CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter surveys the decades since the end of World War II, years which have witnessed extraordinary changes both in Europe and the world it once dominated. The continent was permanently divided into two spheres, each dominated by a peripheral power: the west by the United States, the east by the Soviet Union. European countries which had held colonial empires since the Renaissance lost their overseas possessions, apparently for good. But the period has also witnessed new European initiatives. Nations began to cooperate economically and politically with each other to an unprecedented degree, which helped bring Europe the most extensive material prosperity in its history. Moreover, although the relative power of Europe has clearly declined since 1939, its influence overseas has continued.

The United States and the Soviet Union played out their hostilities in all measures short of actual fighting, hence the term, Cold War. It became clear that the United Nations would not solve the world's problems. The next year, in its Truman Doctrine, the United States promised to support any nation resisting Communist subversion. Its Marshall Plan pumped new life into the war shattered economies of western Europe. The Soviet Union responded with a new revolutionary organization Cominform, and replaced multi-party regimes in eastern Europe with thoroughly Communist ones. The United States, in turn, decided to set up an anti-Soviet state in the western zones of Germany. Despite Russian pressure on Berlin in 1948 and 1949, the Federal Republic of Germany was created in the latter year. With the establishment of NATO in the west in 1949, and COMECON and then the Warsaw Pact in the east, the division of Europe into two was complete.

World War II left a power vacuum in Europe. Previously, Britain, France and Germany had been not only Europe's leaders, but world powers. Their weakness after 1945 left them subordinate to the United States and Soviet Union. The continent became an arena for the rivalries of the two superpowers. The first round of Cold War saw the formation of NATO (1949) and American intervention in Korea (1950). The year 1956 increased Cold War tensions, while revealing Europe's weakness. Neither western Europe, as the Franco- British Suez invasion showed, or eastern Europe, as the abortive Polish and Hungarian revolts showed, could break free from dependence on the superpowers. In Europe and the world, the Cold War continued unabated until the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. American-Soviet rivalry centered around such events as the Vietnam War (1961-1975), the Arab-Israeli conflict, the invasion of Czechoslovakia (1968) and Afghanistan (1979) by the Soviet Union and the Polish crisis of 1981-1982. The Soviet-American treaty of 1987, which provided for the dismantling of over 2000 medium and short range missiles, represented a most significant agreement between the two superpowers. With the collapse
of the Soviet Union, the Cold War concluded in a manner which virtually no one had predicted. The chapter then details the European retreat from empire and various stages of decolonization in the Third World.

Although early post-war attempts at achieving political or military unity did not prove very successful, moves toward unification have been related primarily to economic integration. The Marshall Plan of the United States created the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC). Other cooperative organizations included the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Economic Community (EEC), or the Common Market as it came to be called. It sought the eventual elimination of tariffs, free flow of capital and labor, and similar wage and social benefits in participating countries. The leaders of the EEC reached an important decision in 1988. They set the year 1992 as the beginning of a free-trade zone throughout the Community. The Treaty of Maastricht, which authorized this venture, never gained universal support among European governments, and yet many countries in continental Europe are preparing for the introduction of a common currency, the Euro.

The chapter continues with a survey of the American domestic scene since World War II. Three major themes have dominated discussion: 1) opposition to Communism, 2) expansion of civil rights to blacks and other minorities at home, and 3) a determination to achieve ongoing economic growth. Of special importance is the discussion of Brown vs. the Board of Education (1954), and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The chapter then surveys America's involvement in Vietnam, and the Watergate and Iran-Contra scandals.
Developments in the Soviet Union after the death of Stalin are next detailed. In addition to tensions with the United States, the Soviets had to contend with tensions in eastern Europe and world Communism since 1945. In their relations with the Soviet Union, the countries of eastern Europe passed first through a period of Stalinist control, and then one of revolt. The chapter then focuses on the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev and his attempts to reform the Soviet economy and political relationship between the central government and the republics. The collapse of the Soviet Union can perhaps be primarily attributed to Gorbachev's failure to reconcile this political relationship. The chapter ends with a section on the collapse of Yugoslavia and the civil war that caused the political and social chaos in Bosnia and Serbia.

