were beginning to include the middle classes, and this, in fact, is when the term "middle class" appeared; and the middle classes were expanding in numbers, and they were diversifying as well. There were industrialists and bankers and professors, of course, but also a new section of mankind was becoming visible: shopkeepers, shop assistants, clerks, artisans, civil servants, commercial travelers and mechanics. They were literate now, they had more time and money, and they had become economically and politically significant.
But there were still three-fourths of the population who remained insignificant and largely invisible. Most of them were peasants. Even a lot of the workers that we would call industrial—miners, weavers, potters—still lived in villages, still took time off for harvest. In 1850 and 1860 these people still lived very much like their ancestors. Their diet was largely vegetarian, because meat was expensive and rare.

Now, the homes of such people were primitive. Many had no windows, because there was a tax on doors and windows. Many families shared their quarters with the family pig or goat or chicken, they shared them with a cow. Many had never seen a town, very few had seen more than the local market town. They were not part of a market economy, still less of the national economy. For people like these, national politics, as we know it, were meaningless, something that others did far away; and the nation, what we call the nation, was not a familiar concept. Many people didn’t even speak the national language, they spoke local dialects. A lot of the peasants also used local measures as they had done in the Middle Ages. A bushel might mean something very different in a village like this one from what it meant in a village ten miles down the road. Even the national currency was largely irrelevant because most people handled cash so rarely. They were attached to their village, their valley, their fields. They had a relationship with neighboring communities, with a nearby town; the state was something very vague. The state was related to tax collectors and customs men who evoked a lot of law breaking and rebellion; it was related to soldiers, to policemen, to all kinds of intrusive forces that made a hard life more difficult.

In remote regions, many people didn’t even know that they lived in France or Italy. They didn’t know what nationality they were, they didn’t know what nationality meant; and for a long time when they got the vote, they voted the way the landlord, the priest, the mayor, the village usurer told them to vote. All this was just beginning to change in Europe a hundred years ago; and this is what I want to talk about in this program and the next one—the process of social, economic, cultural, national integration—why it happened, how it happened, and how it affected people’s lives.

First, why. By the last third of the nineteenth century, western Europe was divided into nation-states. The theory of the nation-states was that all its subjects were citizens, subject to the same law, sharing in the national sovereignty which provided the authority of the state. This meant that they had a say in the making of the law, at least by electing the legislature; and it meant that they had to understand the laws and the process of elections and the process of legislation. So they had to have a common language. A country full of people who couldn’t understand each other wasn’t a nation; its people were not fully citizens. If you wanted them to obey laws, pay taxes, serve in the army not reluctantly or resentfully but freely and willingly, you had to persuade them that this was their country, that the state they served was their state.

The first thing to do was to enlarge people’s horizons, to show them that their fatherland was more than the village or the valley, more than Brittany or Tuscany or Kent, that it was really this hitherto abstract entity called France, or Italy, or England. This was going to be done primarily in schools. The last third of the nineteenth century is the time when schooling became public, universal, compulsory and free. There had been schools before, of course, and a lot of children, even the children of simple people, had gone to school; and some had even learned something, some had got on in the world. But never before the 1880s were all the children of western Europe taught to read and write, even the girls who hardly ever went to school before; and this was important, because it meant that by 1900 or so, all young adults within the territory of a given nation-state had acquired a common identity. They knew that they were French or German. They spoke the same language and this affirmed their identity. The certificate you got when you left school at thirteen or so, this replaced first communion or confirmation as the symbol of emancipation and growing up. It became a key to getting a job, just at the moment when the modern economy was producing new jobs, new opportunities of social mobility for simple people—on the railways, in the post office, the police and so on. If you served in the army as most young men did, you couldn’t hope to become a noncommissioned officer—a corporal, a sergeant—without a school ending certificate; and for the exceptional boy—we’re still talking only about boys, you notice—for the exceptional boy a good performance in school offered the chance of a scholarship, access to more advanced education, perhaps to the University, from which you could graduate into the lower reaches of the upper class.

But it isn’t enough for schools to be there for children to go to school. Schooling is not such a pleasure that children are eager to attend, and parents are not always eager to sacrifice the labor, the earning power of their children in exchange for book learning. As a matter of fact, a lot of parents in the nineteenth century protested that being forced to send their children to school deprived them of a crucial portion of the family labor and family revenues. Who was going to guard the sheep? Who was going to bring in the extra shillings from their wages? Making schooling compulsory, making schooling free, helped, of course, and it happened at considerable cost because the dominant classes felt that, first of all, national integration was worth the price, and secondly, that a
modern industrial society could not operate without a basic level of literacy. But that’s what the masters thought who voted the law. What about the masses who obeyed them? What about parents and children? For the answer to that, we have to look at the dramatic changes the Industrial Revolution had brought about, especially in agriculture, transportation and communication.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the mileage of road and rail soared, not just the main lines but secondary lines; not just highways but local roads, country roads. More goods got to the market; more commercial travelers got to the village. The peasant was last brought into the national economy. He had to keep records, to complete forms to fill in shipping manifests; so he couldn’t afford to use a tally stick any more and just notch off his accounts. He shifted from subsistence to a cash economy and he had to count in the national measures and in the national currency, and this dragged him into the wider world whether he liked it or not. So, eventually he was glad to have his child go to school, to learn the language in which to deal with officials, to learn how to write and how to reckon so he could write letters and keep account; to learn how to read, so he could read a will or a contract, or even a newspaper for fun. And the child knew that the school certificate was his passport—and especially her passport, because girls were much more eager to get away than boys—a passport for leaving the village and finding a better life in town.

But schools were not only useful and relevant, they also laid down the values and standards of the brave new world—patriotism and the civil duties that went with it, obeying the law, paying taxes, doing your military service or producing children for it. These first generations to go through school were more law-abiding and more patriotic than any before or since. Indeed, the men who went to war with such enthusiasm in 1914 had been schooled in the 1880s and 1890s.

Meanwhile, an expanding economy had been attracting and accommodating more people. The peasants were voting with their feet for the dark, Satanic mills, voting for the alienating cities. They went there in droves because, unpleasant and dangerous as factories and cities might be, they were still better than the drudgery and the misery of home on the farms. As these immigrants left, the peasants who stayed behind on the farms were better off as well, because there were no longer too many hands for too few jobs. There was also less isolation and the countryside was more integrated in the national economy and the national culture than it had been for centuries.

Country folk were beginning to read the papers, penny papers increasingly illustrated, and the trains that delivered newspapers also brought fertilizers for the fields, better materials for building and roofing their houses, and stoves and dishes and ready-made clothes. And the young people began to wear shoes instead of clogs, especially at dances where they could now dance to the sounds of violins, or even pianos instead of bagpipes. We’ve seen how city folk of the lower classes started to live like their betters. Now country folk started to live like city folk. In two or three generations they would even look like them, and that had never, ever, happened before. And what the urban immigrants got in a few years, if they were lucky, now trickled back to the rural world where they came from, so that two-thirds of humanity could start joining the rest.

Now all this was not simply the result of philanthropy and good fellowship, of course. As we have seen with the industrial working class, it was also the result of self-help, organization, unionization. It was the result of access to the ballot which made politicians try to serve their electors, try to provide what the communities which elected them wanted—roads, water, schools, credit and jobs. And it was the result of greater productivity, hence lower prices, hence more accessible goods. But you couldn’t have had higher productivity if you hadn’t developed this immense reservoir not just of labor but of consumers; if you hadn’t turned potential consumers into actual consumers and enabled them to earn the money with which to buy the clothes, the equipment, the small luxuries everybody always wanted but never could afford. So it was a sort of virtuous spiral. The more people you brought into the economy, the more they could buy, the more you could sell.

The more you sold, the more you could afford to pay a living wage regularly and even to pay the same wage for fewer hours of work. Through the first half of the century, the English passed a series of Factory Acts which culminated in 1850 with a great advance, the sixty-hour week for women. Since in a lot of places women worked alongside men, this meant a shorter working week for everybody and a half-holiday on Saturday. That quickly became known as la semaine anglaise; and this English week of five and a half working days became a major claim of industrial workers in other countries, and by the eve of the First World War, a major gain.

One extra afternoon a week may not seem much to you, but it meant that working class families could enjoy more entertainment on Saturdays and even on Sundays when they were less tired. It meant they could go to the dance hall or theater, and by 1900 they could watch movies, invented in 1895 or 96, as a kind of music hall attraction.
They also had more time to read the papers and to enjoy the spectacular side of electoral politics which provided entertainment and spectator sport at a time when entertainment was still rare.

So advances in the welfare of the masses, urban and rural, were related to the economy and to the implications of national unity. But they were also affected by something a lot less obvious, the new doctrines of Evolution and Natural Selection. In 1859, Charles Darwin, an English naturalist, published a book called, On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection. Darwin argued that animal species did not originate in a divine act of creation as portrayed in the Bible. They evolved as a result of natural change over time, taking or missing opportunities to adapt to an environment which also changed. In another book he published in 1871, called The Descent of Man, Darwin linked human evolution quite explicitly to the higher primates, specifically and shockingly, as his critics put it, to "hairy quadrupeds furnished with a long tail and pointed ears."

"Life is a competitive struggle for existence," wrote Darwin. "Creatures that possess useful characteristics, or that develop such characteristics by mutating right, are favored in the struggle, and what goes for other animals goes for the human animal as well." Such notions were expressed in a phrase that caught the public imagination, "the struggle for existence," or "the struggle for life."

Darwin himself, often used to express these ideas in his studies to be a clergyman at Cambridge. He saw no higher moral or religious ends at work in evolution, only chance and necessity. Some of Darwin's followers, however, identified evolution with progress, and the general idea of the evolution of species and their struggle for life was quickly applied to nations, which also seemed to evolve as living organisms do, struggling for survival and domination. So history could now be interpreted in terms of a struggle for life in which the weak nations went to the wall and the fittest survived.

But there was a problem. Industrial service and urban service which the nineteenth century adored, along with the statistics that the new conscript armies and the new public schools provided, all these suggested that industrial nations were terribly unifit. A high proportion of the population was sickly, twisted, underdeveloped in body and in mind, generally botched; and you had to do something about that—Christian charity said so and Christian charity was very big in the nineteenth century, but now national interests spoke more loudly still, as we shall see in our next program.

#146 Fin de Siècle

There was time now for sports, trips to the country; even a workman could buy his own bike. But for others, the artistic, the rich, it didn't feel so good. The rabble was everywhere, standards were lower, doom was at hand.

Fin de Siècle this time on The Western Tradition.

And now UCLA Professor Eugen Weber's continuing journey through the history of Western Civilization.

In our last program, we ended with a new, nineteenth century doctrines of evolution and natural selection, the survival of the fittest, which would be applied to nations as well as the species. For the first time, national interests now demanded an improvement in the working conditions and the living conditions of the lower classes. For the first time, workmen were thought to have the right to enjoy culture and leisure just like their betters, because it would do them good, it would produce a fitter society. And in England this determination produced the Bank Holiday Act of 1871, a landmark in the emergence of modern leisure patterns, because it transformed the old religious holiday into secular days of recreation sanctioned by the State, and so the holy day became the holiday.

