CHAPTER 25 - POLITICAL CONSOLIDATION  
IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA, 1814-1850

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The defeat of Napoleon and the diplomatic settlement of the Congress of Vienna restored the conservative political and social order in Europe. This chapter deals with the confrontation of this conservative order with sources of unrest found in the forces of liberalism, nationalism and popular sovereignty.

Nineteenth century liberals wanted to limit the arbitrary power of the government against the persons and the property of individual citizens. Liberalism was often complementary to nationalism in Germany, Italy and the Austrian empire. During the 1820s, Russia took the lead in suppressing liberal and nationalistic tendencies. Nicholas I ascended the throne in 1825 and soon put down the Decembrist Revolt. Nicholas I was the most extreme of the nineteenth century autocrats. He embraced a program called Official Nationalism which carried the slogan "Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationalism." The program alienated serious Russian intellectual life from the tsarist government. In response to an uprising in Poland in 1830, Nicholas sent in troops and declared Poland to be an integral part of the Russian empire.

Charles X, an ultra-royalist, succeeded to the French throne in 1824 and tried to roll back as much of the revolution as possible. When elections in 1830 resulted in a stunning victory for the liberals, Charles issued the Four Ordinances (July 1830) which amounted to a royal coup d'état. Rioting broke out in Paris and Charles abdicated. Louis Philippe was proclaimed the new monarch and politically his rule was more liberal than the restoration government. But socially, the revolution of 1830 proved quite conservative and little sympathy was displayed for the lower classes; violent uprisings continued to occur.

In Britain, the forces of conservatism and reform made accommodations with each other. Several factors made this possible: a large commercial and industrial class, a tradition of liberal Whig aristocrats and a strong respect for civil liberties. The chapter details reforms such as the Catholic Emancipation Act (1829) and the Great Reform Bill of 1832. Great Britain continued to symbolize the confident liberal state. The Reform Act of 1867, passed by the Conservatives under the leadership of Disraeli, expanded the electorate well beyond the limits earlier proposed by the Liberals. In the long run, this secured a great deal of support for the Conservative party, but the immediate result was Gladstone's election as Prime Minister. Gladstone's ministry of 1868-1874 witnessed the culmination of British liberalism. It saw, among other things, passage of the Education Act of 1870 which created the first national system of
schools. After a period of Conservative leadership under Benjamin Disraeli, Gladstone returned to office in 1880. The major issue of the next decade was Ireland. The Irish leader for a just land settlement and for home rule was Charles Stewart Parnell. The Irish question remained unsolved until 1914 and affected British politics like the Austrian nationalities problem: national domestic issues could not be adequately addressed because of political divisions created by Ireland.

In 1848, a series of liberal and national revolutions spread across the continent. The text details the causes and courses of the revolutions in Austria-Hungary, France, Italy, Prussia and the German states.

The chapter then focuses on economic development in the North and South of the United States. Highlighted are the major innovations in transportation (canals and railroads), as well as particular technologies (cotton gin) that allowed the development of the "Cotton South" and made the institution of slavery profitable.

Slavery had once existed in the North, but it was abolished there by the early nineteenth century. It had never been fundamental to the northern economy as it was for the South. Still, never did a majority of southern families own slaves and only a relatively small minority of slave owners possessed more than a few slaves. Constitutional arguments for the existence of slavery revolved around protection of private property, which was upheld by the Supreme Court in the Dred Scott decision (1856). Recent scholarship has emphasized the manner in which slave communities helped to preserve family life. African culture persisted in slave communities through oral transmission of legends, and religion proved extraordinarily important. Although slaves were considered property and families were thus broken up with little regard for such social dislocation, the institutions, customs and religion of the slave community helped protect the autonomy of the individual's personality.