**KEY POINTS AND VITAL CONCEPTS**

1. **U.S.-Soviet Relations:** With Stalin's death in 1953, power eventually centered in Nikita Khrushchev, premier from 1955-1964. Under Khrushchev, Russia benefitted from some liberal reforms, especially in cultural life. Nevertheless, the regime remained fundamentally authoritarian and illiberal. The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 revealed Soviet weakness and imbalance of power. Under Brezhnev, Russia increased her nuclear arsenal until relative parity with the U.S. was achieved. Both nations pursued a policy of detente in the 1970s, although the Soviets have supported leftist forces throughout the world with mixed success. In 1979, they successfully invaded Afghanistan, which drew token responses (grain embargo, Olympic boycott) from the Carter administration. Ronald Reagan projected a harder line against Soviet "adventurism," and increased defense funds in order to achieve "nuclear superiority" over the Soviets. Balance of power concepts still dominated US-Soviet relations with escalation of the arms race the result. In practical terms, the Reagan administration gave little support to the Polish "Solidarity" movement. With the accession of former KGB head Yuri Andropov in late 1982, and his immediate successor, Constantine Chernenko, US-Soviet relations remained tenuous. The Soviets made a major shift from their geriatric leadership and emphasized youth and stability with their selection of Mikhail Gorbachev as General Secretary. Reagan's hard line softened somewhat and the two leaders met at the first summit conference in six years late in 1985. Since 1984, Mikhail Gorbachev had been instituting a radical reform program from above called perestroika, or a restructuring of the economy and party bureaucracy. Gorbachev also allowed a broad public discussion
and criticism of Soviet history and government policy, termed glasnost, or openness. His third emphasis had been to win over the public opinion of western Europe by traveling extensively in the West.

2. **The Collapse of the Soviet Union:** Three major political forces confronted Gorbachev in 1990, each of which contributed to a very difficult and untenable political situation. The conservatives in the army and Communist Party believed Gorbachev's reforms to be too liberal and irresponsible given the stagnation of the Soviet economy. The second group was led by Boris Yeltsin, who pressured Gorbachev to move ever more quickly toward democracy and a free market economy. The third force that came into play was regional unrest within the Soviet republics. In what appeared as a strategic retreat, Gorbachev decided to appoint conservatives to positions in the government. He appears to have believed that they could offer him the support he needed to effect gradual reform. In August of 1991, however, these conservative forces attempted a coup. Although the coup was grossly mismanaged and unsuccessful, Gorbachev's authority passed rapidly to Yeltsin's camp. On December 25, 1991, the Soviet Union ceased to exist and the Commonwealth of Independent States was created. The future of Russia remains highly confused. Political opposition to President Yeltsin’s policies from the Russian Parliament and economic stagnation threatened the stability of the region. The internal situation in Russia remains uncertain. Vladimir Putin was elected president in 2001 and has concentrated executive authority in Moscow. Although Russia remains more democratic than under the Soviet system, economic stagnation and corruption continue to threaten political stability.

3. **The West Since 1945 in World Perspective:** After World War II, the continent of Europe declined in world influence. And yet, while that traditional center of Western Civilization was in the process of rebuilding after the devastation of war, both of the new great western nations, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., assumed a dominant influence in world affairs. Within continental Europe, there are continuing attempts to overcome the divisions of nationalism and to cooperate in establishing a "united Europe," free from economic boundaries and constraints. Indeed, a more integrated world economy and political system has established a more intricate web of global interdependencies. It remains to be seen whether the United States will be able to maintain its position of leadership in the West, or whether Western Europe will take a more independent course.
SUGGESTED FILMS


*The Cold War.* McGraw-Hill. 20 min.

*The Cold War.* Time-Life. 20 min.

*Russia: The Unfinished Revolution.* Indiana University. 60 min.

*The Russians: People of Influence.* Lutheran Church of America. 29 min.

*History of U.S. Foreign Relations: Part 4 - The Road to Interdependence.* U.S. Department of State. 30 min.

*Vietnam: A Television History, 1-13.* Films Inc. 60 min. each.

*Vietnam: An Historical Document.* CBS. 56 min.

*Vietnam - Journal of a War.* Time-Life. 52 min.

*Hungary and Communism - Eastern Europe in Change.* Encyclopaedia Britannica. 17 min.

*Khrushchev and the Thaw.* Time-Life. 20 min.