The railway stations were packed; steamboat piers were packed. Cheap excursion fairs, cheap hotels, and boarding houses all prospered because of a new phenomenon: the working class holiday. Outside England this took more time to happen, but it was a start and an example, like what came to be called the English week of five and one half days. It meant that in England first and in other Western countries by 1900 or so, the workers got more free time. Since there wasn't much to do with the free time, much of it was spent drinking, beating your wife, or whatever, so everybody who was anybody began to try to make sure that free time was filled with wholesome activity. One of the more wholesome activities social workers thought of was playing organized games. For one thing, it used up energy which might otherwise explode into violence or crime. For another, it could remedy the physical degeneration of the people. Help the people to become physically fit and their morals will also improve. Churches, schools, industries all agreed that the best thing working class boys and working class men could do on a Saturday afternoon...
was to play ball games. The next best thing was to watch other men play ball games. So, through the 1870s and 1880s literally thousands of teams were founded by church organizations. Trade unions, factories, railway workshops also set up teams, and some of England's great football clubs started this way—"football" of course meaning "soccer."

But the greatest inspiration for sporting activities came from the schools. After 1870, English towns had an educational system that drew all the local children into its net. By the end of the century, thousands of spectators were actually paying to see the finals of local schoolboy competition. They were also paying to see games being played on new grounds, some with covered stands, some provided by the local authorities. The literacy generated in the schools made the basis for the mass readership of new style popular newspapers that gave a lot of coverage to sports. Many people read newspapers just for the sports pages, as they do today.

As the games caught on, the commercial spin-offs became increasingly important. Sports sold papers, but they also sold special equipment, jerseys, shorts, boots, and tonics to strengthen the players and embrocations for sore muscles and patent medicines to heal them and beer to console them. But interest in sports reached further than that. The post and telegraph were crucial for setting up national schedules and to bring the news of game results. Train and tram were essential for moving large numbers of fans to parts of their own city where they had never been before, let alone to other towns where they went to support their teams. Accessible tram lines for working people helped them get to work, but also to the stables. Cheap railway fares for special occasions, which had been used to get people to exhibitions or to pilgrimage shrines, were now allowed for cup finals which drew over one hundred thousand by 1901, as well as for weekend travelers.

So the lower reaches of the population were being freed and being encouraged to enjoy the first benefits of a technologically advanced society. Leisure time, more money, improvements in education, transport, communications produced the need, the desire, and the possibility for leisure and recreation. And the process was not unique to Britain; it could be seen in other societies like Australia and the United States; where mass recreation became a feature of later nineteenth century life. Most of the time, games radiated out from Britain. Soldiers and colonial administrators carried cricket throughout the British Empire, and it's interesting to see sailors and businessmen and mechanics carrying soccer throughout Europe and overseas.

By the 1880s and 90s, soccer was being played in Austria and Russia and Turkey and Scandinavia and all over Latin America. There was also rugby, which was played by students. Rugby was more complicated than soccer and harder to play without getting dirty, so it wasn't as popular. It was more of an upper-class game. The great English private schools played rugby--Oxford and Cambridge played it.

American football also started in the universities which formulated the first inter-collegiate rules in 1873. The game they played was pretty close to rugby, but in the 1880s it evolved into what we now play and watch as American football, although even more violent. During the 1905 season, for example, college games produced eighteen deaths and 159 major injuries. Perhaps that's what attracted mounting attendance, with hundreds of thousands flocking into new stadiums to watch college athletes maim each other.

Baseball was less bloody but just as popular after the Civil War, when it was codified and became an adult game. By the 1890s baseball players had organized and were negotiating salaries and transfers. Baseball was being exported to Cuba and Central America, and gamblers and sporting goods manufacturers were making good money from it.

By that time, also, the only sport of strictly American origin had been born in 1891 at the YMCA in Springfield, Massachusetts where a gym instructor invented basketball to relieve the boredom of gym classes. Within a few years, basketball was being played all over the world, as well as in American colleges, and it was even played by women.

It was the example of English and American college sports that fired the Frenchman Baron de Coubertin to revive the ancient Olympic games as an inspiration for moral and physical revival and for international amity. The first Olympic games of the modern age would take place in Athens in 1896, and American athletes did very well.

I don't propose to give you a history of modern sports on this program, but I do want to make the point that social, political and economic history come together in sports as in everything else. The emancipation of the masses, the improvement in their living and working conditions, the public concern for public health and national integration, the profits to be made out of all this--none of these can be separated.
You can see this even better if you look at the fortunes of the bicycle, which was one of the most consequential inventions of the nineteenth century. Bike-like contraptions existed at the time of the French Revolution, but velocipedes turned into modern machines in the 1880s, and that's when they became tremendously popular. Early bicycles were expensive, so cycling was an upper-class and middle-class sport. But women could cycle as well as men, and the bike was a great emancipating agent for women, because it freed them from chaperones, and especially because it began to free them from corsets and cumbersome skirts and put them in trousers for the first time. Early feminists, who were already interested in more rational dress for women, appreciated the bicycle and toasted it as a liberator.

Then, as more people bought bikes, prices came down and more people could afford to buy bikes. Cycle tourism developed, cycling clubs, holidays on wheels. The growing number of cyclists on the roads led to a demand for better road surfaces in the county as well as in town. Hotels and inns and roadside cafes developed or improved to cater to these new customers, and a whole industry grew. Manufacturers who wanted to show that their model was the best developed bicycle racing, both in velodromes and in road races which drew tens of thousands of spectators. Cycle racing inspired some of the liveliest art of the nineteenth century, and it also provided, as soccer did in English-speaking countries, an avenue for social promotion. Champion racers were the first national and international sports stars.

The cycle manufacturers were often people who had started out making umbrella spokes and corset stays and then converted to something more exciting using similar components; and the same spirit of enterprise inspired a lot of them to try to put engines between three or four wheels and to turn out first horse-less carriages which they called auto-mobiles—things that moved by themselves—and then the first airplanes. If you look at the wheels and the bodies of the first planes and cars, you will see that a lot of basic components were the same. A number of cycle races, like the Farman Brothers, passed from racing bikes to racing cars to racing planes, moved by the same spirit as the men who made them, a love of speed, of adventure, of change characteristic of the age.

But the most important thing about the bicycle was that it represented the first mechanical contraption that could match the horse and which didn't eat hay or foul the streets or need a stable. The bike allowed men to go faster than the horse, and it gave a lot of people a mobility and freedom that only very few enjoyed until then. By the eve of the First World War, miners, skilled workmen, baker boys could afford to buy their own bike, and more could realistically dream of owning one eventually. That's the sort of revolution I like.

But not everybody felt so enthusiastic about technological change, because it disturbed established patterns. The telephone, for example, was seen as an intrusion on privacy. When the painter Degas was called to the telephone during dinner, one of the guests laughed at him, "So that's the telephone—someone rings and you run, just like a servant." And when in a few years subscribers became so numerous that they couldn't be listed and called up by name, they were given telephone numbers; and this was resented and denounced as depersonalizing, you might be losing your identity.

A lot of people from the upper classes felt that they were losing their identity in the new mass identity of the 1880s and 90s. The holidays they used to spend among themselves in some spa or seaside resort were being threatened, they thought, by vulgar crowds with loud voices and flashy clothes. The shopping they used to do in comfort was now hemmed in by a lot of crude women who had used public transport to get there. The higher education and the better jobs that went with higher education were even becoming available to a few schoolboys from the lower classes who might aspire to marry your daughter or your sister. Everybody dressed like everybody else—they didn't really, of course, but that's how the upper classes felt. So how could you expect respect, let alone the deference due from inferiors to superiors, let alone respect for women, who now worked in increasing numbers, who wore bloomers, who flirted, who probably used contraceptive methods to limit the number of their children. Who could respect such women?

Even political power and political influence were being disputed by parvenus, who were not gentlemen but professional politicians. Goodness knows, they might even be labor leaders. So the world was going to the dogs. It was full of degenerates, it was full of pushy parvenus, it was decadent. Democracy was decadent. If these degenerates weren't regenerated, society would sink under the weight of their rottenness and corruption. So, let's clean them up. First, antisemitism will clean out the Jews and put them in their place. Then let's sweep out other foreign bodies—foreigners, Masons, Protestants from Catholic countries, Catholics from Protestant countries, and so on. Let's purify the community, let's use eugenics which proposes a science for breeding fine human beings; and let's revive national enthusiasm and focus it on the struggle for life against our neighbors, against our enemies who will dominate us if we don't dominate them. That is nationalism.
And while we are at it, let's defuse the working class agitation, let's transcend the idea of class warfare by joining the two great forces of the age, nationalism and socialism, in which the state possesses the means of production as well as the means of government. Let's combine these two great forces in a new, more powerful ideology called National Socialism. As you know, this was an idea with a great future and a bloody one. But for the moment socialism and nationalism were going to advance separately, but each affected the other. The national state became increasingly interventionist, increasingly social, the major agency for redistributing the wealth of its citizens, taking from the rich and giving to the poor. And although the socialists continue to tout internationalism and class war, they became increasingly patriotic, increasingly attached to the reformist state.

In 1914, the workers went to war as enthusiastically as everybody else, and the socialist parties dedicated to peace voted for war credits along with everybody else, in part because they were patriotic, in part because their nationalism persuaded them that the worker's interests were better served by defending their own country against enemies whose social policies would be more backward, more reactionary.

This was one set of reactions to the turbulent times—do something, political or ideological. But one man's progress is another man's perversion, and the integration of some looked and felt to others like debasement, decadence, vulgarization. So another significant reaction was to escape, to drop out, to affirm your difference from the rabble, to show that you were more sophisticated, more cultivated, more sensitive than the heavy, lumpish, unleavened masses.

And this was a very influential reaction. It affected most of the arts and letters of the time, and it introduced the era of the avant garde; in which the virtue is not so much in what you do as in being ahead of what others do, a new conformism whose chief characteristic is that it tries to avoid conformity. It was important to write or paint or sing in a way that wouldn't be appreciated by insensitive barbarians, but only by initiates, by esthetics, by refined palates and fine minds capable of appreciating rare and refined sensations, tastes, shapes, allusions. Truly exceptional men and women appreciated only the exceptional. "Ordinary living," as one of them said, "was not for them, our servants will do that for us." The ideal now was music without melody, paintings without a shape that might be immediately clear to the beholder, poetry without rhyme, novels without a plot, philosophies that communicated a wisdom for the chosen few.

In the long run, this was going to divorce artists and intellectuals from the general public and establish the present principle that either you're a real artist, condemned to exile in the midst of insensitive masses, or else you make your work comprehensible and accessible, which is a form of prostitution. All this is now old stuff, but it wasn't in the nineteenth century when all the great painters and writers were also very popular. In the short run, this tendency to set oneself apart artistically fitted the new tempo of the age, the interest in novelty and change. It also went with a propensity for nonconformity—drugs, homosexuality, transvestitism, occultism, mysticism—all of which were used mainly to demonstrate that you were not as others were.

The publicity that such activities attracted confirmed to the prophets of doom that, yes, they were living in an age of decadence and the doomster's reactions confirmed to the esthetics that they were living in an age of barbarism. So the paradoxical situation in the twenty years or so before 1914 was that life was getting better for everybody materially, but that the most artistic and sensitive were convinced that life was getting worse, and this also was going to become a familiar experience, a familiar phenomenon of the twentieth century.

For some reason, the end of the nineteenth century struck a lot of people as if it was the end of the world. They spoke of these years as the fin de siècle, the end of the century, and nobody had taken the end of a century so tragically since the coming of the year 1000 when they really expected the end of the world. Looking back now it all seems rather silly, but in the end, 1914 really was the end of one world, the end of a way of life, and the beginning of another, more popular, more democratic, more mass-oriented. So both the end and the beginning were to be found in this era, and we shouldn't be surprised that people were confused, contradictory, mixed up, just as we are today. Next time, the war to end all wars.

#147 The First World War and the Rise of Fascism

In 1914, Europe cheered as the war to end all wars began, then wept as it buried over eight million corpses. Yet, by 1938 it was preparing for another conflict. What drove Europe to the brink of self destruction?
The First World War and the Rise of Fascism this time on the Western Tradition.