The path to the American Civil War was opened by the accumulation of land from the Mexican War in 1848. New territory was also gained in Oregon and California. The question of extending slavery to these new areas arose anew. The situation was exacerbated by a militant antislavery movement, which had been in existence since the 1830s. During the 1850s, several crises occurred that led various political groups to take more extreme positions. In 1854, the Kansas-Nebraska bill was promoted on the basis of popular sovereignty. This meant that each new territory would become the site of local debate over slavery. Violence erupted when at the instigation of John Brown and others, virtual guerrilla warfare broke out in "Bleeding Kansas." In 1856, the Dred Scott decision repealed the Missouri Compromise and indicated that Congress could not rule over the issue of slavery. National debate arose with Abraham Lincoln gaining a national reputation against the extension of slavery, without advocating its outright
abolition. Through such extreme acts as John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, the politics of North and South became radicalized.
The chapter gives brief mention of the Civil War then characterizes the reconstruction period that followed as oppressive for the southern economy and society. For the rest of the century, the South remained in a relationship to the North that resembled a colonial dependency to an overseeing foreign power. Socially, the Civil War ended slavery and gave the promise of equality. But this was to be a vision not easily attained. Although blacks could vote, hold office and own property, a system of legalized discrimination arose in the form of segregation.

The chapter continues with an evaluation of Canadian national development from 1763 through the nineteenth century. Under the influence of both the British and French, Canada learned to balance its dual heritage.

The text then focuses on the unification of Italy and of Germany and the reforms in the Hapsburg Empire. Nationalists had long wanted a unified Italian state, but had differed about the manner and goals of unification. Romantic republicans led by Mazzini and Garibaldi, frightened more moderate Italians who looked instead to the pope. Unification was carried out by Camillo Cavour, the conservative Prime Minister of Piedmont. Cavour attempted to prove to the rest of Europe that the Italians were capable of progressive government and that they were a military power. Cavour brought Piedmont into the Crimean War to make the latter point and played up to Napoleon III to gain his sympathy. The text goes on to detail the process of unification under Cavour's direction. In late 1860, Italy was united. Venetia was gained in 1866 and Rome was annexed in 1870. The new constitution provided for a rather conservative constitutional monarchy, which soon became famous for corruption.

The construction of a united German nation was the single most important political development in Europe between 1848 and 1914. It transformed the balance of economic, military and international power. Moreover the character of the united German state was largely determined by its method of creation. Germany was united by a conservative army, monarchy (William I) and prime minister of Prussia (Bismarck), among whose chief motives was the outflanking of Prussian liberals. The text goes on to detail the process of unification through war, diplomacy and political manipulation.

Austrian military defeats forced Francis Joseph to come to terms with the Magyar nobility of Hungary. Through the Compromise of 1867, the Hapsburg Empire became a dual monarchy. Except for the common monarch, Austria and Hungary were almost separate states. Many of the other national groups within the empire opposed the Compromise of 1867 and political competition among various nationalist groups resulted in obstruction and paralysis of parliamentary life.

The chapter ends with a section on racial theory and the “scientific” justifications behind anti-Semitism. Under the leadership of Theodor Herzl, Zionists rejected anti-Semitism and promoted a nationalist desire to found an independent Jewish state.
KEY POINTS AND VITAL CONCEPTS

1. **Liberalism**: Liberals tended to be those who were excluded from the existing political processes; they were not democrats. Hostile to privileged aristocrats, they were contemptuous of the unpropertyed class. They sought the removal of economic restraints and believed that labor was simply one more commodity to be bought and sold freely. Liberalism was often complementary to nationalism. The specific problems of the liberals differed according to circumstances; in Germany, for instance, liberals hoped that a unified Germany would be created through the Prussian monarchy, which could later yield to a freer social and political order.

2. **The Great Reform Bill (1832)**: This bill called for: a) abolishing "rotten" boroughs and replacing them with representatives for the previously unrepresented manufacturing districts and cities and, b) doubling the number of voters through a series of new franchises. The Great Reform Bill, however, was not a democratic measure (the basis of voting remained a property qualification), nor did it contribute to the triumph of the middle class (for every new urban district a new rural district was also drawn, and it was expected that the aristocracy would dominate the rural elections), but it did make revolution unnecessary by admitting the people who sought change to the political forum.

3. **American Slavery**: Slavery had once existed in the North, but it was abolished there by the early nineteenth century. It had never been fundamental to the northern economy as it was for the South. Still, never did a majority of southern families own slaves and only a relatively small minority of slave owners possessed more than a few slaves. Constitutional arguments for the existence of slavery revolved around protection of private property, which was upheld by the Supreme Court in the Dred Scott decision (1856). Recent scholarship has emphasized the manner in which slave communities helped to preserve family life. African culture persisted in slave communities through oral transmission of legends, and religion proved extraordinarily important. Although slaves were considered property and families were thus broken up with little regard for such social dislocation, the institutions, customs and religion of the slave community helped protect the autonomy of the individual's personality.
4. The Revolutions of 1848: The causes of the series of widespread revolutions were similar: food shortages and unemployment; a new willingness of political liberals to ally with the working classes in order to put increased pressure on the government, even though the new allies had different aims; and finally, (outside France) a movement to create national states that would reorganize or replace existing political entities. The immediate results of the 1848 revolutions were stunning: the French monarchy fell and many others were badly shaken. But not one revolution established a new liberal or national state. The political initiative passed from the liberal to the conservative political groups. Most importantly, after 1848, the European middle class ceased to be revolutionary; it became increasingly concerned about the protection of its property against radical political and social movements.