And now UCLA Professor Eugen Weber’s continuing journey through the history of Western Civilization.

We’re almost home now, at the beginning of the twentieth century, our century when the chickens hatched in earlier times come home to roost, making the world and Europe within it smaller, scarier, and more expectant. The most spectacular of the century’s phenomena was what I like to call the Second Thirty Years War, from 1914 to 1945. During that period two world wars killed more Europeans then any of the great conflicts of the past ever did. They left economies in ruin. They left millions of Europeans subject to totalitarian rule. Before 1914, Europe had been the center of the world, dominant and dynamic. After 1945, it was reduced to its basic physical dimensions, a medium sized peninsula at the western end of Asia. Eventually, much of it would recover, it would even surpass its former prosperity, but it would never again regain the preponderant role that it had so long played to world politics.

In the years before the First World War, many people felt a catastrophe was inevitable but they could not imagine what it would be like. We have all known moments like this, long nightmare moments when you know something vague but terrible is about to happen, and there is nothing you can do to stop it. As early as 1901, Winston Churchill, then just twenty-seven and newly elected to Parliament, told the House of Commons that a European war can only end in the ruin of the vanquished and the scarcely less fatal commercial dislocation and exhaustion of the conquerors. Churchill lived to see his prediction come true, not once, but twice. The fact is that by 1914 most of the European powers had become less afraid to fight than not to fight. Germany and Austria especially felt the balance of power was swinging against them. Once they mobilized for war, the others followed in a deadly avalanche.

Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary, a sensible, unemotional man looked at the dusk that gathered outside his office window and observed, "The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime." Sensible men were not much in evidence then, they seldom are. They cheered the war in all the great cities—London, Paris, Berlin. Young people welcomed it as an exciting diversion. The poet Rupert Brooke thanked the god who matched him with his hour "and caught our youth and wakened us from sleeping." And so the Great War began. Rupert Brooke had his fun and died. So did other millions. Those who did not die rotted and shivered in the trenches or lived to suffer long years with amputated limbs or gassed lungs.

The chief contestants on one side where the British, French and Russians, joined in 1915 by the Italians, and in 1917 by the Americans along with several smaller nations. Fighting on the other side were Germans and Austrians, along with the Turks and Bulgarians. They gained an early advantage, but then bogged down in a deadly war of attrition that went on and on until one side was hungrier and more exhausted than the other.

Germany accepted the stringent terms of the armistice in the fall of 1918. Everyone agreed there had never been a war like this one and that the world could never again bear such a toll. Over eight million Europeans, perhaps ten million in all, died on the battlefields. Arch-enemies Germany and France each sacrificed at least sixteen percent of their male populations. And if that were not enough, a vast influenza epidemic in 1918 and 19 swept through a cold, hungry weakened world killing two or three times as many people as the war had done.

After the corpses had been buried, the peace negotiations could begin. Unfortunately, they prepared the ground not for a just and lasting peace as promised, but as the economist John Maynard Keynes wrote, "For another just and lasting war."

President Woodrow Wilson lead the American delegation. American loans and supplies had kept France and Britain going during the war, American intervention finally helped to win it. But at the negotiations in Paris, Wilson could not convince his allies to be more magnanimous in peace than the Germans had been in war. As a basis for a fair peace Wilson had devised Fourteen Points. Clemenceau, the French Premier, snidely commented that "Even the good Lord needed only Ten Commandments." As the other negotiators whittled away his points, Wilson became obsessed with the fourteenth and last, which called for a League of Nations that could afford mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike. But once back home, Wilson collapsed from nervous exhaustion, then suffered a stroke. It left the United States to be governed by a sick and mentally impaired president, and it insured that Americans would feel the peace eventually concluded was not their peace. They became increasingly isolationist and turned their backs on Europe which had a serious effect on the world balance of power.
In Geneva, the New League of Nations set up shop in 1920. There the disarray of the European democracies became painfully obvious. In the League Assembly high ideals were treated as realities, providing the ex-allies with excuses for avoiding hard issues and providing their enemies with excuses for fudging the issues. The peace settlement was clearly too harsh for the Germans to accept, too soft to keep them down for long. So it was a nervous time. Europe was unsettled, its map dramatically altered. Under the strain of war, four empires had crumbled: the Russian first, then the Austrian, the Ottoman, and the German. When the empires collapsed the people took to the streets. It was a perfect opportunity for a dozen nationalities from Albania to Finland, to fight for national independence or reunification with their brethren. Minor wars were fought all over Europe: Greeks fought Turks, Hungarians fought Rumanians, the Poles' fought everybody, and most central and east Europeans fought each other in civil wars as well. In Russia, the most significant of these wars had taken place in 1917, as two successful revolutions brought a small faction of social democrats into power, the Bolshevik Communists lead by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. In 1917, the Russian peasant armies were disintegrating on the Eastern Front, no match for the German war machine. Lenin and the Bolsheviks bought time by signing a peace in the city of Brest-Litovsk and giving up large parts of western Russia to Germany. They won popular support by opting for peace at all costs. They promised land to the peasants, better conditions to industrial workers. This got them through several difficult years of civil and foreign war and allowed them to settle firmly in power.

Bolshevism in Russia looked like the illegitimate offspring of Karl Marx and Ivan the Terrible. One of its distinctive marks was the widespread use of bureaucratization and of terror against the people. Lenin's secret police, a crucial element of the regime, murdered a thousand times as many people as the Tsar's police had done. As Joseph Stalin, Lenin's successor remarked, "A single death is a tragedy, a million deaths is a statistic." Under Stalin about ten million peasants were tortured and murdered in the late 1920s and 1930s, killed when Russia proceeded to collectivize agriculture and prohibit family farms, an operation that also exited or transported millions more.

Collectivisation has been called the most war-like operation ever conducted by a state against its own people. But this institutionalization of terror did not affect Russia alone. Communist or not, Russia is part of Europe, it's a part of the world power system. And now that Russia had been taken over by a gang hostile to the West, its former allies Britain and France could no longer play Russia against the Germans; and when equally disturbing men came to power, first in Italy, and then in Germany, the Democracies felt increasingly isolated. They could ill afford to make more enemies. Let's look at Italy first.

Italy had been an ally of Britain and France in the war, but it was the least victorious of the victors. The war left a heritage of social disorder, economic anarchy, bitter frustration. The country's solution was to combine in an explosive mixture the two greatest dynamic forces of the nineteenth century, Nationalism and Socialism. In 1922, Benito Mussolini, socialist and war veteran, came to power by violence and intimidation. He adopted as the emblem of his movement the "fasces" which magistrates of ancient Rome had carried as an emblem of their authority and the unity of the state. Mussolini improved the railroads, he built a large aircraft industry and drained the mosquito infested Pontine Marshes outside Rome. But much of what he did was for show, none of the country's real problems disappeared. Yet compared to Russian misery or the West's spinelessness, Mussolini's right-wing dictatorship called Fascism looked like a success.

One of those who Mussolini impressed was going to surpass him—Adolph Hitler, another demagogue and a National Socialist who soared to power on the wings of crisis. The Germany of later twenties and early thirties was a disaster area. Every European country finished the First World War with its economy in tatters, but Germany's was worst. Soaring inflation made it catastrophic; savers lost everything they had—the solid middle classes never recovered. From this point on Germany was full of people who had nothing to lose.

In 1932, during the height, or perhaps the depth, of the Great Depression, unemployment reached forty-three percent. By that time the Nazis were the second largest party in the Reichstag, Germany's parliament, the Communists were third. It was natural that the young and desperate, or indeed the young and idealistic, many of them students, should place their hope in Nazism with its flaming patriotism. The old order had proved its failure in the economic shipwreck of the depression as well as in the slaughter of the Great War. And the students were not alone. Three years after the Nazis took over in 1933, Germany was the only industrial power to have virtually full employment. No wonder the Germans were enthusiastic about Hitler and did not ask too many questions.

And so it was the losers of the First World War who dominated the politics of the twenties and thirties, while the winners could neither intimidate them nor placate them, although they tried both. Russia was beyond the pale. America remained happily isolationist. And Britain and France drifted from squabbling, to indecision, to appeasement, which is when you throw your friend to the wolves hoping the wolves will be sated before they get to
you. Britain and France then drifted from appeasement into desperation, largely because they couldn't make up their minds what would be the least bad solution among a number of terrible solutions. It's easy to blame them in retrospect— I blamed them at the time—but their problems were great, and the greatest was that many of their citizens felt that they had a lot to lose if they rocked the boat, while their enemies felt they had a lot to gain by rocking ever harder.

France, remember, had lost sixteen percent of its male population and a lot more were disabled. By 1936, the French had more people over sixty than any other country. This was reflected in their conservatism and in their desperate desire to avoid a conflict. In Britain unemployment and labor unrest were endemic. The industrial working class was first angered and then humiliated by the failure of its general strike in 1926. They were brought even lower by the Depression. The British Empire came out of the war larger than ever, but this only meant that the sun never set upon its problems. No one in liberal Britain could decide just how illiberal it could afford to be in maintaining its power over its colonies. The country's intellectual elite, which had been deeply disillusioned by the war, now combined a rejection of nationalism with hedonism. E. M. Foster, the novelist, remarked that, "If he had to choose between betraying his country and betraying a friend he hoped he would have the guts to betray his country."

So this was a time when both communism and fascism provided new flags to inspire and rally, and many of the best and brightest, as well as the brutish and shallow turned to them between the wars. There was bound to be a clash between the dictators who knew or thought they knew what they wanted and the liberal democracies rent by self-criticism and doubt, and it was an uneven match.

In March 1933, the first concentration camp opened at Dachau near Munich, two months after Hitler came to power. Three months later, the leader of Britain's Labour Party, George Lansbury declared, "I would close every recruiting station, disband the army, and disband the air force. I would abolish the whole deadly equipment of war and say to the world, 'do your worst.'" Well, the world was doing its worst. So Germany rebuilt its army and men of good will continued to act impartially between the fire brigade and the fire. Time was running out.

In Spain, General Francisco Franco, lead right-wing rebels against a legally elected left wing government in 1936. The rebels were helped by the Germans and Italians. The Spanish government was supported by France and Russia. But French aid was too little, too late, and the Russians were chiefly interested in helping themselves, so Fascist aid to Franco proved vastly more effective and more deadly. In April 1937, the German air force lent a hand by bombing the town of Guernica. The raid left a thousand inhabitants dead and the town in rubble. It had a profound effect on European diplomacy, for scenes of destruction on this scale fanned Europe's fears of mass bombing. Pablo Picasso then immortalized the raid in a painting he did for the 1937 World's Fair. So the horror of Guernica added a new dimension to the general dread of war and bolstered the democracies reluctance to risk anything of the sort. When Hitler illegally reoccupied the demilitarized Rhineland, when he illegally annexed Austria and rolled triumphantly through the streets of Vienna, the fear of war persuaded the Allies to do nothing. Then in September 1938, Hitler pushed even further demanding a piece of Czechoslovakia. He mobilized his army on the Czech border. Neville Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, was appalled. "How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks here, because of a quarrel in a far away country between people of whom we know nothing." You can understand how relieved Chamberlain would be when he managed to avert war by going to Munich and making a deal with Hitler. In the process, he helped give away Czechoslovakia's western borderlands and rendered her defenseless. He called that "peace with honor."

Winston Churchill was more to the point when he told the House of Commons that it had sustained a defeat without having to fight a war. And yet in spite of German and Italian aggression, most Western statesmen in the 1930s persisted in treating fascist leaders not as ruthless hoodlums indifferent to rule; but as politicians very much like themselves. The British Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, observed rather wistfully that the world would have been a much better place and easier to manage if Herr Hitler and Senor Muscolia had been to Oxford. The next best thing, it seemed, was to pretend they had. But wolves are wolves even if you choose to pretend they are chickens; and the hunger of the wolves wasn't going to be appeased so easily, as we shall see in our next proem.
From 1939 to 1945, war raged in Europe from Flanders fields again to the rubble of Stalingrad. How did nationalism and ideology lead to the mobilization, displacement, and murder of millions?

The Second World War this time on The Western Tradition.

And now UCLA Professor Eugen Weber's continuing journey through the history of Western Civilization.

Most wars are expected to work like their predecessors, but few turn out that way. The Second World War did not at all. In our last program we ended on the brink. It was 1938, and Adolph Hitler was sneering that he had seen the leaders of the Allied democracies, and they were little worms. I can confirm that they were. And yet even worms will turn. As Hitler and Mussolini strutted forward reasonably supposing that nothing stood in their way, British exasperation came to a head. Having failed in 1938 to defend the Czech democracy which had a good army and sound defenses, the British went to war in 1939 to defend brave, foolhardily undemocratic Poland, which had no defenses and not much of an army. The British also dragged the reluctant French with them and so began the bloodiest conflict in history.

From the beginning it was clear to some that the Second World War would have little in common with the First. On the military side a war of movement replaced the drawn out slogging of trench warfare. There were short spells of intense effort with sharp thrusts calling for massive power. And then came long intervals of apparent inaction much like a macabre version of American football. On the political side, the antagonism between Hitler's National Socialism and Stalin's Communism was quickly revealed as superficial. In August, 1939, Germany and Russia signed the Non-Aggression Pact, the better to divide up Poland and then the rest of eastern Europe. And so, in these early days of the war, Germany and Russia gobbled up large chunks of northern and eastern Europe while France and Britain sat tight and watched, dreading the inevitable confrontation, and ill prepared for it. It wasn't until the spring of 1940 that Germany finally ended the suspense and the Phony War. It launched a lightning armor attack, a Blitzkrieg, through Belgium into northern France, circumventing France's newly constructed, much ballyhooed defensive wall, the Maginot Line which proved utterly worthless. The French army, which was poorly led by elderly stick-in-the-muds, quickly collapsed. Within seven weeks, Paris was occupied, the French were knocked out of the war. This was a stunning defeat, and it sent the British soldiers who were fighting in France and Belgium scuttling home. They escaped from Dunkirk by the skin of their teeth leaving most of the continent in German hands. And so the short victorious war that Germany had hoped for in 1914, she finally achieved in 1940. But just when it seemed all over, things began to go wrong for the Axis powers. In London, an unreasonable patriot, Prime Minister Winston Churchill, resolved to go on fighting against all odds. "Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duty. So bear ourselves that if the British Empire and its Commonwealths last for a thousand years, men will still say this was their finest hour." And then in June, 1940, the Italians blundered into the war on the German side determined to be in on the kill and share the spoils. The Germans were forced to turn south to support them. Meanwhile Japan, Germany's other ally, was pursuing initiatives of its own in China, Southeast Asia and the Pacific alarming the Americans.

But neither Japan's aggressiveness nor Italy's blundering need have turned out badly for the Axis powers. By June 1941, the Germans had pressed the British to the gates of Cairo. The Nazis could then have driven for the oil-rich Persian Gulf and on to India. Instead they chose to break the pact that bound Communists and Nazis together in their greed for Poland and they moved against Russia.

Hitler wanted more lebensraum, more living space for his master race, and Russia had more space than anyone. Hitler also thought that a Blitzkrieg victory in the east was the best way of crushing British hopes and inducing them to surrender. So he tried to kill two birds with one stone and wound up crushing himself. The invasion of the Soviet Union in June 41 was the turning point of the war. Russia like an endless bog swallowed more and more of the German army. When the Soviets who has suffered under Stalin realized that the Nazis were far worse, they had no choice but to fight to the death. They lost two and a half million men in only four months before winter buried the German army and turned Blitzkrieg into a grinding war of attrition. Just as in Napoleon's day, the Russian winter proved worse than the Russian armies. And if that wasn't enough, Japan's reckless attack on Pearl Harbor brought the United States into the war as well. President Franklin Roosevelt announced the grim news to the American public: "Yesterday, December 7, 1941, a date which will live in infamy, the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the empire of Japan." So now the Allied war effort moved forward like a great tank, powered and fueled by the American economy. Within one year American military production equaled that of Germany, Italy, and Japan combined. Liberty ships were turned out at the rate of one
every ten hours, jeeps at the rate of one every two minutes. A tidal wave of material crushed the Axis powers. The Russians were ravaging the Axis at Stalingrad. There were victories in North Africa, in Italy, in Normandy on D-Day, and at last, in the Battle of the Bulge in the Arden when the Allies beat back the last German offensive.

By May 1945, the Third Reich lay in ruins along with much of Europe. Three months later after a long bloody Pacific war, Japan was brought to its knees, quelled by America’s terrifying new weapon the Atom bomb. The war was over at last. In Europe, there were bitter memories and a bitter taste. The air war responsible for much of its devastation had provided a strange paradox. It had come at the hands of the Allies. After 1940, Britain had only one way to strike back at the enemy, through the indiscriminate bombing of German cities. By 1942, destroying German morale had become the primary objective of the Allied bomber command. About 600,000 Germans would die this way by the end of the war. The Nazis also bombed civilians targets. They bombed them ruthlessly, and they did it first. But tactics of this sort did not succeed in destroying civilian morale on either side, let alone bringing the enemy down. Yet they reeked havoc on great and ancient cities: London, Coventry, Lubeck, Hamburg. And then on Shroud Tuesday in February 1945, British and American bombers acting on Russian insistence destroyed most of the beautiful city of Dresden, killing in one single night 135,000 men, women, and children, many of the last still in their carnival costumes.

The funeral pyres of Dresden lit up the crash of Europe’s last grasp for world supremacy. Evil men, foolish men had driven it to war. But it was their people who had to pay the price and that price was high.

When Berlin was finally taken in a battle that raged during the last months of the war, Europe was as Churchill described it, “a carnal house, a breeding ground of pestilence and hate.” Those who suffered most were not the fighting men but the unarmed civilians, especially the most helpless. Indeed this has become a trademark of the twentieth century. It is no accident that on the day Hitler invaded Poland, orders went out for the extermination of the incurably ill and the chronically insane in German hospitals. Some 70,000 died before ecclesiastical intervention put a stop to the practice. But by that time much had been learned that could be put to use in the genocide to follow. When the young Hitler did this self-portrait, he lived in Vienna. That is where he came to admire the politics of Karl Lueger, imperial Vienna’s greatest mayor. Lueger gave his city a fine transport system, better schooling, better police, a lot of new jobs. Lueger was also an anti-semit. But what to him was a political ploy was to Hitler an obsession.

As Hitler saw it, in the endless struggle for life, the weak went to the wall, while the strong survived and prospered. A nation’s strength, he believed, lay in its racial purity. And Germany’s purity, her national health and vigor, even her survival were menaced by racial corruptions represented by the Jews, a corruption not merely physical but spiritual and moral as well. For Hitler the evidence of how dangerous this was lay all around: the humiliating peace of the First World War, the slough of decadence and despond that followed were all the work of Jews. So was Russian Communism. So was the Great Depression. The conclusion is clear; rid the world of Jews, rid the world of Slavs, of colored races, of mix breeds and gypsies and homosexuals and Jehovah Witnesses and Communists and of course the mentally ill. You name them, we kill them. Rid the world of all these people and it would be a better place.

In Mien Kampf we find some of this paradigm of paranoia and ill-digested Social Darwinism. This was Hitler’s long term program. Many Germans and non-Germans, even among his supporters, took it lightly or treated it with indifference. But Hitler was consumed by it, and the Germans most of whom accepted Hitler’s decisions wholehearted, were going to be consumed as well. The war provided Hitler an opportunity to move full-steam-ahead regardless of any effects it might have upon the German war effort. Millions of Jews from France to Russia were rounded up and sent off to concentration camps, slave societies whose inmates could be worked to death in factories run by German business or else simply starved, tortured and executed. Mass gassing procedures were introduced at the camps in 1942. They were far more efficient than earlier methods. This is how one eyewitness describes the procedure, “The first train arrived; forty-five freight cars with six thousand seven hundred people of which one thousand four hundred and fifty were already dead on arrival. A large loud speaker blares instructions—undress completely, take off artificial limbs, glasses and so on. Hand in all valuables. Women and girls to the barber who cuts off their hair in two or three strokes and stuffs it into potato sacks. Then the line starts moving. At the corner an SS man announces in a pastoral voice, Nothing will happen to you. Just breath deeply inside the chambers. It stretches the lungs. This inhalation is necessary against the illnesses and epidemics.” But the majority knows what is ahead. The stench tells their fate.
By 1945, about six million of the eight and a half million Jews under German occupation had been killed, two million of them here in the concentration camp of Auschwitz. When the camps were liberated at the end of the war, the international community was finally forced to acknowledge their existence which had been known for some time. But however eloquent the world's rejection of Nazi barbarism, this sort of atrocity perpetuated by a heretofore civilized state set an example. It suggested possibilities that colored the subsequent history of the twentieth century. Hitler's racial theory, like the Communist theory of class war implied social engineering on a grand scale. As Heinrich Himmler the head of the SS explained to his staff, "What happens to a Russian, to a Czech does not interest me in the slightest. What the nations can offer in the way of good blood of our type we will take if necessary by kidnaping their children and raising them here with us. Whether nations live in prosperity or starve to death like cattle interests me only insofar as we need them as slaves to our Kultur." Masses of human beings were to be moved about, used, altered, indoctrinated, exterminated according to abstract principles. War itself, the mass movement of armies, prisoners, refugees, contributed to this and intensified it. A quarter of a century earlier, during the First World War, the Germans had occupied most of Belgium and a large slice of France. A million and a half people were then turned into refugees and many others into slave labor for Germany's war effort. The army commander, General Ludendorff, herded four hundred thousand Belgians into German factories. All this would be repeated on a much vaster scale by the Nazis. In August, 1944, seven and a half million foreigners worked in German industry alone including nearly two million prisoners of war, over five million forced laborers from a dozen countries. The Germans were not alone in this however. The Russians who knew all about social engineering had been moving or killing millions of their own people for a generation.

In 1929, for instance Joseph Stalin delivered a speech justifying his policy of Collectivization and the need to eliminate the Kulaks, Russia's relatively well off, independent peasants. The Kulaks were resisting the loss of their farms for rather obvious reasons. And this is what Stalin has to say about it, and the Levant language is all his, "Can we advance our socialized industry at an accelerated rate while having to rely on an agricultural base such as is provided by small peasant farming which is incapable of expanding production? No, we cannot! What then is the solution? The Socialist way is to set up collective farms and state farms, the way which leads to the squeezing out of the capitalist elements from agriculture. That is why we have recently passed from the policy of restricting the exploiting proclivities of the Kulaks to the policy of eliminating the Kulaks as a class."

And eliminate them he did. Millions of them. Of course, it's much easier to do this sort of thing when you do not see people as individuals, but as a class, or a race, or a problem to be solved.

After the Second World War was over, even more millions were set on the move in Russia, in eastern Europe, and in Germany, both East and West. Some of them were refugees. Others were expelled as territory was transferred from one sovereignty to another. Wars are great mix-masters. They displace masses of combatants and civilians and blend them into unexpected mixtures. The Second World War was the greatest mix-master of them all. Never before had so many millions been shifted around. Never had so many been up-rooted. Never was mobility so much a part of life nor stability so rare as in the wake of the Second Thirty Years War from 1914 to 1945.