5. The Unification of Germany: Both the fact and manner of German unification produced long-range effects in Europe. A powerful new state, rich in natural resources and talented citizens had been created in north central Europe. Militarily and economically the German Empire would be stronger than Prussia had been alone. The unification of Germany would also be a blow to European liberalism since the new state was a conservative creation. The two states most immediately affected by German and also Italian unification were France and Austria. Change had to come in each: France returned to a republican government and the Hapsburg's organized a dual monarchy.

6. Major Political Trends (1850-1875): Between 1850 and 1875, the major contours of the political systems that would dominate Europe until World War I had been drawn. The concept of a nation-state had, on the whole, triumphed and support for governments stemmed from various degrees of citizen participation. Moreover, the unity of nations was no longer based on dynastic links, but on ethnic, cultural, linguistic and historical bonds. The major sources of future discontent would arise from the demands of labor to enter the political processes and the still unsatisfied aspirations of subject nationalities.

7. The American Civil War in World Perspective: Within the context of world history, the American Civil War was important because it was the greatest war anywhere in the world between the defeat of Napoleon and World War I in 1914. It represented the same centralizing authority that was triumphing during the same decade in Italy, Germany and France. It resulted in the establishment of a continent-wide free labor market, which helped open North America to
economic development. Free labor would become the American norm and debates over the role of industrial labor in the United States resembled those in Europe.

8. European and North American Political Consolidation in World Perspective: The European, American, and Canadian movements toward strong, centralized nation-states had counterparts elsewhere in the world. Japan sought to modernize by imitating the military and economic power of Europe. Latin America entered a stable and successful period, and in the United States, the central federal government asserted its power over the individual states. But this centralization also had ominous results for weaker groups as the peasantry in Latin America, and Indians and Blacks in the United States labored under repression, warfare, and segregation. These social and political problems would haunt the twentieth century. Finally, these strong European nation-states soon transferred their rivalry from Europe to other regions of the world, subjugating vast areas of Africa and Asia. Strong nationalist movements would run counter to this domination and influence the shape of the contemporary world. In time, the United States would be drawn into these world-wide conflicts.

**SUGGESTED FILMS**

*English History: Nineteenth Century Reforms.* Coronet. 13 min.

*Civilisation XIII: Heroic Materialism.* Time-Life. 52 min.

*Early Victorian England and Charles Dickens.* Encyclopaedia Britannica. 30 min.

*The Industrial Revolution in England.* Encyclopaedia Britannica. 26 min.


*Man and the Industrial Revolution.* American Broadcasting Co. 20 min.

*Meaning of the Industrial Revolution.* Coronet. 11 min.
Revolts and Reforms in Europe (1815-1848). Coronet. 16 min.

Revolutions of 1848. Radim Films Inc. 22 min.

America: 6 - A Firebell in the Night. BBC/Time-Life. 52 min.

America: 7 - Domesticating a Wilderness. BBC/Time-Life. 52 min.

Slavery. NET. 30 min.

Bismarck: Germany from Blood and Iron. Learning Corporation of America. 30 min.

Germany: Feudal States to Unification. Coronet. 13 min.

Unification of Italy. Coronet. 14 min.

Myth of Nationalism. Berlet, Walter H. Films. 30 min.

Queen Victoria: A Profile in Power. Learning Corporation of America. 30 min.

Queen Victoria and British History. Centron Educational Films. 28 min.

Queen Victoria and Disraeli. Teaching Films Custodian. 20 min.

The Civil War: Anguish of Emancipation. Learning Corporation of America. 27 min.

The Civil War: Promise of Reconstruction. Learning Corporation of America. 27 min.

The Road to Gettysburg - Civil War. NBC. 24 min.