Of course, in the Europe of centuries past, territories often changed rulers, sometimes as the result of war. But such changes did not mean much of a change in the lives of most people. They went on living, they went on working as they had done before. In the age of nationalism and ideology however, a change of ruler, a change of flag meant a change of language, of economic and administrative practices, of the lessons learned at school, of permissible behavior. That was if you were lucky. If you were not it could mean the loss of personal liberty, property, even life. This is what happened in eastern Europe. As the Red army moved toward Berlin, Goebbels, the Nazi propaganda minister, warned that if Germany were defeated the Soviets would occupy all eastern and southeastern Europe, and the greater part of the Third Reich. And over all this territory, says Goebbels, an Iron Curtain would descend. We shall see how Europe coped with this and other anxieties of the postwar era in our next program. Until then...

#149 The Cold War

It was neither peace nor war, with constant Communist probing and Western counter-measures; a world-wide struggle of pathological hostility as each side saw the other as the incarnation of evil.
The Cold War this time on The Western Tradition.

And now UCLA Professor Eugene Weber's continuing journey through the history of Western Civilization.

The year 1945 was the end of a period and also of a way of life. The Second World War had shaken the globe like a great earthquake and nothing after it was going to be the same again. The age of European dominance was over. The supremacy of European countries based as much on prestige as on power could not survive the blow it had received. But the great European colonial empires had already been sapped in earlier years by declining confidence among the masters and ever more strident appeals to the liberal doctrines that the masters taught. Now these empires quickly fell to pieces when the economic and military power that had won them, that had held them, disappeared.

The sun when it sets goes quietly. The confidence that made Europeans shoulder the "White Man's Burden" uninvited broke down. The war had shown that the seats of power now lay outside Europe, they lay with Europe's two great offsprings; the Soviet Union and the United States. And with these new centers of power there came a new rivalry that has dominated the world ever since.

The first international act after the war was to create a new organization—the United Nations. All hundred and fifty-nine of them to replace the League of Nations discredited as an ineffective talking shop. The structure of the United Nations was designed to balance the interests of the Great Powers which had won the war against those of other weaker nations. The United Nations did not prove vastly more effective than its predecessor in avoiding conflicts. It too was a talking shop, but talking is better than fighting. The primary reason why the talk never degenerated into global war was the balance of terror. A new factor which we now regard or disregard as an old familiar factor. America remembers, had demonstrated the incredible power of the atom bomb in 1945. By 1949, the Soviets had a bomb of their own in spite of a prediction by U. S. Army intelligence that they wouldn't be able to build one for a whole generation. Within a few years, both the United States and Russia had hydrogen bombs as well, vastly more powerful and more deadly than the old atom bombs. And by 1957, the Soviets could also put a satellite into orbit, the implications of which were not lost on the West. An intercontinental ballistic missile that could carry Sputnik could also carry atomic warheads to the United States and to Western Europe.

Paradoxically, this threat of Mutually Assured Destruction as it was eventually known, this threat made a lot of people very nervous and forced the atomic nations to use their power with relative caution. The risk of an atomic blow-up did not prevent other conflicts but it did keep them within limits, and as a result, the years since 1945 were full of crisis and of conflict, but none of these has yet degenerated into the sort of general war that devastated Europe and much of the rest of the world in the two world wars. If it does, we probably won't be here to talk about it.

But in the last year of World War II, it wasn't at all clear how things were going to turn out. There was reason to fear that the Soviets under Stalin would press their conquests forward into central and western Europe and down to the Mediterranean. An enfeebled Europe looked like easy prey. In fact though, Russia's conquests during 1945 stopped on her eastern borderlands where she annexed the Baltic states, large chunks of Germany and Poland, and where she set up a string of vassal states from Poland to the Balkans. Germany itself, divided and occupied after 1945, furnished one of these vassal states in its eastern portion while the allied zone of occupation in the West became a Democratic Federal Republic in due course. The way Europe was divided after the war reproduced patterns that had been set a thousand years before. If you look at the map you can see how much non-communist Europe has in common with the Roman Empire and the Carolingian Empire and how largely the Communist Empire, especially where it runs through Germany, coincides with the areas that Western Christianity and the Western tradition left untouched for a long time. After the war, Germany became a main stage for Russian probes and Western resistance especially in Berlin. Although the city had been divided among the victors after the war like the rest of Germany, Berlin was located a hundred miles within Russia's occupied German zone. This marked the city as a permanent sore and one the Communists could scratch when ever they wanted. The Berlin airlift of 1948 and 1949 came about when the Russians closed land access to the city hoping to force the French, British, and Americans out. It didn't work. Supplies were brought in by plane, tens of thousands of flights, for the crisis was not the first nor the last there and elsewhere.

Berlin was only one point where the friction turned to crisis, where constant Communist probing forced Western counter-measures. It was an entirely new situation, neither peace nor war, but a world wide struggle in which every possible weapon was used short of the direct confrontation that might lead to atomic warfare. In a
speech in 1947, Bernard Baruch, the American financier, gave it a name, "The Cold War." In the nineteenth century, the Frenchman Alex de Tocqueville, had seen the future of the world divided between Americans and Russians, one side standing for liberty, the other for servitude. Now, the almost pathological hostility between the two camps rose to more fantastic heights than when the Bolsheviks had seized power in 1917. Within a few years, each side had learned to look upon the other as the incarnation of evil. But even this unpleasant situation wasn't entirely useless as we shall see.

After 1945, the impoverished remnants of west European power could not maintain a cold war on their own. That was something only the Americans could do and they started to do so in 1947 to help Greece and Turkey then under heavy pressure from the communists. On March 12th of that year, President Truman went before Congress to ask for aid and to enunciate what came to be called the Truman Doctrine.

"I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures. The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedom. If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world, and we shall surely endanger the welfare of this nation."

Whether you think the Truman Doctrine is noble or foolhardy or something in-between, it has colored American foreign policy ever since from Greece to Viet Nam to Nicaragua. But back in 1948, it could not prevent a Communist coup in Czechoslovakia, the last country in eastern Europe to have preserved its independence. The rape of Czechoslovakia, a fragile democracy violated twice in a decade, first by Hitler, then by Stalin, this followed quickly by the blockade of Berlin, made 1948 a very uneasy easy year.

So as a first step in their own defense, Britain, France, and the Be-Ne-Lux countries, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, signed a defensive treaty out of which NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, was to grow. Ironically, the great power clash which had been expected and feared in Europe, broke out at the other end of the world when the Russian trained troops of North Korea invaded South Korea in 1950. Korea was another country divided between communist and allied occupation zones. And the war the United Nations fought there, the war to keep Korea divided rather than let the northern communists take the lot, lasted three years. It brought in the Chinese. It saw General Douglas MacArthur advocating the invasion of China and possibly the start of World War III, until Truman brought him home. The war caused some three million casualties among the military and civilian populations involved, including about a hundred and forty thousand Americans. In Europe, one effect of the Korean war was the feeling that NATO could only work properly if Germany was armed and integrated into the military alliance of the democracies that had beaten her. So, by 1955, Germany had become a full fledged member of the treaty organization only ten years after her defeat. But this military build-up was not the only tactic the West used. It was apparent that the Communists did best where economic and social dislocation on a major scale wore down the middle class and made workers miserable, creating social grievances that the communists could use. The antiCommunists, therefore had to make war on poverty, on employment, hunger, and inflation.

In June 1947, the U.S. Secretary of State, General George C. Marshall, announced a new policy, "directed," he said, "not against any country or doctrine, but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos. It's purpose should be the revival of a working economy." Well, it doesn't always happen, but the Marshall Plan worked as planned. The actual financial aid that it provided, equivalent to about sixty billion dollars in 1987 terms, was somewhat less than the American aid which Europe had received from 1945 to the time it started. But previous aid had been distributed haphazardly. This new aid was going to be coordinated by Europeans themselves. Indeed the greatest function of the Marshall Plan was to promote European cooperation in the establishment of a common recovery program, which by 1951 brought industrial output back to prewar levels.

With a series of international agreements, western Europe tried to leave behind the conflicts of national claims and ambitions which had chaffed it and scared it over the past century and a half. And it moved towards political and economic integration managed by supranational institutions. It's unlikely that this would have happened without the original American initiative, or, one would think without the stubborn policy of Stalin who was determined to keep his part of Europe out of it. And so the advance of West European integration and the advance of Communist policy developed in a kind of counterpoint.

The Marshall Plan was a counter to Communist advances. And the answer to this Western aid was a tightening of Stalinist reigns on Eastern satellites, culminating in the loss of Czech independence in 1948. The struggle over Berlin in the same year encouraged the creation of NATO, and the outbreak of the Korean war in 1950, has-
tenced the emancipation of West Germany, whose manpower and resources could not be spared, which in turn lead to the sovereignty of the rival German Democratic Republic in the East, and to the creation of the Warsaw Pact to reinforce Soviet domination of Eastern Europe.

Meanwhile, the German resurgence prompted the pooling of coal and steel resources of Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, France, and Germany in the European coal and steel community in order to restrain and control German economic activity. And that lead to the creation of the European economic community in 1957, which established a Common Market in western Europe with common tariffs insuring the free movement of capital, labor, and goods, and working out common social and economic policies. You know that it's a classic rule that unification provides a faster market and broader opportunities not only for trade but for planning on a more economical scale. By 1960, even though European economic unification was still grudging; incomplete; hesitant, the consumption, productivity, and living standards of people living in western Europe were double what they had been before the war. Western Europe had three percent of the land and ten percent of the population of the world, but it had twenty percent of its food, twenty-five percent of its total output, forty percent of world trade.

By 1973, the average European consumed more than twice as much as he had done in 1950; some denounced this as crass consumerism, most regarded it as a distinct improvement. A lot more people had proper homes to live in, refrigerators, even cars. They lived better, they ate better, and as a result, the generations that grew up in the fifties and sixties were a good deal taller than their parents. One thing this meant was that very few people remained who had nothing to lose as their parents had had nothing to lose in the Depression. They now had a stake in society. They wanted to see it continue changing for the better and they didn't want to change it radically, let alone destroy it or see it destroyed.

But while this European miracle was the doing of Europeans with a little help from their friends, the preservation of the miracle in the West continued to be regarded as somebody else's business. Just as in the 1930s, the European democracies did not want to make the effort. did not want to spend the money or to draft their young people to insure their own defense. And this is not very surprising. Sensible people, free people, prefer to invest in present needs and comforts rather than in hypothetical future threats. For the economy, this attitude is very practical. The United States built up its economy in the nineteenth century with hardly an army and not much of a navy which left a lot more resources for productive investment. And West Germany and Japan have now joined the United States as the world's greatest economic powers because they spend so little on defense. So this is the reasonable way to act. But it's only the reasonable way if you have somebody who will shoulder the burden for you and keep you safe. And in the second half of the twentieth century, that someone is the United States.

So the defense of western Europe was left in large part to the Americans. And since most Europeans weren't going to provide sufficient men and money to safeguard themselves, the deterrent was provided by atomic weaponry. Inferiority in conventional forces was compensated by atomic defense. In effect, NATO was saying to the Soviets and to eastern Europe, 'if you attack us with infantry and tanks and planes, we shall be forced to use our atom bomb.' This has worked well enough except that a lot of people in Europe now feel caught between the two superpowers and they seem to have forgotten the history of nuclear deterrents, the fact that nuclear weapons were far cheaper in the first place than conventional forces that no one in the West wanted to pay for.

Meanwhile, the Cold War was redefining the meaning of 'The West' as that part of the world where Soviet writ did not run. So the West, meaning us, including Turkey but not Czechoslovakia, Israel but not Hungary, Japan but not Cuba. The political systems of these so-called Western nations vary widely of course. But in all of them, the capitalist system was being steadily modified to include elements of socialism and social welfare programs, forms of economic organization more traditionally associated with their Communist rivals. And while the Western world moved ever further away from the capitalist model that Marx and Lenin described, the Soviet world move closer to the kind of old regime it claimed to replace, complete with police control, intellectual control, militarism, and nationalism.

And so the combination of nationalism and socialism, or be it in very different forms, this combination has been reincarnated in communist regimes and to some extent in capitalist regimes just a few decades after the defeat of Germany. But the places where it has flourished most are in the so-called Third World. It's never been clear to me where the second world is situated, but let's say so. In the countries that have sprung up on the ruins of the West's old colonies, nationalism and socialism combine. And we'll take a look at these countries and their European legacy in our next program. Until then...
#150 The Third World

The non-industrial countries of the world used to be backward but self-sufficient; now they are backward and dependent, with every baby born pushing them closer to catastrophe.

The Third World this time on The Western Tradition.

And now UCLA Professor Eugen Weber's continuing journey through the history of Western Civilization.

Last time we ended on a note of turnabout. In the second half of the twentieth century the capitalist West was becoming more socialist; the soviet world was becoming more like the old Czarnist regime it was meant to replace, and there was even a resurgence of national socialism, especially in the former colonies of the West. One of the great novelties of the post war era has been the appearance and progressive self-assertion of this so-called Third World, born of the dissolution of Europe's colonial empire. More than fifty new republics have joined the ranks of the United Nations since 1945. By 1974, the only colonial empire left to Europe was that of Russia. The current colonial holdings of France or Britain are scarcely worth mention in comparison with those of countries like China, South Africa, Indonesia or even the Sudan. Europe's age of territorial imperialism seems to be over, and that, itself, is a remarkable change.

But the colonial enterprises of the past have left their mark behind them. Whether they came to heal, teach, order or exploit, the Europeans were bound to revolutionize when they did not destroy the societies, peoples, cultures, that they touched. But whatever motives moved the European empire builders, they were responsible for training the leaders and inspiring the ideologies that have challenged Westerners and then displaced them. On the one hand, the need of the industrialized nations to interfere with those less developed, as England did with India, this need increased as communications shrank the world and trade tied its disparate parts together. Without the colonies' markets and especially their products, the industries of the West were likely to run down. On the other hand, the more backward countries could only hope to match their exploiters in wealth and power by developing capital, skills, value systems from the West; that is, by facilitating even greater foreign meddling in and control of their affairs. The West could not be kept out without Western techniques, and those techniques could not be acquired without bringing in the West. That was the quandary.

But some actions of the West, even if they were intended to be benevolent, could have dire effects if they were based on an inappropriate estimate of what was good. Condensed milk for babies, solid meals for starving men and women, cold water for the overheated—these can hurt or kill. Similarly, so can constitutions and other alien imports. You cannot introduce machines and factories without implicit concepts of what man can or should do. You cannot introduce social services without attendant ideas of what man needs and what man is. One materialism ushers in another, one ideology elbows out another and imposes itself.

European ideas concerning property, for instance, proved as much a dissolver to Third World cultures as European arms and techniques. When lands which had been held and worked in common were split up and treated as private separate pieces of property, subject to sale, transfer, mortgage by one particular owner, then tribal or communal forms of land tenure were dissipated and with them the society, the crafts, the tribes, which had evolved structures quite different from those of the West. Like land, labor also had to be brought in line with European concepts and European needs. Older forms of labor organization were replaced, sometimes forcibly, by money wages, open markets, regular hours, above all, by the notion of work as an ethical value rather than merely a demanding necessity. Where Europe took five hundred years to live the evolution from Middle Ages to modern world, African and Asian societies were forced to live it in a couple of generations. Money replaced barter or subsistence; exchange replaced self-sufficiency. Tens of millions who had seldom or never used currency were initiated into its delights, or pressured by taxes and other obligations into cash producing activities. Efficiency replaced haphazardness; secularization replaced traditional magic observances; laws and administration replaced customs; impersonal bureaucracies replaced face-to-face relationships. Some of this was an improvement; all of it was upsetting. One society after another was affected by alien concepts, generally applied with little understanding of the historical background or the stability provided by existing practices. People who had operated time-out-mind as parts of customary cultures were introduced to the possibilities and the insecurities of change. They really could not challenge their new masters.

But the colonial process is not as simple as it is often painted and it does not operate in one direction alone. The occupier does not simply rule the occupied; he infiltrates their consciousness, their lives, their culture. He takes hold of them inside and out. Indians and Nigerians often want to be English gentlemen.
All this indicates the possibility that technological society did not destroy values as such, but rather suggested new values. What you see in nineteenth and twentieth century colonial history is an accelerated version of European history. Contrasts replaced tradition, the free moving, free wheeling individual replaced the stable family or tribe; democracy with all its drawbacks and opportunities replaced the stable hierarchies of status and birth; changing legal structures transformed society and social attitudes. Technological innovations turned configurations of provinces into countries; spread modern skills, suggested the revival of native industry and enterprise in a new guise and on a new scale. And just as in Europe, all this has provided more efficient modern means for age old tendencies to exploit, to oppress, and to murder your enemies en masse.

But because the whole world is at our doorstep, we can see that time has not unraveled at the same rate for people in every country. We are haunted by the disparity between the advanced countries and all others, the imbalance between the industrialized West and North and the agrarian remainder of the world. Today, a glance across the world reveals extraordinary differences unlike two hundred years ago when, generally speaking, most people everywhere still lived approximately in similar circumstances. Today’s differences are more on a scale of time than space. Behind this lies the fact that while all the world advances, its most advanced areas advance the fastest. Europe and North America, which have less than thirty percent of the world’s population, produce eighty percent of its income; and Europe continues to consume the greatest share of the surplus foods and raw materials of the world and to provide the leading exporters of manufactured goods, just as she had done in 1900.

Asia, Africa, Latin America are increasing their production too, but not nearly as fast, and they are not making lots of money from selling raw materials to Europe either because a great change, another great change, has occurred. The largest amount of trading takes place between the industrial nations themselves—instead of between industrial nations and their former colonies. Europe and the United States take less of the world’s raw materials now than they did seventy years ago. So primary producers in Asia, in Africa, in South America, with their rubber and their oil and their tin do less trade and they do it on less terms than before because demand for their products is shrinking, or is only being maintained by artificial means. A country like Ghana produced more cocoa in 1964 than it did in 1954, but it earned less than half what it had earned a decade before, and since the 1973 oil crisis, the situation has only grown worse. In 1970, the beef from one African cow could pay for one barrel of oil; now it takes eight cows to buy a barrel of oil.

Non-industrial economies used to be backward but self-sufficient; now they are backward and dependent, which makes them more unstable than the industrial economies on which they depend. That is especially true when a country depends on a single product. All in all, over a score of countries still depend on a single product for over half of their export trade, and they lead a precarious existence, teetering on the brink of catastrophe with every oscillation of world commodity prices. At the same time, these economies have been caught between soaring demand for modern goods and insufficient supply. The result has been crippling inflation. Between 1958 and 1968, the cost of living index went up from one hundred to one hundred forty-nine in India, two hundred two in Ghana, eight hundred seventy-nine in Argentina, two thousand two hundred and sixty in Brazil, all countries where anachronism and modernization are at odds.

In my first lecture, I quoted Voltaire about history being only a pack of tricks that we play on the dead. How often, one may ask, is history a pack of tricks that the dead play on us, and we play on each other. And we become aware of them as one hidden mine after another goes off unexpectedly under our feet. Overpopulation might be one of history’s most fiendish tricks.

Modern sanitation techniques and disease control had such a dramatic effect on underdeveloped nations that the population growth which occurred over several centuries in the West took less than a decade in certain Asian and South American countries, far faster than the economy and means of production could adjust to the conditions this created. The continents least able to bear it find their population rising fastest. Asia, with fifty percent of the world’s population, has eleven percent of its revenues. Men and women have multiplied for thousands of years to reach the five billion mark. Short of catastrophe, they’ll double that in forty years. And yet most of these masses who are no longer powerless or silent, who grow in number because of the West’s medical advances, cannot afford the West’s comforts, machinery or nourishment. Discontent can spread more rapidly than prosperity. As Nehru once remarked, “What is new in India is not misery, but the consciousness the Indian people has of it today, and its impatience to be free of it.” Yet, whilst an American farmer can feed forty-four persons, a Frenchman, twelve, a Russian, five, the average producer in an undeveloped country can generally feed only himself properly—at best, one other person. It takes fifteen Indian cows to give as much milk as one American cow; seven acres of Vietnamese rice patty to harvest the same quantities as those produced by one acre in Australia.
Unfortunately, there is little reason to think that the hungry countries whose population by 2000 A.D. will be over five billion, four-fifths of the total projected for the whole planet, that these countries can be modernized fast enough to keep them from becoming a miserable, suffering, explosive sore. The greater the population, the less likely their living standard is to improve; the less the living standard improves, the less chance there is of lowering the birthrate; the greater the population pressure on available resources, the fewer resources can be spared to increase productivity, to improve living conditions, and to create possibilities and attitudes conducive to limiting the population.

The area of the world’s cultivated lands can be tripled, productivity greatly intensified. A fuller, more balanced diet might even cut down the population growth. Recent studies suggest that hungry societies whose diet is deficient in proteins may be particularly prolific, while protein rich diets reduce the fertility rate. It’s also possible to bring the birth rate down to compensate for a lower death rate, and it is possible to enlist science in solving the problems of subsistence, production and population. But capital and technology depend on human attitudes and human decisions. In this regard, the 1980s have witnessed remarkable strides in India and China, but equally remarkable retrogression in other places.

Thirty years after colonial rule, African states are more dependent than ever on foreign assistance. Every fifth sack of grain the Africans will eat is imported. So are the armaments, which account for far more money than goes to their living standards. As usual, political decisions command the material possibilities. Cultural and ideological orientation affects and directs the uses of the means of society’s command, and so, while the hungry and backward countries challenge the industrialized West to aid them even more, they also accuse it of ignoring or destroying their peculiar culture and their values. The aid has become both problem and solution; it condemns as it saves.

The story of the Third World also emphasizes something else: the sheer brevity of colonial imperialism. In the last three centuries, Europeans conquered much of the world; they settled it; they set their mark on it with their culture and technology, but they didn’t need colonies to do this. And the Colonial Age was a very brief episode in the history of the West. Colonies, remember, were a very uneconomic way of exploiting people. But even this brief interlude had a dramatic, often devastating, effect on the Third World which had barely changed for thousands of years.

As for the West, much of what happened in the last hundred years has proved as short lived as the colonial age. Much is being abandoned; much is being reversed. Literacy, for example, which was so hard to achieve and only generalized around 1900, literacy is now seeping away. We’re returning to the oral and visual culture of our forefathers. Law and order, that proved so hard to establish, are also cracking. Life used to be precarious, then it became a little less precarious in the late nineteenth century; in the late twentieth century it grows more precarious again. And while material uniformity grows, cultural uniformity, another recent achievement, cultural uniformity wanes. Even national unity is being challenged by particularisms reasserted; linguistic in Belgium or Canada; national in Brittany and Wales, and Catalonia and Yugoslavia; cultural and ethnic in countries like the United States. The long trend to greater centralization, to greater authority, is being reversed in the West, although of course, not in the rest of the world, and the shorter trend which for three or four centuries tried to impose standards of reason and rational discourse, this is meeting strong competition from the sciences, the arts and the politics of irrationality. It’s hard, after all, to be rational in an irrational world. It is not rational.

So we are going back to earlier situations which our forefathers fought hard to alter and overcome; and whatever else this means, it suggests that historical experience is not a linear progression. It is rather a meander, a river in which waters you can never step twice, of course, but also one whose curves ever approach each other and ever flow through new, unexpected territories. Next time, the Technological Revolution. Until then . . .

#151 The Technological Revolution

From hot air balloons and bicycles, to airplanes, and motorcars, not to mention radios, telephones, mass circulation newspapers and cinema and television--the world was getting smaller; it turned faster, it became more self-conscious each day.

The Technological Revolution this time on The Western Tradition.
And now UCLA Professor Eugen Weber's continuing journey through the history of Western Civilization.

We're almost ready to conclude our five thousand years of history, our economy tour through the old country, although there really is no conclusion. There is no happy ending, there is no eternal damnation, there is no priceless wisdom even; just a little more experience. The human predicament remains essentially the same, but we live in greater comfort, and that's what I want to remind you of in our last two programs—just how far we've come, in material terms, at least, if not in any other.

At 4:00 p.m. on April 24, 1900, a balloon rose from the Tuileries Gardens in Paris while fifteen thousand people craned their necks and watched. On board the balloon was a pioneer cinematographer, the cinema having been invented five or six years before. As he went up, he writes, "a light wind pushed us eastward. It's from four hundred meters that Paris looks its best; knotted around a ribbon of the Seine, one saw it all, cut up by avenues and boulevards, gullied by its streets and lakes."

Since that time, aviation has got us used to this sort of sight; in 1900 it was completely new. You would think that could have happened sooner—since the hot air balloon used in 1900 was an invention of the eighteenth century—but balloons remained a rare curiosity while airplanes, when they came, multiplied fast. Within three years of 1903, when the Wright brothers got the first airplane off the ground, an aircraft factory in the Paris suburb of Biencour was turning out good biplanes. By 1908, one of these had made the first cross-country flight in Europe, twenty-seven kilometers, about fifteen miles, from Fleurus to Reims in the Champagne. The following year, Louis Bleriot would cross the English Channel with no compass by following the ships that steamed between Boulogne and Dover.

But then, in 1909, aerial photographs were taken of military installations in northeastern France, and in that same year, thirty-eight airplanes entered the first air meeting, held at Reims in the Champagne. Now, this had been organized by the local Champagne industry. It offered considerable prizes and it set several records, but the Reims meeting didn't just reflect the publicity value of the new machines, it also suggested their military potential. This was soon demonstrated when, in 1911, the Italians, at war with the Turks, began to use planes to scout out enemy positions and also to chuck out bombs by hand.

A John Goldsworthy, the English novelist, wrote a moving letter to the London Times, begging the military to "leave us the innocence of the air," but the air was destined to be violated like the rest of the earth. Within a couple of years, British troops were being equipped with specially built antiaircraft guns, and things have never been quite the same since.

As we have seen, wars serve as great accelerators. The end of the war in 1918 left lots of useless planes and lots of unemployed pilots. It didn't take long for some of these to start to fly both passengers and mail. Five years later, flying aces back from World War I offered promenades in the air and also two-hour flights to and from Paris. By the 1930s, anyone who could afford it, could travel or ship goods across the world on regular services. Still, passenger flying remained the prerogative of kings like Edward XIII, dictators, and other exceptional figures until World War II accelerated things once more and turned the luxury of the few into the commonplace transport of the many. Jet engines developed for late model fighter planes and for Hitler's V-1, the vengeance planes, revealed commercial possibilities.

In 1952, B. O. A. C., the British Overseas Aircraft Corporation, introduced the first passenger jet service. By the 1960s, wide-bodied jumbo jets were carrying six hundred and seven hundred passengers. In 1976, the supersonic Concorde, costly triumph for Franco-British engineering, crossed the Atlantic in less than three hours. Lindbergh, in 1927, took ten times as long and had to wait for his champagne. Now, if you're flying from Paris to New York, you can get there before you've left. It was impressive to know that men could fly to the moon, but simple commercial flight added a new dimension to the experience of ordinary folk. Now they could cross entire continents with greater speed and ease than it had taken to get from a country town to the capital one hundred years before. Jaded as we are today, we might want to give a moment's thought to how and from what all this started. The true origins of heavier than air flying machines lie less in the fantasies of Leonardo da Vinci than in humble and more practical aspirations. In 1889, an Irishman named John Boyd Dunlop, soon followed by the Michelin brothers of France, patented a kind of rubber tire that turned unwieldy, uncomfortable velocipedes into bicycles—safer, easier to ride and control, and soon much cheaper as well. For the first time in history, man found an alternative to the costly horse, one that permitted him to move much faster than he could do on foot; and woman discovered an emancipating agent, liberating her from constricting corsets, voluminous skirts, and chaperones.
As the nineteenth century ended, as the twentieth century began, manufacturers of corset stays and umbrella spokes turned to making bicycles with such effect that prices dropped within a decade or two to where quite modest folk could afford to buy one. Others, more venturesome, equipped the new contraptions with steam or petrol engines turning bi-, tri- or quadricycles first into motorbikes, then into motorcars, then into flying machines. All of them used much the same parts, and most were produced and raced by the same men and women who were driven by love-of-gain but also, and above all, by the spirits of enterprise and adventure, the love of excitement and speed that marks a century not half as mopey as it is sometimes made out.

At first, however, the bicycle remained the people's horse, a horse that consumed no hay, required no stable, dropped no manure. Cars took a bit longer. Motorized public transport dates to the beginning of the century, and its appearance drove a British scholar to stately complain:

What is this that roareth thus?
Can it be a motor bus?
Yes! The smell and hideous hum
Indicat motorem bum.
How shall wretches live like us,
Cinctor dis motorebus?
Domina, defende nos
Contra hos motores bos."

Now, you don't have to understand Latin to know exactly how he felt.

In Europe, low priced cars for the middle classes didn't come until the 1930s, when men like Andre Citroen, adopted and adapted Henry Ford's assembly line methods. Then in 1938, Ferdinand Porsche, turned out the first people's car, the Volkswagen prototype of a postwar family of Morris Minors and Citroen two-horsepower cars that made automobiles accessible to most. By 1960, there was one private car for every thirty-one people in the world--one for three in the United States, one for twenty-two in Europe. Predictably, bikes and motorcars also led to more tourist facilities--inns, restaurants, hotels that now catered to more than just commercial travelers--and they also led to better roads. Rotted, dusty, ill-paved highways were gradually replaced by even surfaces kinder to tires and springs. In 1924, the first high speed auto-strata opened in Italy between Varese and Milan. Italy and Germany pioneered the freeways that the United States was going to perfect.

And so, Europe and the world moved from the age of animal and foot power to that of motor traction. In 1914, the floods of refugees had pushed handbarrows or trudged along their horsecarts. In 1940, similar refugees filled highways with bikes and cars fleeing from German tanks, dive-bombed by screaming aircraft. There was no holding back progress.

Other goodies were born, quite literally, with the century. The cheap box camera in 1900, vacuum cleaners in 1901, and also gramophone records. People had made their own music or listened to somebody playing it in a hall or in a public kiosk. Now they could listen to music at will. By 1913, Decca had devised a portable gramophone that could be used in the garden or taken on picnics and that didn't cost more than a Sunday lunch. Soon, that would prove a boom in the trenches. In 1901, an Italian, Guglielmo Marconi, also achieved the first wireless communication across the Atlantic. By 1912, when the Titanic went down in the North Atlantic with 1,600 souls, the miraculous possibilities of modern technology sending out distress signals were revealed along with the fragility of modern technology. Parisians had been talking about pulling down the Eiffel Tower, which had been denounced as an eyesore since 1889. But a radio antenna on top of the tower's thousand-foot structure ensured its survival. Then, in 1920, Marconi opened the first British broadcasting station near Chelmsford in Essex, soon to become the BBC. Soon, also, families would be free from oppressive silences—they could switch on the radio, and after the Second World War, television, which had been demonstrated back in 1926. By 1933, President Roosevelt's fireside chats would demonstrate the political uses of mass communications, and soon Stanley Baldwin, the British Prime Minister, Hitler; Churchill; would take up the idea.

The world was shrinking. More people were traveling and traveling faster. Where the Black Plague of the fourteenth century had taken months and months to spread through Europe, the flu of 1918 took only a few weeks. At the same time, radios and telephones—another nineteenth century invention perfected in the twentieth—and mass circulation papers and magazines were making the world ever smaller, more stressful, more conscious of what went on next door and beyond.
Twentieth century men and women wake up and go to bed with news from near and far; and since good news is seldom news, the diet of sensationalism makes for indigestion, or at least flatulence. Stanley Baldwin, the British Prime Minister, lambasted Britain's press lords for wanting power without responsibility, which he described as the prerogative of the harlot through the ages. But the press was far more influential than prostitutes ever were, something MacCauley had predicted in 1828, when he dubbed its reporters the Fourth Estate, and most of the media's power came not from the opinions they expressed, but from the information they conveyed almost unconsciously, information about possibilities, about ways of life and standards and acceptabilities and availabilities that much of the world—whether in far continents or poor streets right here at home—much of the world had long ignored, and that it gradually set to copy. I remember in 1944 seeing the film Mrs. Miniver, in an open-air cinema in India. The Indians were watching from the walls and from the trees outside, and I wondered, sitting in that privileged enclosure, looking at the images of such a privileged life; I wondered what the Indians made of the dresses and manners and comforts in the film, so alien to them then, so commonplace by now, forty years later.

And then there was advertising. The nineteenth century had seen an explosion of publicity—posters, displays that liven city streets. In 1910, the first neon tube was demonstrated in Paris, and it proved ideally suited not just for street lights but for advertising, too. In 1912, the first neon advertisements went up in Paris for an Italian aperitif, Cinzano. Lights, prints, images, newspapers and reviews, radio and cinema, then television, spurred a revolution of aspirations the like of which the world had never seen. Modern technology was busy producing ever more things to covet, and modern technology in due course fulfilled many of the aspirations it inspired. More than by its wars, the twentieth century stands out by the radical physical difference between its way of life and that of all preceding centuries. The world probably changed no more between the birth of Jesus and 1900 than it has changed from 1900 to the present; and while not all the novelties of our time were devised after 1900, all have been developed and made generally available during the eighty years just past, especially the last twenty, and this is as true of neon as of other new devices.

Sidewalks and sewers, street lights and paving, bathrooms and water closets, running water beyond the ground floor, let alone hot and cold running water, gas and electric ranges, all of these were exceptional luxuries before the First World War. "Bakelite" was invented by a Belgian in 1907, but it wasn't until the 1930s and 40s that plastic objects, furniture and containers revolutionized industrial design. Telephones were also rare in Europe until after the War. The first dial telephone, the first automatic exchange in Britain, appeared in 1920. And even though the first electrical refrigerator went on sale in Chicago in 1913, milk still turned in summer and meat still went bad for lack of refrigeration in European homes and shops of the 1950s and 60s. It was not until the last twenty years, at most thirty, that most Europeans lived the crucial transformation of their homes and kitchens in lighting, heating, ease of movement and labor-saving devices—in stoves and ovens with thermostats that didn't have to be watched all the time, in refrigerators, dishwashers, washing machines, even self-wringer mops.

It was the women who benefited most from these improvements, so that one must suppose critics of labor-saving devices to be mostly curmudgeons of the male sex, and it is another point in our century's favor that it saw great strides in emancipation of half of the human race. The work performed by women became less demanding; their dress became less constricting as elastic rubber replaced whalebone and lacing in foundation garments around 1905, as bras shortened the corset around 1914, as skirts lightened and rose after 1917. Even beautification was democratized when lipsticks in disposable metal cartridges appeared in 1915; but far more so by the appearance of artificial silk fibers in 1910, and then nylon stockings in 1939, which inspired immortal lines that I quote from memory:

"When as in silk my Julia goes,
That is, composed of cellulose,
The fibers of her garb and hose
Designed for her by Jules et Cie,
Oh! how her beauty fetches me!"

But the fundamental emancipator of women, long yearned for, really came in 1956 with the marketing of the first oral contraceptive. The pill was far from perfect, but, it was more important than the vote, because it promised choice and the potential emancipation of womankind from its biological destiny—no small thing. Now, of course, women are not alone in being subject to a biological condition, and in this realm all mankind has undergone a revolution undreamt of in earlier times: partial reprieve from biological destiny. In our next program we shall learn more about that and other breakthroughs of the twentieth century, as well as some of the century's keenest disappointments. Until then . . .
#152 Toward The Future

One after another, the laws of physics have been rewritten, the theories of life itself revised; as science and technology radically change our lives for better and for worse, we are reminded once more—that in much of wisdom there is grief.

Toward the Future this time on The Western Tradition.

And now UCLA Professor Eugen Weber's continuing journey through the history of Western Civilization.

Last time we saw how modern technology made everyday life easier for normal people, easier than it had ever been before. But there was another, even greater revolution in the twentieth century, one that has granted humanity a partial reprieve from biological destiny. It was in 1901 for example, that the first Nobel Prizes were awarded. The prize for Physics went to Wilhelm Roentgen for his work on X-rays, which some at the time still regarded as a curiosity, no different from moving pictures or balloon ascents. And the prize for Medicine that year went to Emil von Behring for his work on diphtheria. Both awards illustrated the spectacular advances being made in medicine which the twentieth century was going to carry still further.

In 1899, one hundred thousand people in England and Wales alone died of infectious diseases, but in our century vaccination, inoculation, preventive medicine, preventive hygiene, would make such swathes of infection obsolete. They cut back tuberculosis, they obliterated smallpox, which had been the scourge of mankind. Two hundred years ago, nine Europeans in ten contracted smallpox, one in seven died from it—most of the rest were left more or less disfigured. By mid-twentieth century, this plague was a memory, along with cholera, whooping cough, diphtheria, and, after 1954, polio.

Our major diseases today go with living longer, like cancer, and living more stressfully, like heart disease. Even AIDS is a gift of better communications and world travel, as syphilis was in the sixteenth century. Some plagues simply took longer before they disappeared. The transmission of typhus from man to man by lice was discovered in 1909, but the conditions in which this took place couldn't be so easily eliminated. During the First World War, for instance, most Serbian deaths came not from battle but from typhus. Between 1917 and 1921, the disease hit some twenty-five million in Soviet territories and it caused three million deaths. As famine, misery, and filth receded, so did typhus. The fight against disease was becoming a fight against conditions that would breed disease—malarial marshes, mosquitoes, malnutrition, dirt.

But the fight was also aided by the development of more and more effective drugs, serums, antibiotics, which were much speeded up by the two World Wars. No less important was general public access to medical care, something extremely rare a hundred years ago when most people could not afford a doctor, and one only went to hospital to die. With medical care, mortality declined precipitously, longevity soared. But since nothing is ever clear-cut, the progress of modern medicine and public health brought new problems in its wake. The declining death rate resulted in a huge population increase. Despite dramatically improved crop yields and productivity, due in good part to the synthetic nitrogen fertilizers turned out by a German chemist in 1910, there wasn't enough food to feed all the new people. Although it was more evident in undeveloped countries where hunger and government incompetence and thievery continued as a way of life, the problem was also beginning to be recognized even in the wealthier West.

The demographic bomb, however, caused less concern than bombs of other kinds. The summer of 1945 saw the first explosions of controlled atomic devices that could release vast power, whether for good or ill. Accelerated, as usual, by war, this came as the culmination of research in physics that had been going on since the beginning of the century in Europe. Around 1911, the work of the Curies in France and of Rutherford in England revealed the instability and disintegration of atoms in radioactive substances.

Narration of news broadcast: "No longer any doubt about it. That uranium is splitting into at least two big parts and those biggest chicks, nearly one hundred million electro-volts. . . ."

Atoms, which had been believed to be the firm, indivisible base of the material world, atoms could now be split, releasing energy in the process.
It was a fundamental tenet of classic theories that light, energy, and matter were both continuous and separate entities. But now work done in Germany, Denmark, Switzerland, Italy, suggested that when bodies emit light, they actually radiate energy pulsating in infinitesimal measures, quanta, proportional to the frequency of a discontinuous radiation.

One after the other, the solid notions that paved the floor of science appeared to melt away. A new physics was suggesting new hypotheses about the structure of the universe, of matter, of perception. Picasso's Cubism, Dali's Surrealism, reflected this in painting and in sculpture. Freud's emphasis on the unconscious came out in the free association of Surrealists and the deliberate, apparent incoherence of someone like James Joyce in literature. The mathematical principles of Isaac Newton, the rationalism, the mechanical determinism of the past three hundred years, these were being rewritten into a New Relativism.

In 1905, Albert Einstein's theory of special relativity suggested that neither time nor space was absolute. There were no absolutes any more. By 1915, Einstein's general theory of relativity presented matter itself as just one form of energy; and the basic component of matter, the atom, a tiny compound of compressed energy, could turn into light or into heat, or both. Now, this transmutation of matter into energy which Rutherford called the new alchemy, this could be set off by bombarding atoms with smaller, subatomic particles. In 1932, the first cyclotron was built to accelerate this bombardment, and it was also found that in the case of atoms of certain elements like uranium, their disintegration was accompanied by a chain reaction that went with an intense emission of energy which could be controlled in a nuclear reactor or packaged into a bomb. This was the basis of the four hundred pound bomb which destroyed Hiroshima on August 6, 1945.

Hiroshima, like Guernica in the Spanish Civil War, Hiroshima has become part of history and continues to affect it. The justified terror of what atom bombs could do, and far worse devices also, has played its part in avoiding major conflicts over forty extremely nervous years. But it has also produced a pervasive anxiety and guilt, about man's capacity to destroy mankind and, more specifically, about the dangers of science and technology. That anxiety was further spurred when, in 1953, at Cambridge again, James Watson and Francis Crick deciphered the double helix configuration of the molecule of DNA, which determines the structure and the function of every living animal or plant, and which functions like a living computer that tells a cell what protein to make--in other words, what to create and how. In 1972, the theory was put to work when scientists in California managed to split and recombine DNA so as to use it for a particular purpose. The step from theory to application had taken half a century in nuclear physics; it took less than twenty years to produce man-made microorganisms.

Like atoms bombarded by radioactive rays, man's solid certainties disintegrated under the bombardment of physics, chemistry, biochemistry, astronomy and, indeed, geography. The Danish physicist Neils Borge explained this as early as 1938. "Man," said Neils Borge, "no longer lived at the center of the universe surrounded by less fortunate societies on the edge of some abyss. Men and women now share a small spherical planet of one solar system, which is only one small part of a much larger systems."

"This, like the revision of our long-held ideas about space and time," said Borge, "provided a forceful admonition about the relativity of all human judgment." So what you have here is a contemporary replay of the Copernican revolution of three hundred years ago, and the anxiety that was voiced by the future Dean of St. Paul's, by John Donne, in the seventeenth century, is our anxiety, as we can hear. Donne complains:

That new philosophy calls all in doubt
The element of fire is quite put out
The sun is lost and the earth
And no man's wit
Can well direct him where to look for it
And freely men confess that this world is spent
When in the planets at the firmament
They seek so many new
Then see that this is crumpled out again
To his atom's ease
It's all in pieces, all coherence gone.
All just supply and all relation
Now that is Donne in 1611, but it could just as well be the 1980s, except that it rhymes, which no poetry would do today. In any case, here we are in the twentieth century with a lot of people already a bit lonely in a godless world, and now they are denied not only God but the solid substance of judgments and perceptions. The world had always been disgracefully mismanaged, but now you no longer knew to whom to complain.

The answer to this predicament was suggested by a philosopher from France in a lecture of 1945. Jean-Paul Sartre put forward what he described as a new humanism and which he called Existentialism. Condemned to freedom and to loneliness, Sartrean Man finds that his condition can be transcended by himself alone, as he endows life, events, above all himself, with a meaning that he must weave out of his own resources. Looking at the world in which he finds neither faith nor normative values, Sartre rejects despair for an affirmation arising precisely from despair, but leading to choice, to action, to the creation of one's own destiny.

Of course, in our new age of disposable fashions, even philosophies are built to self-destruct. No one today thinks much of Existentialism, yet it reflects the practice, if not the principle, of our times. Certainly, even if he does not like it, Man continues to recreate his destiny at an accelerated pace. One example of this is the computer, which is simply a high-speed calculator with an electronic memory. During the war, the British built the first electronic computer because they wanted to use it to break enemy codes. The first civilian counterpart of this was unveiled in the United States in 1946. It weighed thirty tons, it filled the space of a two-car garage, and it contained eighteen thousand vacuum tubes, which failed at the rate of one every seven minutes. By the 1980s, one pea-sized silicon chip delivers the same amount of computing power, and any home computer costing a hundred dollars or less can out-perform what cost half a million dollars twenty years ago. Computers have radically affected our lives for good or ill and cannot be jettisoned short of catastrophe. So, science and technology have changed the ways of life, but not the nature, nor the passions of mankind. After a century spent arguing that problems can be solved by science, by reason, or by acts of will, we have to admit that some problems can't be solved. Or that their solution leaves more problems in its wake, something that Ecclesiastes apparently knew a long, long time ago.

There are not that many people who read the Bible these days, which is the epitome of wisdom and violence and high aspirations and the hurtful achievements of mankind, so I cannot tell how many of you have read Ecclesiastes, but this is what the preacher says: "For in much wisdom there is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow, for who knows what is good for men in this life? Who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?"

So here in the third century before Christ the Hebrew sage suggests that all is vanity and vexation of spirit, and I'm sure he wasn't the first to say so. So some things have changed, and other things haven't changed at all. But if we still don't know where we're going, at least we face our predicament, the human predicament, in comfort far greater than Ecclesiastes ever knew. And this is a help. As for the Western tradition, if you perceive such a thing as we perceive it, the most striking thing about the Western tradition is that it is not one, but many. It includes authoritarianism and individualism, personal initiative and centralization, obedience and revolt, faith and questioning, inertia and enterprise, conflict and reconciliation. That's what makes our culture, that's what makes our history so tantalizing, so available for almost any reference you want, a yellow pages of human conduct, human values. But there are, I think, two constants that you can never miss: one of these is curiosity, the quest that drives some in all times to ask, to search more than most; and the other is ambition, which drives some in all times to press further and to try and achieve more.

Really, when you think about it, our patron saint is Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods. And on this note I shall leave you with some lines from Wordsworth.

Still glides the stream and shall forever glide
The form remains, the function never dies
While we, the brave, the mighty, and the wise
We men, who in our morn of youth defy the elements
Must vanish
Be it so
Enough that something from our hands have power
To live, and act, and serve the future hour
And that, as toward the silent tomb we go
Through love, through hope and faith's unending dower
We feel that we are greater than we know